

2000

Tabula Cortonensis

Rex E. Wallace

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/etruscan_studies

Recommended Citation

Wallace, Rex E. (2000) "Tabula Cortonensis," *Etruscan Studies*: Vol. 7, Article 1.

Available at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/etruscan_studies/vol7/iss1/1

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Etruscan Studies by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

TABULA CORTONENSIS

Rex Wallace

TABULA CORTONENSIS, by Luciano Agostiniani and Francesco Nicosia. "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, Rome 2000. 175 pages, 36 color photographs, 2 radiographs, and facsimile of the *Tabula*.

In August, 1992, a workman by the name of Giovanni Ghiottini walked into a police station at Camucia (a few kilometers south of Cortona) and handed over several bronze artifacts which he claimed to have found at a construction site in the area. Among the artifacts was a lamina of bronze with an Etruscan opistograph, or inscription incised on both sides (figs. 1, 2). The workman who "discovered" the inscription refused to reveal the true location of the find to authorities. We can be certain, however, that it was produced at Cortona during the third to second centuries B.C. because of the letter forms and because of an orthographic peculiarity—the use of retrograde *epsilon* (transcribed as ê). The bronze lamina appropriately is labeled *Tabula Cortonensis*.

It seems remarkable that such an important find would be withheld from the academic world for eight years, but authorities were hoping that Ghiottini would reveal the exact find spot of the *Tabula*—or at least divulge the names of those who knew—and, for that reason, did not wish the interference that the news of this sensational find would cause. Now, about a year after the public was notified of the *Tabula*'s existence, the first authoritative study has appeared, thanks to the efforts of Francesco Nicosia, superintendent in charge of archaeology at Cortona at the time of the discovery, and Luciano Agostiniani, a linguist at the University of Perugia.

The authors have produced a splendid introduction to the bronze and the Etruscan text inscribed on it. Chapter 1, on the physical attributes of the bronze object, was written by Nicosia. Chapter 2, which has a transcription of the text, a presentation of the alphabet and letter forms, and a description of the disposition of the text on the bronze, was a collaborative effort. Agostiniani was responsible for the linguistic analysis and interpretation of the text in Chapter 3. The book also has two appendices, one of which is an updated catalogue of Etruscan inscriptions from Cortona. The final section of the book is a spectacular set of 36 color photographs, two radiographs, and a facsimile of the *Tabula*.

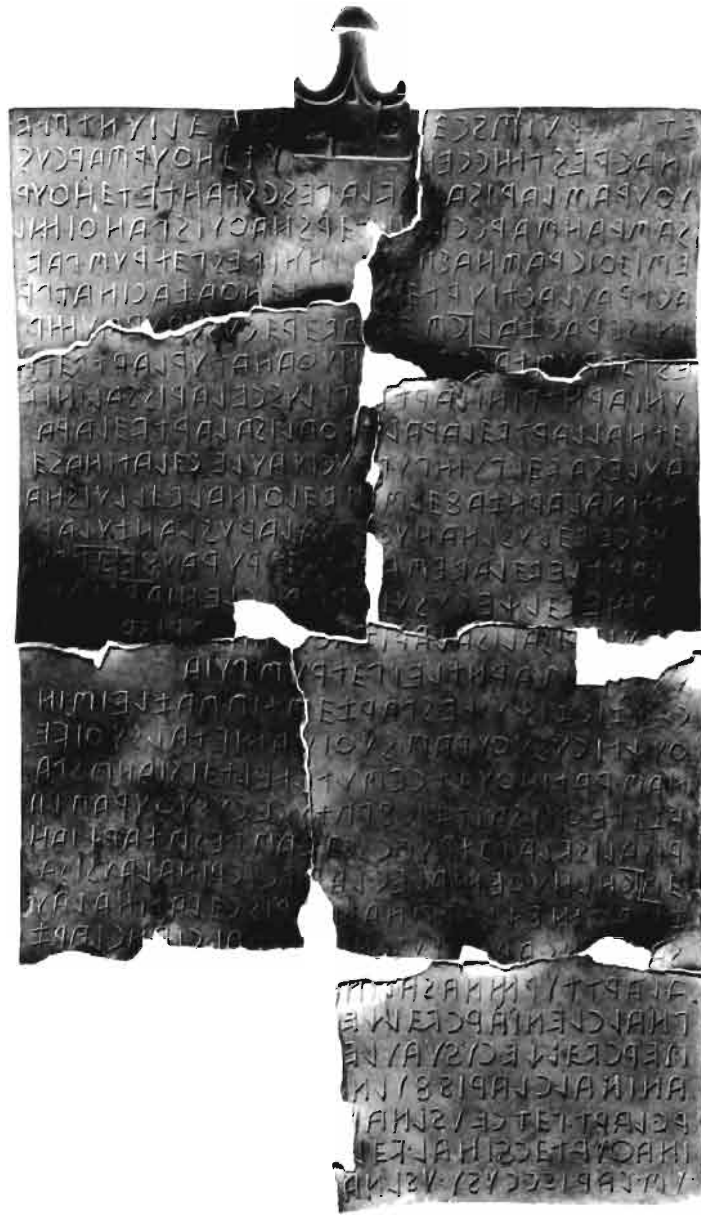


Fig. 1. *Tabula Cortonensis*: side A.
(Courtesy Soprintendenza Archeologica per la Toscana, Firenze.)

The *Tabula* was deliberately broken into eight pieces in antiquity, probably so that it could be melted down and reused. Seven pieces have survived; the missing piece is the one that belongs in the lower left-hand corner. The *Tabula* is a little over 8 inches wide and about 11.5 inches long. The inscription takes up one whole side of the bronze tablet (side A; see fig. 1) and about



Fig. 2. *Tabula Cortonensis*: side B.
(Courtesy
Soprintendenza
Archeologica per la
Toscana, Firenze.)

a third of the other side (side B; see fig. 2). In all, the inscription is 40 lines long (side A has 32 lines; side B has 8 lines.) and has about 200 words, which makes it the third longest inscription in the Etruscan corpus.

The text itself is organized into three large paragraphs (1: side A, lines 1–16; 2, side A, lines 17–32 and side B, line 1; 3: side B,

lines 2–8), of which the first two are further subdivided into smaller units by means of punctuation (a largish Z-shaped sign). With few exceptions, word forms are separated by means of a punct set at mid-line level.

Despite the fact that the text is divided into paragraphs, subsections, and words, syntactic analysis and interpretation are difficult. The state of our knowledge of Etruscan morphology and syntax has improved dramatically in the last twenty years, but not to the extent that we can competently analyze complex sentences. Add to this the fact that we can not determine the meanings for about half of the words in the *Tabula* (excluding proper names), for example, *êliun. restm. tẽnθur. pes, mlesia, vina*, and it is easy to understand why a global interpretation for this text is out of the question. Still, some headway can be made.

The authors reason that the inscription records a transaction of some sort, perhaps involving a parcel of land, between a man named *Petru Scevas* and members of the *Cusu* family. This is an interesting suggestion; it may be on the right track, but the evidence is circumstantial. We know that the *Tabula* is a public document, since it was fitted with handles so as to be hung in a public place or stored in an archive. An important public official is mentioned (*zilaθ mexl · rasnal* “magistrate of the *res publica*”), which would be consistent with the format of a public document. Several phrases in the text contain numerals that could refer to measurements of land, e.g., *tẽnθur śar* “10?,” *tẽnθur sa* “4?,” *śran śar* “10?,” *prinisera zal* “2?.” In the initial section of the text there is a phrase containing the word *vina*, which, if related to *vinum* “wine,” could refer to a tract of land used for viticulture. Finally, we know that, in third- and second-century Tuscany, redistribution of land took place in which large plots were parceled up into smaller chunks to be worked by individual families. It is possible, then, that our document may well be concerned with just such an allocation of land, but we cannot prove it.

Although we can not translate the *Tabula*, we recognize familiar words:

verbs: *ame* “is,” *ziχuxε* “was written”
 nouns: *clan* “son,” *zic* “document,” *zilaθ* name of magistracy,
puia “wife,” *tiur* “moon; month”
 numerals: *zal* “two,” *sa* “four,” *śar* “ten”
 adverb: *θui* “here”

Phrases and clauses, such as the one cited here, are known from other Etruscan inscriptions:

8 *cên · zic · ziχuxε*

ce-NOM “this” + *-hen*-deictic particle (?). *zic*-NOM “document,” *ziχuxē*-past passive “was written”
 “this document was written”

Tabula
 Cortonensis

A particularly important phrase is found at the beginning of section VII. Official documents in Etruscan were dated by means of the names of public officials who were in office at the time the document was produced. In the *Tabula* the phrase specifying the date is particularly noteworthy because its syntactic structure is different from that in other Etruscan examples. The name of the magistracy is in the locative case and the names of the magistrates are in the genitive (see below), whereas in other Etruscan examples the names of the magistrates are in the pertinentive case and the whole phrase may be considered an absolute construction comparable to that found in Latin, for example, *C. Pansa et A. Hirtio consulibus*.

zilci · larθal · cusuś · titinal larisalc · saliniś aulesla
zilci-LOC name of magistracy, *larθal*-GEN praenomen, *cusuś*-GEN gentilicium, *titinal*-GEN gentilicium, *larisalc*-GEN praenomen, *-c*-conjunction “and,” *saliniś*-GEN gentilicium, *aulesś*-GEN praenomen + *-sla*-GEN enclitic pronoun “this”
 “In the *Zilc*-ship of *Lart Cusu*, (son) of *Titina*, and of *Laris Salini*, the (son) of *Aule*”

Beyond these cases and a few phrases with locative case-marking, analysis is tough going. Nevertheless, Agostiniani does an admirable job with linguistic analysis, carefully discussing the possible morphological structure of every word and carefully laying out the most sensible arguments for syntactic constructions. Along the way, he provides detailed analyses of problematic suffixes (*-θur* suffix, pp. 59–61), clarifies derivational relationships between words (*span* “plain” vs. *spanti* “dish, flat plate” (p. 93), and makes some new and intriguing proposals:

- a. *cēn*: to be analyzed as a contraction of *ce*-NOM “this” + deictic particle *-hen*; for the full form see *cehen* (*Etruskische Texte* Pe. 4.1, 5.2), p. 87; for the morphological structure compare Latin *hunc*, which comes from the pronoun **hom* ACC SG + particle **-ke*.
- b. *inni*: ACC relative pronoun of the inanimate relative *in*-NOM “which,” pp. 99–100.
- c. *male* “oversee,” verb base from which the noun *malena* “mirror” is derived, p. 106.
- d. *celti nēitiss tarsminaśś*: *celti*-LOC “territory,” *nēitiss*-GEN “lake,” *tarsminaśś*-GEN “Trasimeno”
 “in the territory of Lake Trasimeno,” pp. 112–114.

Rex Wallace

In sum, this book is a marvelous—perhaps even inspired—presentation of an inscription which ranks as the most important find since the Pyrgi Tablets. We are grateful that the task was placed in the hands of two scholars who are among the best in their respective fields, because it is just this type of exacting examination and detailed analysis of Etruscan inscriptions that is going to move Etruscan language studies forward.

Department of Classics
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01002
rwallace@classics.umass.edu