Etruscan Inscriptions in the Royal Ontario Museum

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1. At the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, I viewed (8/14/01) two Etruscan inscriptions on cinerary urns of a cylindrical type common at Chiusi. The urns were published in Hayes 1985 under the catalogue entry numbers G13 and G15. Another inscription on a cinerary urn of this same type, G14, was published by Hayes in Studi Etruschi (Hayes 1975) and so was included in Rix’s compendium of Etruscan texts (ET Cl 1.2484). G13 and G15 seem to have been overlooked.

2. Inscription G13 was painted in dark red on the round lid of the urn in sinistroverse direction (photograph 1). Hayes (1985: 166) transcribed G13 as in (1).

   (1) vepnep vioscna . l . sex

Hayes’ reading may be improved upon in several ways. First of all, the third letter of word one is tau. The oblique cross bar dissects the vertical near the top ™. The final letter must be iota. A short dash of red paint appears near the bottom of the vertical stroke, but this is accidental or perhaps the result of the scribe not cleanly lifting his brush from the surface of the ceramic. The first word is vetnei, a feminine family name. In two places words are separated by punctuation in the form of a colon. This dividing sign is visible after vetnei and after lambda. A single dot stands between the alpha of vioscna and the following lambda. It is probable that the lower dot is no longer visible. A revised reading of the inscription is given in (2).

   (2) vetnei : vioscna · l : sex

2.1 The letterforms in this inscription are typical of those found in other 2nd century B.C. inscriptions from Chiusi. According to Maggiani’s classification of Etruscan alphabets of the Hellenistic Age (Maggiani 1990), the letterforms in G13 may be categorized as Tipo II, settentrionale, II sec. a.C. The lowermost oblique stroke of epsilon and wau is elongated and it meets the vertical just below the mid-point; the topmost stroke in both letters is short and slightly bowed. Nu has the form ℳ. Khi is an inverted arrow ↓. The crossbar of the alpha descends very gently in the direction of writing.
2.2 The interpretation does not present problems. The inscription is a funerary text. The deceased is a female whose family name vetnei is accompanied by a metronymic phrase viocna - l : sex. The separation of the inflectional ending -l of the genitive from its nominal base viocna and the placement of a dividing point between the two must be an error on the part of the painter. A more accurate transcription of this inscription is in (3).

(3) vetnei : viocna{l} : sex ‘Vetnei, daughter of Vişcna’

2.3 The family to which the deceased belonged is well represented in funerary inscriptions at Clusium. The name, in various morphological incarnations, is attested in 18 inscriptions (vetnal gen. sg.: ET Cl 1.773, 1.1452, 1.2657, ETP 187; vetnalia gen. sg. + articular pro.: Cl 1.1029, 1.1840, 1.2305, 1.2306; vetnei: Cl 1.1686; vetinal gen. sg.: Cl 1.941; vetinei: Cl 1.1688, 1.1689; vetenei: Cl 1.1691; vetanal gen. sg.: Cl 1.1312, 1.1313, 1.1350; and vetanei: Cl 1.107, 1.322). The name is also found nearby at Perusia (Pe vetnei: 1.845; 1.1047), but only in two inscriptions. viocnei, the family name of the mother of vetnei, is not attested in inscriptions recovered at Clusium, but the stem from which it was built, vicce, is, both as a masculine family name (ET Cl 1.54; 1.820) and as a cognomen (Cl 1.1041; Cl 1.1200). Outside of Clusium the family name viocenei ([with anaptyxis ?]) appears as a cognomen on a funerary inscription from Arretium (ET Ar 1.73). The name viocna, without accompanying onomastic phrase, was incised on a vase from the Ager Saenensis (ET AS 2.7).

3. Inscription G15 runs in sinistroverse direction around the upper rim band of the cylindrical body of the urn (photographs 2 & 3). The transcription of Hayes (1985: 168) is reproduced in (4).

(4) lar0 velxite - vipinal

Hayes’ reading is correct, except that he does not indicate the punctuation that is visible between the personal name and the family name of the deceased. (5) is the correct reading for G15.

(5) lar0 · velxite · vipinal ‘Lar0 Velxite, (son) of Vipinei’

3.1 Two scribes were responsible for incising G15. The family name velxite and the metronymic vipinal were written by one hand. The letters in these words were incised in a reasonably neat fashion (photograph 2). They are, for the most part, uniform in size and spaced equidistant from one another. The personal name lar0 was added by
another hand. The letters were crudely incised and were positioned awkwardly with respect to one another (photograph 3). The alpha and the rho are larger than other letters in the inscription. The scribe who incised this word failed to write within the boundaries of the upper band that encircles the urn. The band is demarcated by a groove, above which most of the letters were written. The tail of the rho and the oblique bars of the alpha of larθ descend far below the groove. In contrast to the alpha of vipinal, in which the medial bar is horizontal Α, the medial bar of the alpha of larθ descends sharply toward the right in the opposite direction of writing Α.

The letterforms in velxite · vipinal may be classified as Tipo II, settentroniale, II sec. a.C. (Maggiani 1990), but some shapes do not match those in the model script. For example, the topmost oblique stroke in epsilon and wau is not bowed. And whereas the lowermost oblique stroke of wau is elongated, this is not the case for epsilon. All of the oblique bars of this letter are roughly equal in length Α. Tau has the form Т, the oblique dissecting the vertical at the top without sloping too noticeably in the direction of writing.

3.2 G15 is also a funerary text. The deceased is remembered by his personal name and family name larθ velxite, which are followed by a metronymic vipinal, the feminine form of the family name of the deceased’s mother (vipinei). The family name of the deceased, velxite, confirms Clusium as the point of origin of the urn. Six inscriptions, all from this area, may be attributed to members of this family. Two inscriptions refer to males named larθ velxite (ET Cl 1.576, 1.577). A third inscription names the husband of the deceased as a member of the velxite family (velxites gen. sg., ET Cl 1.1721). Female members of the family (velxiti) are attested in ET Cl 1.466, 1649 and 1650.

The mother of the deceased belonged to the vipina family. To judge from the number of funerary inscriptions with this name, the family was particularly prominent at Clusium. In the nominative case alone there are 27 masculine forms vipi and 27 feminine forms vipinei for a total of 54 funerary inscriptions referring to members of this family during the neo-Etruscan period (4th c. - 1 c. B.C.).

4. Hayes (1985: 167-168) dates G13 and G15 to the 2nd-1st c. B.C. based on the morphology of the cinerary urn. This date is borne out by the shape of the letterforms of the inscriptions.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ar = Arretium
AS = Ager Saenensis
CIL = Pauli & Danielsson, Corpus Inscriptionum Etruscarum
Cl = Clusium
Co = Cortona
ET = Rix, Etrusckische Texte
ETP = Wallace, Shamgochian & Patterson, Etruscan Texts Project Online
Pe = Perusia

FOOTNOTES

1. In the summer of 2005 my colleague, Dominique Briquel, informed me that one of his students, Fabrice Poli, had recently completed a study of these same inscriptions. His paper will appear in the next issue of Studi Etruschi. My colleague also kindly forwarded to me his own discussion of Hayes G15. This paper will also appear in Studi Etruschi.

2. Each catalogue entry in Hayes 1985 has commentary and photographs. Unfortunately, the photographs are not of sufficient quality to permit the reading of inscriptions G14 and G15 in their entirety. Most of G13 can be made out, but the first and the last letters cannot be seen clearly.

3. In Hayes 1975: 103-104 G14 is transcribed as $\text{lar} \, \text{titi} : \text{ma} \, \text{cx}[\ldots]$. According to Hayes (1985: 168), the editors of Studi Etruschi were responsible for the reading of the third word. Hayes labeled the reading ‘highly conjectural’. Indeed, the stylized sketch of the remains of the painted letters given by Hayes (1985: 168) does not appear to support the reading proposed by the editors. However, it appears to me as if the
reading mąç[x] is the correct one. If the second letter is an alpha, it is larger than the alphas of larθia. The upper part of the letter, where the oblique strokes converge, is missing. It may originally have been painted on the lip or rim of the lid. This line of reasoning is suggested by the fact that the rightmost stroke begins to arc leftward toward the edge of the upper band. The letterform after gamma is illegible to me.

4. Rix published the inscription, ET Cl 1.2484, with a minor addendum. He read the fourth letter as ϋ, and the third word as the cognomen mąç[tia], for which it was possible to cite macutia (ET Cl 1.2483) as a comparandum.

5. Throughout the paper linguistic forms in the Etruscan alphabet are transcribed in bold. Epigraphic conventions: Square brackets [ a ] indicate letters that have been restored or can no longer be read; curly brackets { a } indicate characters erroneously written by the scribe; the underdot ā indicates characters that are damaged and/or no longer clearly legible. Grammatical abbreviations: gen. = genitive; pro. = pronoun; sg. = singular. References to Etruscan inscriptions are from Pauli & Danielsson (CIE), Rix 1991 (ET) and Wallace, Shamgochian & Patterson 2004-2005 (ETP).

6. Hayes’ transcriptions are updated in light of a more current system of transcription. Greek sigma σ for a palatal sibilant /ʃ/; $ stands for a dental /s/. The dental and velar aspirated stops are θ and χ respectively.

7. The inscription was discovered on the lid of the urn during cleaning (Hayes 1985: 166).

8. For discussion, see Maggiani 1990: 188-191. Following the schema proposed in an earlier article (Maggiani 1984), the letterforms belong to a subtype of the ‘regularized’ variety, C4.

9. The masculine stem is vetna; the feminine is vetnei. The forms with medial vowel, vetnei, vetenei, vetanal and vetanei, are to be explained by anaptyxis (see Rix 1984: 217), by morphological renewal (vetnal ⇒ vetenal under influence of vete), or by a combination of the two.

10. Morphologically related forms, vetni and vetini, are found at Clusium (vetni: Cl 1.1684; vetini: Cl 1.1685) and Cortona (vetni: Co 1.23).

11. The alphabet appears to have features of Tipo II, Etruria settentrionale, III sec. a.C. (no. 2) and Tipo II, Etruria settentrionale, II sec. a.C. (no. 1).
12. G15, ET Cl 1.576 and ET Cl 1.577 have the same onomastic phrase, larθ velxite vipinal. ET Cl 1.576 and ET Cl 1.577 may refer to the same person. ET Cl 1.576 was incised on a ceramic tegola, which could have been set up at the entrance to the tomb. G15 and ET Cl 1.577 probably refer to persons belonging to two generations of the velxite family. ET Cl 1.577 was painted on a ceramic olla (CIE I, 606). Punctuation is in the form of a colon (:). As noted in §3, G15 was incised along the upper band of the body of the urn and a single dividing point was used to separate the words.

13. For other case-forms for this family name see the indices in Rix 1991, Bd. I.

REFERENCES


PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Inscription G13. Photograph courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum.