

THE EARLIEST INSCRIPTION FROM TARQUINIA

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Little more than twenty years ago, in 1969, Hans Jucker has drawn our attention to an inscribed proto-Corinthian kotyle reported to have been found in the territory of the ancient Etruscan town of Tarquinia.¹ Three years later, the Italian scholar Mauro Cristofani dedicated a second contribution to the same object in order to supplement his studies in archaic Etruscan writing.² On the basis of the form of the vessel, Jucker assigns it to the about 700 BC. As the inscription is added after firing, its date is inevitably linked up with the lifetime of the drinking cup. Although Jucker tries to stretch this period to almost half a century, Cristofani rather inclines to a date close to c. 700 BC for epigraphical reasons, too, and therefore labels the document "the earliest Etruscan inscription known to us today" in a more general work on early Etruscan epigraphy and language.³ The latter qualification seems a little overdone since Tyrrhenian or Etruscoid inscriptions have been unearthed in Pithecussae and Cumae, southern Italy, which belong to the immediately preceding period or are at least simultaneous with the emergence of Etruscan civilization in present-day Tuscany.⁴ Nevertheless, it seems clear that we are dealing here with the earliest piece of evidence for writing in the region and, as such, it might very well present us interesting information on the formative phase of Etruscan culture. At least, this is what Cristofani tries to tell us when he ends his contribution with the verdict that the inscription, in his eyes, proves the presence of indigenous Italic people in Etruria at this early stage. In the present article, then, it will be investigated whether the text in question can be

¹ H. Jucker, "Ein protokorinthischer Becher mit etruskischer Inschrift", *Studi Etruschi* 37 (1969) 501-505.

² M. Cristofani, "Appunti di Epigrafia Etrusca Arcaica, Postilla: la più antica iscrizione di Tarquinia", *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, classe di lettere e filosofia, Serie III*, 1 (1972) 295-299.

³ M. Cristofani, "Recent advances in Etruscan Epigraphy and Language", *Italy before the Romans*, eds. D. and F. Ridgway (Roma 1979) 378.

⁴ F.C. Woudhuizen, "Epigraphic Evidence for Alien Residents of a Third Kind at Pithecussae/Cumae, Italy, c. 750-675 BC", *Talanta, Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society* 20/21 (1988-1989) 97-108.

used to this aim. Of course, a lot depends on the transliteration and interpretation of this text, and therefore we will concentrate our attention first of all on these matters.

With the term transliteration in this particular case reference is made not to the reading of the individual signs. Both authors, namely, fully agree in their identifications and their readings are easily verifiable thanks to the admirably clear photographs presented by Jucker. It rather refers to the composition of the inscription as a whole and its division into separate words—issues on which both authors have varying opinions. In connection with the first mentioned issue, Jucker analyzes the text written in retrograde direction and *scriptio continua*, as consisting of two separate lines, the one being inscribed on top of the other (see figure 1). In defiance of this view, Cristofani rightly points out that the sequence *putes* at the end of the first line is characterized by the same type of spacious lettering as the one with which the second line starts, and that therefore the text evidently runs continuously from the first to the second line in accordance with the archaic fashion of writing in spiral over the entire body of the vase (see figure 2). But is this the end of the story? I do not think so, as Cristofani overlooks what Jucker spotted without drawing the right conclusion from it, namely: that the sequence *putes* just mentioned is written in such a large type of lettering that as a result of this the last signs from the immediately preceding part of the text had to be inscribed in an over-economical way in order to avoid the sections to become mixed up. In combination with Cristofani's observation, this epigraphic peculiarity evidently leads us to the conclusion that the continuous section *putes kraitiles*, etc., was already there *before* the immediately preceding section starting with *mivelelthus*, etc., was written down! To put it in other words, it seems perfectly clear that we are in fact dealing with two entirely independent inscriptions, one starting in a very large type of lettering and therefore being put first in the free space, and one added at a later time in the remaining space on top of the primary inscription, taking its start in more modest dimensions where this is first possible but nonetheless suffering from lack of space at the end (see figure 3).

If we next turn our attention to the question of how the different inscriptions can be broken up into their constituent components, our startingpoint ought to be the propositions made by Jucker in this respect. He suggested to read the primary one *putes kraitiles this putes* and the secondary one *mi velelthus kacriqunumesi esi*. Later on, Cristofani suggested two corrections concerning the secondary text on the basis of his identification of the sequence *numesiesi* as a separate entity, thus leading him to the transliteration of the entire phrase *mi velelthus kacriq*



Fig. 1. Drawing of the earliest inscription from Tarquinia by Hans Jucker 1969.



Fig. 2. Drawing of the earliest inscription from Tarquinia by Mauro Cristofani 1972.



Fig. 3. Drawing of the earliest inscription from Tarquinia by the present author.

numesiesi. As it is self-evident that the distinction of separate words or entities in the two different inscriptions is largely dependent on the interpretation of their contents (note that only *putes* for its repetitive nature can be isolated as a separate entity on the basis of indications solely stemming from internal evidence), it seems not unreasonable to treat both these levels of exegesis simultaneously. Ascending to the level of textual interpretation, then, the secondary inscription immediately singles itself out as being a workable one from the point of view of Etruscan linguistics. As a matter of fact, it is easily recognizable as an Etruscan possession-formula owing to the nominative of the pronoun of the first person singular, *mi* "I", at its beginning. In the light of copious parallels, it may safely be assumed that the present form *mi* is followed by a (composite) personal name in the genitive- or oblique-case, and, possibly, but not necessarily, an indication of the object on which the legend is written. Such a personal name is no doubt to be traced in the second combination on account of the fact that the sequence *vel-*strikingly recalls the familiar Etruscan praenomen *Vel*.⁵ Next, a second personal name is evidently concealed in the combination *numesiesi* at the end of the phrase, as the root of this entity is virtually inseparable from the MN *Numasioi* as attested in the Faliscan dative singular *-i* on the famous gold fibula from Praenest, dated to the latter half of the 7th century BC for the use of the digraph *vh* = */f/*. Other occurrences of this personal name in Etruscan inscriptions, especially the one cited by Cristofani from Campania reading *mi numisiies vhelmus* (6th century BC), as well as its Latin derivative *Numerius*, apparently coincide with

⁵M. Pallottino, *Testimonia Linguae Etruscae* (Firenze 1968²) s.v.

the given Faliscan evidence to the point that a nominative **numesie-* is reconstructable.⁶ Consequently, the form *numesiesi* may legitimately be analyzed as a genitive or dative singular in *-(e)si*, comparable to *kaviiesi* in *mi mulu kaviiesi* (TLE 153, c. 650 BC) "I (am) the thank-offering for Kavie" also from Tarquinia, etc.⁷

So far we have had no problems in following Cristofani's propositions to improve the reading of the text. But from here onwards it seems that we have to set out our own course, as Cristofani needs to take recourse to the assumption of dittography in the otherwise unparalleled personal name **velelthus* and an otherwise unparalleled indication of the vase, **criqu*, not to mention his failure to explain the remaining element *ka*. Having observed this, it seems more appropriate to take the sequence *velel* for the genitive- or oblique-case in *-(e)l* of the personal name *Vel*, as comparative evidence for such a formation is available in the form of the genitive *velas* (TLE 325) under consideration of the fact that the endings *-l* and *-s* are mutually interchangeable.⁸ This leaves us with a residual group in the middle, reading *thuskacriqu*. At first sight, this combination seems a hard nut to crack, but as soon as we realize that it might very well be a complex form consisting of two constituent elements, viz. *thuska* and *criqu*, there appears a glimpse of hope at the horizon. For the first element thus distinguished bears a striking resemblance to the Latin designation of the Etruscan people, *Tusci*. It is generally assumed that this word originates from a primary form **tursci* as this would bring the Latin evidence into direct relationship with the Greek designation of the Etruscans, *Tursēnoi*. It even appears that direct evidence for the phonetic development reconstructed in this manner is provided by texts in the indigenous Italic language of the Umbrians, as on the bronze tablets from Iguvium the developed form *tuscer* takes the

⁶ Cristofani (*supra* note 2) 297; note that the vowel in the middle of the name is particularly weak, being liable to *eli*-oscillation (as accepted by Cristofani), oscillation between *a* and *e* (not accepted by Cristofani, who assumes a different origin for the element *numa-*), and *au*-vowel shift (accepted by Cristofani only as far as the, in his opinion, second root *numa-* is concerned), before it is lost altogether in late forms like *numsi*, characterized by syncope.

⁷ In fact, *-(e)si* is an adjectival suffix which occurs alongside the, from an Indo-European point of view, expected genitive singular ending *-s*. The function of these two distinctive markers of, originally, the genitive singular only has been extended to the dative singular by progressive assimilation.

⁸ For the interchangeability of the endings *-s* and *-l*, compare *zilath (...)* *mechl rasnal* (TLE 87) to *zilath [mechl] rasnas* (TLE 137). The plausibility of the combination of praenomen *Vel-* with case-ending *-(e)l* is further emphasized by the existence of an adjectival derivative, *Velesia-*, used as a separate name in TLE 74 and a 7th century BC inscription from Caere, reading *mi velelias thina mlach mlakas* "I (am) the *deinos* for Velesia, a beautiful (vase) for a beautiful (person)".

place of original *turscum* in a later, somewhat more elaborate version of basically the same document.⁹ Therefore, it does not surprise us to trace the apparently related formation *tursikina* in a late 7th century BC inscription on a gold fibula from Chiusi written in the Etruscan language itself.¹⁰ On the other hand, it must be observed that the phonetically more developed variant of the root under discussion is also attested for an inscription from the territory of the Elymoi in the northwest corner of Sicily—a people, like the Etruscans, originating from northwest Asia Minor according to the literary sources and, at the time of the inscription, exposed to Greek secondary influences.¹¹ In the light of this evidence, then, it might be conjectured that both the original and developed form of the root in question already coexisted in archaic times, as Elymian *tuskai* (dative singular in *-i*) is unlikely to be attributed to secondary Greek influences and therefore most plausibly represents inherited lexical material.

As the latter inference cannot be proved straightforwardly, it might be rewarding to have a look at the second residual element, *criqu*, because, if this can be explained in a satisfactory way, the proposed identification of *thuska* undoubtedly gains weight. Doing so, it seems not far-fetched to connect the present sequence *criqu* with Etruscan forms like *creices* (genitive singular in *-s*), *creici* (dative singular in *-i*) and *kraikalus* (genitive singular in *-s* of adjectival derivative characterized by the morpheme *-l-*), especially if we realize that the writing of *qoppa* for *gamma* is due to graphic peculiarities of archaic, or archaizing, Etruscan script, preferring *qoppa* before *upsilon*, *kappa* before *alpha* and *gamma* before the remaining two vowels, and has no bearing whatsoever on the formal resemblance.¹² This Etruscan form, then, is used to indicate persons of (ultimate) Greek origin, and is generally considered to be the source of inspiration of Latin *Graecus*. It is even surmised to be at the basis of modern Salentine Greek *griko*, which is cited here because it presents the closest comparable evidence for our *criqu*, though it must be admitted, of course, that the span of intervening time is far too great to attribute to this comparison any value for the

⁹ E. Pulgram, *Italic, Latin, Italian, 600 BC to AD 1260* (Heidelberg 1978) Ig. II, I; I, 8.

¹⁰ TLE 489; for the latest reading of this inscription, see J. Heurgon, "Recherches sur la Fibule d'or de Chiusi", *Mélanges d'École Française* 83 (1971) 9-28.

¹¹ P. Ambrosini, "Le iscrizioni sicane, sicule, elime", *Le Iscrizioni Pre-Latine in Italia, Roma, 14-15 marzo 1977* (Roma 1979) 101, no. 73; for the dating of these inscriptions to the second half of the 5th century BC, or earlier, see p. 82.

¹² TLE 131, 314 and M. Frederiksen, "Campania", *Italy before the Romans*, eds. D. and F. Ridgway (Roma 1979) 289.

present argument.¹³ But, as more in general there are no gravitating phonetic developments which could be held against the identification proposed here (note that the remaining difference between monophthong *i* and diphthong *ei* or *ai* is of subordinate importance), it evidently follows that also the preceding identification of *thuska* as "Etruscan" receives additional confirmation, not in the least because both interjected elements happen to belong to the category of ethnic appositions.¹⁴ When due allowance is made, finally, for the fact that the hybrid formation or combination thus reconstructed may stand either in the nominative for being an indeclinable or in the dative in *-a* for the *a*-stem and *-u* for the *u*-stem, respectively, all this in sum leads us to the following transliteration and interpretation of the entire phrase: *mi velel thuska criqu numesiesi* "I (am) of/for Vel Numasie, the Etrusco-Greek".

Fortunately, the still tentative propositions made in the foregoing can be enhanced substantially if we turn our attention to the primary inscription reading, as we have seen, *putes kraitiles this putes*. According to Jucker, this phrase constitutes a second possession-formula in honour of another owner, which suggestion is ultimately based on his interpretation of the sequence *kraitiles* as a personal name and the element *putes*, in line with its formal relationship to Greek *potērion*, as an indication of the vase. This interpretation, however, seems difficult to reconcile with Jucker's own, in my opinion correct, observation that both lines of text are inscribed by one and the same scribal hand.¹⁵ Cristofani, in turn, follows the interpretation of *putes* as an indication of the drinking cup, but leaves the matter concerning the remainder of the phrase undecided. Both authors agree, however, insofar as they do not question the Etruscan nature of the language in this particular case. And precisely the latter startingpoint (i.e. that the language is Etruscan) seems extremely

¹³ G. Rohlfs, "Italgriech. *griko* "griechisch"", *Glotta* 41, 3-4 (1963) 300-303. C. de Simone, *Die griechischen Entlehnungen im Etruskischen II* (Wiesbaden 1970) 263 f. remarks the following in connection with the origin of the word in question: "Sehr ansprechend ist in diesem Zusammenhang die von M. Guarducci wieder vorgetragene These, wonach der Name *Graikof* von böotischen Kolonisten, die an der Gründung von Kyme teilgenommen hätten, mitgebracht worden ist." With this theory, reference is made to the Euboean and Boeotian place name *Graia*. It is further assumed according to this line of approach, that *Graiki* constitutes a hybrid formation, characterized by the Italic ethnic suffix *-ci* as present in *Falisci*, *Osci*, *Umbri*, etc. We will see that this theory is particularly tempting in the light of what follows here.

¹⁴ Note that Etruscan writing has never reached a level of standardization comparable to the Attic *koinē* in Greece, so we have to reckon with local variations as well as *ad hoc* solutions by individual scribes; compare also the remarks in note 6 above.

¹⁵ Jucker (*supra* note 1) 504 f.

doubtful as not a single item from the primary inscription can be paralleled straightforwardly in a definite Etruscan text! For this reason, the present author is of the opinion that the inscription under consideration is not in the Etruscan language, but contains a Greek legend in the guise of Etruscan alphabetic writing. A first indication in favour of this view is formed by the fact that the combination *kraitiles*, already taken for a personal name by Jucker, is strikingly reminiscent of the Greek MN *Kratulos*, *Kratilas* or *Kratilēs*, especially if we realize that the diphthong *ai* in the present formation is easily ascribable to secondary Etruscan influences.¹⁶ But, of course, the identification of a Greek name cannot be used as a decisive argument for the Greek nature of the language of a text, as there are many examples of Greek names mentioned in Etruscan documents. Therefore we have to go on with the next identifiable element, the entry *putes*, which, as we have seen, is taken by both authors for the name of the vase because of its likeness in form to Greek *potērion*. Again, in this case the writing of *upsilon* instead of *omicron* is easily explicable by the principles of Etruscan orthography. But, instead of suggesting that with the present word reference is made to the vessel itself—which, for the repetitive nature of the word, makes no sense whatsoever in the framework of the analysis of the composition of the text as given at the outset of this study—I would rather propose to interpret it as a verbal form based on the same root as the Greek noun adduced to as comparative material. Thus one could think of Aeolic Greek *pōthi* “drink!”, or, at this stage of the interpretation, Latin *potes* of the same meaning.¹⁷ The Latin line of approach, however, which seems so promising for the exactness of the parallel offered by the old subjunctive from Plautus’ times, is definitely ruled out by the third and final element, *this*. Considering the fact, namely, that this element occurs immediately before the repeated instance of *putes*, it seems very attractive, indeed, to suggest that we are actually dealing here with Greek *dis* “two times”, again (as is quite consequent) in Etruscan (the use of *thēta*

¹⁶ Mr C.J. Ruijgh was so kind to draw my attention to the fact that the diphthong *ai* in Latin *skaina* is explained by intermediary Etruscan influence in the process of derivation from the ultimate original, Greek *skana*, and that this example therefore may serve as an analogous case for Greek *a* > Etruscan *ai*.

¹⁷ For the Aeolic imperative aorist *pōthi*, see E. Schwyzer, *Dialectorum Graecum* (1923) 333, discussion of drinking-inscription no. 685 from Cyprus; for the possibility of a Greek imperative aorist in *-s* in this particular case, compare the remark of P. Kretschmer, *Die Griechischen Vasenschriften, ihrer Sprache nach untersucht* (Gütersloh 1894) 196 concerning an irregular variant of the drinking-formula *chaire kai pīei*: “Unerklärt bleibt hierbei nur die Form *pīeis*, man müsste denn glauben, dass das *-s* auf einer Stufe stände mit dem selbst noch nicht recht erklärten *-s* von *dós*, *thés*, *schés*, *epíspes*, u.s.w.”.

instead of *delta*) disguise. And in Latin we would have expected, in case we are correct in our present analysis, an earlier stage in the development of *bis* "two times", viz. **duis*, on the analogy of *bonus* < *duenos*, *bellum* < *duellom*, etc.¹⁸ In sum, then, the preceding propositions lead us to the following interpretation of the entire phrase: *putes kraitiles this putēs* "Drink, Kraitiles, drink two times!".

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| 1. <i>putēs kraitilēs this putēs</i> | "Drink, Katilēs, drink two times!" |
| 2. <i>mi velel thuska criqu numesiesi</i> | "I (am) of/for Vel Numesie, the Etrusco-Greek" |

Fig. 4. Transcription and interpretation of the earliest inscription from Tarquinia.

Notwithstanding the hypothetical nature of the readings thus achieved, it cannot be denied that there is some inner consistency: a drinking-formula in Greek, characterized by secondary influences in its orthography, is inscribed on the surface of a cup for drinking wine by a scribe who subsequently added an Etruscan possession-formula in which he specified himself as an "Etrusco-Greek". In addition, it might be adduced that they are not at all unrealistic in the light of the parallels. Drinking-inscriptions are particularly popular on Greek vases, even before Classical times; for the West, one has only to bring to mind the famous Nestor-cup from Pithecussae, dated to the last quarter of the 8th century BC; but also the east Mediterranean region is not lacking this type of documents, as a Cyprian syllabic inscription appears to testify to their application on pottery from about the same period onwards.¹⁹ Next, also the simultaneous occurrence of Greek and Etruscan inscriptions on one and the same object is not unique, as a sherd from Pithecussae, dated c. 740 BC, happens to be inscribed with a Tyrrhenian or Etruscoid possession-formula on the top side and a Greek one in a different scribal hand on the lower side.²⁰ Finally, the presence of Etruscanized Greeks at Tarquinia is well recorded for the latter half of the 7th century BC, not

¹⁸ Pulgram (*supra* note 9) 171; only Françoise Bader has ventured on the theory that Latin *duo* and *bis* stem from different Indo-European roots, **de*, *di*, *do* and **we*, *wi*, *wo*, respectively, in which case (but note that this is a minority view) our present reasoning is invalidated and we have to rely solely on the Greek nature of the personal name.

¹⁹ L.H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Oxford 1961) "western Greece" no. 1, dated c. 725-700 BC; G. Neumann, "Beiträge zum Kyprischen II, 3: Eine Einladung zum Trinken", *Kadmos* 15 (1976) 77 ff., which inscription, dated to the beginning of the 7th century BC for the type of the vessel on which it is written, in its most simple interpretation *ta, Eteodama, pithi* "here, Eteodamas, drink!", offers the closest analogy to our present text from Tarquinia.

²⁰ Woudhuizen (*supra* note 4) 99 f.

only by epigraphic evidence in the form of an inscription mentioning a certain *rutile hipocrates* "Rutilius, the son of Hippokrates" (TLE 155), but also by Greek and Roman literary sources preserving the memory of the Corinthian nobleman Demaratos' emigration to the station of his most important business associates, Tarquinia, his subsequent marriage with an Etruscan woman of illustrious birth, and the vicissitudes of his fully Etruscanized male offspring, the Tarquin-dynasty of early Rome.²¹ The preceding evidence for Etruscanized Greeks in 7th century BC Tarquinia may suffice to underline the *a priori* plausibility of the presence of Graecized Etruscans also during roughly the same period. To the latter category, it seems, the *Vel Numesie* from our present inscription is most likely to be assigned on the basis of (1) the Etruscan background of his praenomen *Vel*, (2) his mastery of the Etruscan language, and (3) his writing of Greek according to the orthography of the Etruscan alphabet, as the sum of these characteristics befits an Etruscan in close contact with Greeks more than vice versa. Having observed this, it remains to be settled whether "Etruscan" in this connection means "indigenous Italic", as Cristofani wants us to believe, or not. As a matter of fact, his case rests on the recurrence of the MN *Numesie*, or its graphic variants, either in inscriptions in the Italic languages proper (Faliscan) or in Etruscan inscriptions but then in combination with an indigenous Italic (Oscan) gentilicium—all these documents stemming from a considerably later period.²² The considerably later date of these documents, however, undermines the validity of his argument to a great deal, as, for example, in 6th century BC Campania several decades, if not actually centuries, of Etruscan dominance can easily account for Etruscanized indigenous Oscans. Most significant in this connection, therefore, is the information of the Praenest gold fibula, as it is closest in date to our earliest Tarquinian text. But this document leaves little to be desired insofar as clarity is concerned, as the text states bluntly that Manios made the fibula for Numasie. Is the MN *Manios* of disputed Italic background? No. Does it not, for this reason, explain perfectly well why the text is conducted in the Latin-Faliscan language? Yes. What has *Numasie* to do with all this? If he was the customer, in whose consignment the fibula has been made, must he be a Latin-

²¹ Dion. Hal. III, 46 (mentions the marriage of Demaratos); Liv. I, 34.

²² Cristofani (*supra* note 2) 297; note, however, that according to Woudhuizen (*supra* note 4) 101 ff. Tyrreno-Etruscan colonists are represented among the founders of Cumae during the late 8th and early 7th century BC, and that this, in combination with the information referred to in note 13 above, might very well lead to the plausible inference that the author of our present text actually arrived after having lived for some time in Cumae.

Faliscan too because the maker-formula is in that language? No. In fact, if the Italian scholar Colonna is right in his identification of the gold fibula as an Etruscan one (which seems self-evident in the light of the parallels) and in his attribution of this find to the original contents of the extravagantly rich Etruscan Barberini- or Bernardini-tomb (which is a tempting suggestion), the evidence of its inscription appears to be in perfect harmony with that of its Etruscan forerunner from Tarquinia, indicating, as it does, that the MN *Numasie* is genuinely Etruscan.²³ In general, it may be stated that the context of the first written documents in the West is colonial, be it *emporia* in offshore islands or recently founded *towns* in easily defensible coastal sites, and that the first persons who mastered the alphabet were *colonists*, be it Phoenician, Tyrrhenian or Greek. Indigenous Italic tribes, like the Faliscans, Latins, Umbrians and Oscans, living in agricultural *villages* before they came into contact with the commercial and industrial communities of the eastern Mediterranean, ascended to literacy at a considerably later time, for which cultural enrichment they were demonstrably indebted to their Etruscan overlords. If the earliest inscription from Tarquinia presents any information at all on the formative phase of Etruscan culture, it is at least the close contact of Etruscans with, and yet their independence in matters of literacy from, the Greeks which strikes us most. Does this reconstruction present a picture too complicated for present-day Etruscologists? Hopefully not, as it conforms to general patterns of colonization.²⁴

²³ A.E. Gordon, *Illustrated Introduction to Latin Epigraphy* (California 1983) 75 f.

²⁴ Cf. R. Bloch, *The Etruscans* (London 1961²) 63 f.