Review of Gerhard Meiser (ed.), Etruskische Texte

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The 1991 edition of the linguistically significant Etruscan texts, *Etruskische Texte*, by Helmut Rix and others was a landmark in Etruscan studies. For the first time it was possible to see the near totality of the evidence in one handy and relatively affordable place. The Rix edition concisely provided reliable texts, dating, generic classification, and information on find spots, material types, and earlier editions. Complete indices, including an invaluable index *a tergo*, rounded out the work. Since it was conceived as an *editio minor*, there were no drawings or photos of texts, nor was there any commentary or interpretation. In the intervening years since 1991, the discovery of new texts and the re-reading of old texts have proceeded apace and a new edition became a desideratum. One of the co-editors of the first edition, Gerhard Meiser, along with co-editors, Valentina Belfiore and Sindy Kluge, has now produced a second edition that includes about 1,100 texts not found in the first edition (p. 6). The most notable and longest of these is the *Tabula Cortonensis*, here called the *Aes Cortonense*, first published in 2000.

Volume 1 includes a general introduction, which begins with a quick explanation of the abbreviatory conventions and symbols (pp. 3–5). There then follows an explanation of the organization of this edition. Since the first edition has become a standard reference, Meiser has decided to retain the original numbering of inscriptions in this edition. Some inscriptions have been reassigned to a different locale and this means that the old number of the first edition is now an empty slot with cross-reference to the new location. For example, Cr 2.42 first assigned to Caere has now been assigned to Veii under the number Ve 2.10 and the reader who looks for Cr 2.42 will be referred to Ve 2.10. In order to keep track of these reassignments each subsection of the work includes a *conspectus editionum* which lists (a) *tituli novi* (b) *tituli in alia loca transpositi* and (c) *tituli ex alis locis transpositi*. Pages 62–65 give the complete *conspectus editionum*.

The first edition grouped funerary inscriptions together by locale and family, but organized all other text genres chronologically. This edition continues this principle. The editors have inserted newly discovered funerary texts in their correct geographical locale and the reader can find newly localized texts through a cross-reference at their former number. New *tituli* in the other chronologically arranged genres are appended to the end. Since this breaks the chronological order, the editors provide an *ordo chronologicus* at the head of each genre subsection. An
organizational change from the first edition concerns multiple distinct text types on
the same object. The first edition gave these texts in their generically appropriate
loci, and created a special subsection (X) to join together all texts on one object. The
new edition now gives the multiple texts in the first possible location and adds
cross-references to the subsections where the other texts are repeated in their
generically appropriate place.

From the linguistic/epigraphic point of view the most significant change is the
representation of the Etruscan sibilant system. As is well known—and leaving aside
further complications—Etruscan had, roughly speaking, a contrast between /s/ and
/ʃ/, but this contrast was represented in two different and inverse ways in Northern
and Southern Etruria. In the South sigma was used for /s/ and san for /ʃ/, but in the
North san was used for /s/ and sigma was used for /ʃ/. This situation has created
great difficulties for would-be editors of Etruscan who aim at a linguistically
meaningful and informative transcription. In the first edition Rix et al. represented
this situation by using the Latin alphabet <s> to represent /s/ and Greek <σ> to
represent /ʃ/. To represent Southern spelling these signs were used without any
further diacritics, but for Northern spelling <ʃ> and <s> were employed. In the new
dition Meiser has decided on a transcription that is more epigraphically oriented.
The sign sigma is always transcribed as s and the sign san is always transcribed as ś.
When sigma <s> and san < ś> have the value /ʃ/, they are provided with a double
strikethrough. Thus one can always tell both what sign the inscription actually has
and what value is to be assigned to that sign. The drawbacks, however, to this new
system are (a) that it is graphically quite unappealing and (b) hard to reproduce. (I
personally have no idea how to create this effect on my computer).

The introduction also includes an extensive set of instructions for using the
dition (Gebrauchsanweisung, pp. 16–32) at the end of which we are told in a
paraphrase of the Kursbuch Deutsche Bundesbahn “Eine [...] Gewähr für die
Richtigkeit des Inhalts [dieser Edition] kann daher nicht [in allen Fällen, GM]
übernommen werden”! The new introduction is followed by complete reprint of the

There is no space to examine many inscriptions here, but two little texts caught
my eye as worthy of some comment. Inscription Ad 2.80 from Adria, mi verkantus ‘I
am of Verkantos’ or perhaps ‘of Verkantu’, dated to the 4th-3rd century BCE (cf. Ad
2.92–4 with the same text from a bit later), evidently contains a Celtic name. The
tomb where the texts were found includes typical La Tène grave goods (Gaucci
and Pozzi 2009:63). *Verkantos is a near perfect match for Old Welsh Guorcant (Book
of Llandaf). The first element is ver- ‘over’, but it is unclear whether the second is
*kanton ‘100’ (Old Irish cét, Middle Welsh cant), i.e. ‘he who is over(seer of) 100’ or
*kantos ‘rim, border’ (MW cant) ‘he who is over the border’. Another Celtic name,
eluveitie (Pa 0.3, ca. 300 BCE), to be compared with Latin Helvetii, Greek Ἑλουήττιοι (Strabo), confirms Thurneysen’s (1923:12) brilliant etymology from *elu-eitu-ijo–‘die Landreichen’. Compare Old Irish il ‘much’ < *elu- and íath ‘land’ < *eitu-. The preservation of the original diphthong ei is a notable archaism. Amusingly, a Google search for eluveitie turns up the learned Swiss folk metal band of the same name, who sing some of their songs in Gaulish.

The second edition of Etruskische Texte will be an essential tool for research for many years, or at least until the next edition.

References