

ETRUSCAN ADDS FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF HISTORY TO AFRICA AS A NAME, A CONCEPT AND A CONTINENT

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ABSTRACT. Customarily the beginning of the history of a nation, an country, an institution etc. is marked by the availability of written sources. Thus the history of the concept of Africa – so central to the identity of Africans and African Americans – is usually made to begin in the third century, in the context of Ancient Rome's Punic Wars. However, the author, international specialist on the languages of the Ancient Mediterranean including Etruscan, presents the case for reading a late 7th century BC Etruscan text as an attestation of the word 'Africa' – thus adding four hundred years to African history.

KEY WORDS. Africa, African history, Ancient Mediterranean, Etruscan, Hellenistic Period, history, identity, Iron Age, prehistory, San Giovenale, written sources

On the front side of a stone bed with decorated legs in a chamber tomb from San Giovenale (near Vetralla, Central Italy) dated to the late 7th century BC, the following text has been incised in retrograde direction of writing and *scriptio continua*, starting at about the top middle side of the bed and running downwards to the left leg near the end for lack of space:¹

mihanϕinasiavhircinasimuluvana

On the basis of dedicatory inscriptions of similar type on vases dating from about the same period, like *mi mulu kaviiesi* (Tarquinia, c. 650 BC) and *mi hirumesi mulu* (Caere, late 7th or early 6th century BC)² we can easily divide the given sequence in four distinct entities:

mi hanϕinasi avhircinasi muluvana

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¹ Colonna 1984: 290-1; cf. Rix 1991: AT 3.2.

² Rix 1991: AT 3.1; Cr 3.12. Cf. Woudhuizen 1992: 104 (no. 6); Woudhuizen 1998: 157 (no. 42). For further inscriptions with *mulu*, see Rix 1991: index, s.v.

Of these four entities, the first, *mi*, is the nominative of the pronoun of the 1st person singular “I”, which characterizes archaic dedicatory inscriptions being usually conducted in the first person singular as if the object itself speaks to the reader (so-called “iscrizioni parlanti”). Next, the last word, *muluvana*, is obviously related with *mulu* of the given vase inscriptions and therefore likewise denotes the object being dedicated. Now, the root *mulu-* or *muluva-*, which is also present in the central verb of dedicatory inscriptions, *muluvanike*, *muluvanece*, etc., “(s)he has offered as a vow”, ultimately originates from Luwian hieroglyphic *maluwa-* “thank-offering”, derivations of which are attested for Sidetic in form of *malvam₁a*, corresponding to Greek *kharistēria* in a bilingual inscription, and Lydian in form of *ml₁ve₁ndai₁* (dative plural in *-ai₁*), bearing reference to mobilia in the grave.³ What strikes us in the present form *muluvana* is the preservation of root-final *-va-* in like manner as in the related verb, which, in the light of the Luwian background, forms an integral part of the root and hence has been dropped in the abridged *mulu*. Furthermore, it is characterized by an additional element *-na*, which likely classifies it as a nominal or adjectival derivation in the same manner as *śuthina* or *suthina* “grave-gift” is derived from *śuthi* or *suthi* “grave”, in short as something pertaining to the thank-offering. Finally, the two corresponding forms in the middle render the name of the deceased person for which the bed was intended, both elements of which show the adjectival genitive in *-si*, originating from Luwian *-ašši-*.⁴ In sum, this leads us to the following translation:

“I (am) the (...) pertaining to the thank-offering of Hanphinas Afircinas”

As far as the name of the deceased person is concerned, the first element, *hanφina-*, recalls the family name or gentilicium *hamφna-* as attested for later inscriptions primarily from the region of Perugia. Contrary to the opinion of the editor of our inscription, Giovanni Colonna, however, I do not think that it actually constitutes the first name or praenomen, which would collide with the given comparative evidence, but rather maintain that the

³ Woudhuizen 1992, s.v. *mulveni*.

⁴ Woudhuizen 1992: 79; 81-2.

latter is omitted.⁵ This inference coincides with the fact that the second element of the name, *avhircina-*, is not a family name or gentilicium, but an ethnonym of similar type as *tursikina-* as attested for a dedicatory inscription on a gold fibula from Chiusi dating to the last quarter of the 7th century BC.⁶ The latter form shows the root *tursi-* “Etruscan” in combination with the element *-kina-*, which is paralleled for *vestirikina-*, and in variant form *-cina-* or *-cena-*, for *katacina-*, *melacina-*, *peticina-*, and *atacena-*, *laricena-*, respectively. As rightly stipulated by Carlo de Simone, the morpheme *-kina-*, *-cina-* or *-cena-* probably bears testimony of Celtic adstrate influences on Etruscan, and therefore may likely be traced back to Proto-Indo-European **ǵenh₁-* “to procreate” – a root frequently applied in kinship terms.⁷ Accordingly, we are left with the residual element *avhir-*, which, as Colonna keenly observed, should be compared to the root of the family name *afrcna-* and *afrc-* (note that 7th century BC *vh* = later *f*) as recorded for the region of Chiusi, and as such actually confronts us with an unsuspectedly early reflex of the ethnic designation *Africus*,⁸ based on the root *Āfer* “African” or *Āfrī* “an African.”⁹

To be more precise: our Etruscan inscription attests the ethnonym “African”, four hundred years before the earliest attestation of *Afer* (viz. as a cognomen of the Carthaginian born Publius Terentius Afer, a playwright in the 160s BC)¹⁰ or *Africa*¹¹ (used by the poet Ennius who lived from 239 to 169 BC) in Latin! Given the fact¹² that in its earliest use Africa refers to the re-

⁵ Colonna 1984: 291; cf. Rix 1991: Pe 1.42; Pe 1.43; Pe 1.143; Pe 1.619; Pe 1.1217; etc. For gentilicia in *-na-*, see Woudhuizen 1992: 81.

⁶ Rix 1991: Cl 2.3. Cf. Woudhuizen 1992: 104 (no. 10).

⁷ De Simone 1978; cf. Woudhuizen 1998: 141; 191.

⁸ Colonna 1984: 291 (“insospettata antichità”); cf. Rix 1991: Cl 1.2593; Cl 1.558; Cl 1.2437; Cl 1.550; Cl 1.1321.

⁹ Lewis & Short 1975, s.v. *Āfer*.

¹⁰ Hornblower & Spawforth 1996, s.v. *Terence*.

¹¹ Vahlen 1903: 55 (*Annalium* 310); 205 (*Saturarum* 11); cf. Hornblower & Spawforth 1996, s.v. *Ennius*.

¹² Ashmore 1961, s.v. *Africa, Roman*. Cf. the surname *Africānus* attributed to P. Cornelius Scipio major after the defeat of Hannibal at Zama in 201 BC, and to P. Cornelius

gion of Carthage, it may reasonably be inferred that our African buried in the chamber tomb at San Giovenale originated from the latter region, with which Etruria was in close contact from the very beginning of the Etruscan civilization during the late 8th and early 7th century BC onwards.¹³ However, the Etruscan nature of his family name, showing the characteristic element *-na-*, should warn us against oversimplified conclusions: the person in question may well have been fully Etruscanized already during his lifetime.

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Scipio Aemilianus minor after the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC. Note also that the Roman province Africa, later Africa vetus, consists of the region of Carthage.

¹³ One may think in this connection of the mythical visit of Aeneas on his trip from Troy to Latium to the Carthaginian queen Dido, considering the fact that Aeneas is not only a Roman hero, but also an Etruscan cult figure. Archaeologically, the relations of Etruria with Carthage are reflected in the attestation of Etruscan bucchero in Carthage during the period of 630 to 580 BC, whereas epigraphically they are further underlined by an Etruscan inscription on an ivory plaque found at Carthage, dating from the 6th century BC (Rix 1991: Af 3.1); historically, finally, the Etrusco-Carthaginian alliance against the Phokaians at Alalia also in the 6th century BC may serve as a telling example.