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Review of L.B. van der Meer, *Liber Linteus Zagrabiensis*

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Liber Linteus Zagradiensis. The Linen Book of Zagreb: A Comment on the Longest Etruscan Text. By L.B. VAN DER MEER. (Monographs on Antiquity.) Louvain: Peeters, 2007. Pp. ix, 210.

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The Etruscan language is known from three sources: 1) a small number of ancient glosses and comments in classical writings; 2) thousands of (mostly) short texts written on a variety of durable materials (stone, pottery, etc.); and 3) one 'book', the *Liber Linteus*. This book, the longest single Etruscan text to come down to us, was written on a sheet of linen which was at some point shredded and used in Egypt to wrap the mummy of a wealthy woman who had died sometime in her forties. Around 1849, Mihael de Barić bought the mummy and brought it to Zagreb where it has resided ever since; hence the text is known as the *Liber linteus*, the *Linen Book of Zagreb*, the *Zagreb Mummy Text*, etc. In scholarly literature it is usually noted simply as *LL*.

Forty years would pass before the text was even identified, but since that time our understanding of it has improved steadily. Significant advances in our understanding of the text were made by a number of early researchers, culminating in the work of Karl Olzscha in the mid 1930s. Olzscha compared the *LL* to other early Italic texts such as the Umbrian *Iguvine Tables* and the Latin 'Mars Hymn' known from Cato. Olzscha was able to give a broad interpretation of the text showing that the *LL* was a liturgical text describing certain sacrifices to be performed to various gods throughout the year. Although many of the specific translations of individual terms proposed by Olzscha have not stood the test of time, his broad understanding of the text has proven sound.

In the last thirty or forty years, our understanding of Etruscan has increased substantially with the publication and work done on the Etruscan Pyrgi bilinguals, the publication of Helmut Rix's extremely usable edition of Etruscan texts (Rix et al. 1991), and with the simple hard work of a number of dedicated scholars. Among these scholars is L.B. van der Meer (henceforth VdM) whose important work on Etruscan mirrors and on the Bronze Liver of Piacenza is well known in the field. His new book on the *LL* comes at an important time. With the publication of Koen Wylín's fine treatment of the Etruscan verb, there is now a growing *communis opinio* on a number of difficult matters, and VdM notes in his 'Acknowledgements' that he now feels 'ready to tackle one of the most difficult topics in Etruscology . . . ' (vii).

VdM's book contains thirteen content chapters (I-XIII). Additional chapters cover miscellaneous material: XIV 'Appendices' (171-178—which lists several other long Etruscan inscriptions alluded to in the text), XV 'Bibliography' (179-

187), XVI 'Indices' (188-196) and XVII 'List of Illustrations' (197-198). Although not listed in the table of contents, the book closes with a lovely set of plates showing each of the strips of *LL* in beautiful color photographs (199-210).

The first ten content chapters are brief and contain background information: I 'Introduction' (1-2); II 'History' (3); III 'Date' (4); IV 'Mummy, Papyrus and the *Liber Linteus*' (5-9); V '*Libri Linteii*' (10—a plural not a genitive—briefly alluding to references in classical literature to linen texts); VI 'Material Aspects' (11-12); VII 'Textile' (13-14); VIII 'Text' (15-27); IX 'Structure' (28-41); X 'Status, Authority and Priests' (42-44). The contents of most of the above should be obvious, but a few brief words are needed to give a sense of chapters VIII and IX.

It is only in chapter VIII that the actual analysis of the *LL* begins. This chapter is divided into seven sections. Here VdM lays out his methodology (VIII.1) and discusses some of the broader aspects of the text (e.g., VIII.4 'Coherence', VIII.5 'Poetics'). It is also here that VdM makes his first slightly controversial point: he argues that the text as we have it was composed very late, and he will later argue that the text was composed in direct response to the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* in 186 B.C.E. (see, e.g. 69-74, 170). The argument is interesting but unproven. The ninth chapter introduces the broad structure of the text. Here, VdM discusses the calendar and organization of the text (IX.1 and IX.2), the rituals performed (IX.4), and the deities that can be confidently identified (IX.5).

The real meat of the book, however, is in chapter XI, which is not only the longest chapter in the book, but is in fact twice as long as all of the preceding chapters combined. Here a word-by-word analysis of the text is given. Many studies of the *LL* have focused on those passages that are clearest at the expense of the more difficult passages (e.g., Rix 1991). Given his longer treatment, VdM has chosen to do a word-by-word analysis beginning with Column 1 and working through the entire text. This has certain advantages for the user, both because of the transparent structure of his analysis (to find a discussion of a given term one has only to look at its first occurrence), and because many minor terms are described here which are not treated in other sources. This is how VdM describes his own analysis in the opening of chapter XI:

Each syntagma or string of words (sentence, phrase or command) and each word that can be isolated in the *Liber linteus* (*LL*) will be commented on and if possible, tentatively translated. ... So, of each lexeme the semantic category (noun; verb), the morphology (declension or conjugation), the context (part of a syntagma), the occurrence elsewhere in the *LL* text, and etymology will be presented. (44)

To a large extent VdM has succeeded in producing an extremely important work. There is, however, a downside to VdM's word-by-word approach: at times his examination becomes myopic, focusing on lexical terms without a thorough analysis of the syntactic and phrasal structures. Since, in many ways, our most significant advances in Etruscan studies have been the result of carefully delineating the structure of each sentence, isolating which words are nouns and which are verbs, skimping on this analysis causes VdM to overlook a few crucial points.

For example, VdM translates the formula *śacnicstreś cilθś śpureśtreśc enaś* (restored at 2.1-2, repeated 2.3-4+) as 'by the sacred fraternity/priesthood of *cilθ*, and by the *civitas* of *enaś*', a translation not significantly different from what can be found in other handbooks. His arguments for the translation of each word seem sound; however, he fails to point out clearly the syntactic evidence—that is the parallel structure here—an observation that would add support for his conclusion. Moreover, the formula needs to be analyzed along with the similar *śacnicleri cilθś śpureri meθlumeric enaś*, which VdM passes over almost without comment. Ultimately, a detailed syntactic discussion here would not in any way change his translation, but in other places more attention to syntactic detail would be helpful. For instance, the discussion of the problematic *nunθenθ* begins with a brief note on the various translations in the published literature, namely 'offer', 'invoke', etc. (68), but this and a few other very brief comments is all we get. What is needed here is a thorough discussion of the variant forms, *nunθenθ* versus *nunθen* versus *nunθene*, and an attempt to connect more carefully the passage in which the verb occurs to the broader context around it. Is this verb connected to the prayers (hence 'invoke') or more closely connected to various nominal objects (such as the *cletram* 'cart' [*vel sim.*], hence 'anoint' [as per Wallace 2008: 101-2, 251])? For any detailed discussion of these different verbal forms one will need to consult Stienbauer or Wylin, but since these scholars do not agree always among themselves, some overview here would have been helpful.

The syntactic discussion that is present could be clearer at times. For instance, at one point VdM argues that *śvec* may be a person, probably a priest, as the word is followed by *an* ('who') (87). But only a few pages before he has argued that the problematic word *vacl* is best interpreted as 'libation' even though it occurs in a similar syntagma: *vacl an ścanince . . .* (80). One might envision several argumentative approaches to explain this issue and pursuing them here would have been helpful.

Still, since so much of the recent work on Etruscan has happened on the continent beyond the purview of the English-speaking world, VdM's new book should serve as a good introduction to many of the problems of the text of the *LL*.

VdM presents and summarizes secondary literature effectively. Overall, he uses good judgment in his overview of the problems and in his interpretations of individual words, but there are times when even he falls into the trap of ‘guessology’ (to use Facchetti’s term [Facchetti 2005: 373]), e.g. ‘*lec* may be akin to Italic *lec*’ (65), but nothing in the context suggests this, or worse, his comment that *snuiuϕ* ‘reminds us of *svutaf*. . . ’ (100); well maybe so, but it hardly seems like a close enough match to be of any real value. Ultimately, VdM’s goal seems to have been to add a comment for every word although at times it might have been best to simply note that the meaning of word is at this point unknown.

VdM is at his best when he uses his knowledge of archaeological evidence to support his linguistic interpretations. Especially good is his discussion of *faśle* (65), which he argues means ‘oil’. He shows how this interpretation is stronger than the other proposals that are now circulating. Crucial to his argument is a small red-figure *askos* with the inscription *mi faśena tataś tulaluś* (Rix, *Etruskische Texte*, Sp 2.36), which he notes is a kind of vessel often used for oil. Also interesting is his long discussion (57ff.) of the word *cisium*, which he takes to mean ‘triple offering’ based partly on its overt similarity to the word ‘three’ but based more strikingly on his discussion of a number of Etruscan altars with three cup-like indentations. Finally, in this regard is his slightly convoluted analysis of the iconography of the divine term *farθan*, leading him to suggest that the word may refer to a ‘tabu god’. Ultimately, this brings VdM to the suggestion that the *LL* is connected to the Roman ban on bacchanalian rites. Again, although the discussion is quite interesting, the absence of definitive evidence leaves this intriguing discussion in the realm of speculation.

The importance of VdM’s contribution, however, cannot be understated. This volume will be the foundation of all future studies of the *LL* because of VdM’s own contributions and because so much previous scholarship has been collected in one place.

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