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AN ETRUSCAN INSCRIPTION ON A STATUETTE OF HERAKLES

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1. In the gallery housing antiquities at the Toledo Museum of Art (no. 2), a bronze statuette of Herakles (height 24,2 cm.) is prominently displayed in a showcase containing artifacts from Latium and Etruria (see plate XIII a).² The provenance of the statuette is unknown (but see §4 below).

An Etruscan inscription (approx. 8 cm. in length), incised in sinistrograde ductus along the right side of the statuette, beginning at the hip and ending just below the knee, reads: hercales : mi : (see plate XIII b). The height of the letters is fairly uniform (max. 9.5 mm. [sigma], min. 7 mm. [heta, gamma, lambda, iota]). Letter-width varies between approx. 3 mm. for sigma and 7.5 mm. for my (excluding iota). The spacing between the letters varies between 4.5 mm. max. (alpha and lambda) and 2.5 mm. min. (lambda and epsilon). Interpunction, in the form of two vertically-aligned points (approximately 3 mm. apart), appears after both words of the inscription.³

2. The inscription on the statuette belongs to the genre of texts known as "iscrizioni parlanti".⁴ The structure of the text consists of a theonym hercales in the genitive case followed by the first singular personal pronoun mi. This syntactic structure (noun with

¹ Museum inv. no., 78.22. Special thanks are due Mr. Kurt Luckner, Curator of Antiquities at the Toledo Museum of Art, for making the bronze available for my inspection (vidi 1/31/92). The Toledo Museum of Art has kindly granted me permission to reprint photographs of the statuette and inscription. I also express my gratitude to Emeline Richardson for making her notes on the statuette available to me. The following bibliographical abbreviations are employed in this paper:

CIE = Corpus Inscriptionum Etruscarum, Vol.I II 1,1-3, II 2,1, ed. C.Pauli, B.Nogara, E.Sittig, Leipzig 1893-1935;

CII = Corpus Inscriptionum Italicarum et Glossarium Italicum, ed. A.Fabretti, Augusta Taurinarum 1867;

CIL = Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, Vol.I²: 2, 1 ed. E.Lommatzsch, Berlin 1918;

NRIE = M.Buffa, Nuova raccolta di iscrizioni etrusche, Firenze 1935;

SE = Rivista di epigraphia etrusca in Studi Etruschi, Firenze 1929-;

TLE = M.Pallottino, Testimonia linguae etruscae, 2nd ed., Firenze 1968;

ThLE = M.Pallottino, Thesaurus Linguae Etruscae, Roma 1978.

² The statuette is described in detail by A.Kozloff and D.Mitten, *The God's Delight*, Cleveland 1988,250-52 and mentioned briefly by N. de Grummond, "Rediscovery," *Etruscan Life and Afterlife*, Detroit 1986,20 (photo, p.21, fig.I,1).

³ I am indebted to Susan Curtis for her work on the drawing of the inscription.

⁴ For discussion of this inscriptional type in the languages of ancient Italy, see L.Agostiniani, *Le "iscrizioni parlanti" dell'Italia antica*, Firenze 1982.

genitive case marking + personal pronoun *mi*) is standard in Etruscan texts indicating ownership or possession (= 'I (belong) to Herakles' or 'I (am the property) of Herakles'). But this inscription, because the "possessor" is a divinity, must have a different pragmatic value. In all probability, the statuette is a votive dedication to Herakles.⁵

The placement of the pronoun in final position puts our inscription in the rarest category of "iscrizioni parlanti". Inscriptions with the pronoun in final position account for only a small percentage of the examples of this inscriptional type (19 out of 289).⁶ If this inscription is a votive dedication, the decision to place *hercales* first is readily understandable: the theonym then occupies what is syntactically a prominent position.

3. The sigma marking the genitive case of *hercales* indicates that the writing system employed for this inscription is a "southern" variety (three-bar sigma = /s/, san = /š/). The letter forms are similar to those found in inscriptions from central and southern Etruscan communities such as Volcii, Volsinii and Tarquinii during the neo-Etruscan period (roughly after 450 BC).⁷ Heta is written 'a scala'. The left oblique stroke of the alpha is rounded and the medial bar ascends in the direction of writing. Rho is written without a tail. The oblique and the vertical bars of *my* intersect near the bottom. Sigma is rounded and elongated; the lowest portion of this sign extends approximately 2 mm. below the lowest oblique bar of the preceding epsilon.

There is a gouge between epsilon and sigma, but this is, of course, of no linguistic significance.

In terms of phonological structure, the base *hercale-* is unique. The neo-Etruscan phonological representation for this theonym is /herkle/, cf. the spellings *hercle* (59x), *herkle* (3x), *herxle* (1x).⁸ In all probability, then, our base form *hercale-* is derived from /herkle/ by means of vowel epenthesis, i.e. *hercle* > *hercale-*.⁹ Epenthesis of vowels in the environment of stop plus resonant clusters is not uncommon in Etruscan and is in fact attested in several

⁵ So also E.Richardson (per litteras). For comparable inscriptions, see TLE 733 (*mi θanrś*) inscribed on a bronze presumably dedicated to the divinity *θanr*, and TLE 625 (*mi celś atial celθi*) [corrected in ThLE, p.245], which seems to be a votive dedication to the goddess *Cel*.

⁶ Agostiniani, "iscrizioni parlanti" 250.

⁷ For discussion of the date of the bronze and inscription, see §4.

⁸ C. de Simone, *Die griechischen Entlehnungen im Etruskischen I*, Wiesbaden 1968,70-78 lists three neo-Etruscan forms, namely *heracle* (CII 2527, CII 2531), *hercele* (CIL I², 551), and *hercles* (de Simone, *Entlehnungen I*, 72) that deviate from the bisyllabic base form /herkle/. *hercele*, which appears on a mirror from Praeneste (CIL I² 551), doesn't belong in this list because it's Latin, not Etruscan (see R.Wachter, *Altlateinische Inschriften*, Bern 1987,135-36). *hercles*, a form that dates to the second half of the 5th century and thus well into the period when medial vowels were syncopated, probably reflects an older, more conservative spelling for the theonym. The spelling with medial vowel here then need not indicate a phonological representation /herθkle/. For *heracle* the spelling with medial alpha is due to the fact that it was remodelled (from *hercle*) to conform more closely to its Greek prototype Ἡρακλῆς. How or in fact whether the medial -a- was actually pronounced is impossible to determine. At any rate, these forms do not provide any evidence against a basic neo-Etruscan phonological representation /herkle/.

⁹ For the most recent discussion of vowel epenthesis in Etruscan see H.Rix, 'La scrittura e la lingua', in M.Cristofani (ed.) *Gli Etruschi. Una nuova immagine*, Firenze, 1984,217.

words borrowed from Greek.¹⁰ Moreover, it is likely that an archaic Etruscan form of the theonym, herecele (CII 2528), attests an example of vowel epenthesis in the same phonological context as that found in hercales.¹¹ herecele probably reflects a trisyllabic underlying representation /herðkle/ (< *herakle) (i.e. before medial vowel syncope) with an epenthetic vowel subsequently inserted to break up the stop plus resonant cluster -kl-.¹²

The quality of the epenthetic vowel in neo-Etruscan can not easily be determined. Orthographically, all of the possibilities are attested: -a-, rapalni masculine gentilicium NRIE 331 (cf. raplni CIE 2663); -e-, vestreclal feminine gentilicium (GEN II)¹³ CIE 4512 (cf. vestrcni feminine gentilicium CIE 5420); -u-, θanucvil feminine praenomen CIE 5103 (cf. θanχvil CIE 5567); -i-, s[c]ansina gentilicium CIE 5117 (cf. scansna CIE 511). In some cases the same word is found with the epenthetic vowel represented by different vowel signs, e.g. hepeni masculine gentilicium SE 27, 295, n. 69 vs. hepani masculine gentilicium SE 27, 283, n.14 (cf. hepani masculine gentilicium TLE 920, 922). It is possible, then, since context does not seem to govern the quality of the epenthetic vowel, that the vowel involved was phonetically somewhere in the middle of the vowel triangle, perhaps [ə] vel. sim. A suggestion offered by H.Rix however points to another possible conclusion.¹⁴ Rix claims that -a- is the most frequently attested epenthetic vowel in the inscriptions from the south. One could then suppose that the quality of the epenthetic vowel was geographically determined and that its quality in the south was phonetically [a] as opposed to [ə] or the like in the north, where the orthography for the epenthetic vowel is less stable. Phonetically, then, hercales could be [herkales] or [herkəles].

4. Kozloff and Mitten date the statuette and so also, presumably, the inscription to the early part of the 4th century BC.¹⁵ Emeline Richardson (per litteras), based on consideration of the letter-forms, dates the inscription more generally to the 4th century. These suggestions are certainly not inconsistent with the forms of the letters on the inscription or with the base-form of the theonym hercales, which must be neo-Etruscan on phonological grounds. Nevertheless, one must remain cautious about attributing a date to neo-Etruscan inscriptions on palaeographic grounds alone. The fourth century is possible, but not provable.

Kozloff and Mitten also report that Richardson has suggested Volsinii as a possible site for the manufacture of the statuette.¹⁶ This too is a reasonable hypothesis. To judge from the Elder Pliny's note (Nat. 34.16), this city may have been an important manufacturing center

¹⁰ Etruscan borrowings with epenthetic vowels are listed by C. de Simone, *Die griechischen Entlehnungen im Etruskischen II*, Wiesbaden, 1970,72.

¹¹ de Simone, *Entlehnungen II*, 72.

¹² de Simone, *Entlehnungen II*, 72.

¹³ For discussion of the inflectional forms of Etruscan onomastica see Rix, 'La scrittura', 222-228.

¹⁴ Rix, 'La scrittura', 217.

¹⁵ Kozloff and Mitten, *Delight*, 250.

¹⁶ Kozloff and Mitten, *Delight*, 252.

for bronze.¹⁷ At any rate, if Volsinii is the source for this piece, then it provides us with a likely terminus ante quem for the inscription (265 BC) and one which is consistent with the hypothesis of a 4th century production date.

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¹⁷ Pliny reports that over 2,000 bronze statues were carted away by the Romans after the city (Volsinii Veteres) was subdued.



a)



b)

a) Herakles-Bronzestatuetten, b) mit etruskischer Inschrift (Toledo Museum of Art, inv.no. 78.22)