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In copertina: il mare e il nome di Aristonothos
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Questa rivista vuole celebrare il mare Mediterraneo e contribuire a sviluppare temi, studi e immaginario che il cratere firmato dal greco Aristonothos ancora oggi evoca. Deposto nella tomba di un etrusco, racconta di storie e relazioni fra culture diverse che si svolgono in questo mare e sulle terre che unisce

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AN UNPUBLISHED ETRUSCAN INSCRIPTION
ON A CINERARY URN IN THE FIELD MUSEUM

Un'iscrizione etrusca inedita su un'urna cineraria del Field Museum

Theresa Huntsman, Rex Wallace


RIASSUNTO: Un'urna cineraria in terracotta conservata nella collezione del Field Museum (Chicago, IL) presenta un'iscrizione etrusca inedita. In questo contributo vengono analizzate le caratteristiche dell'urna cineraria ed è proposta una lettura e una restituzione dell'iscrizione dipinta lungo il bordo superiore della cassetta.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Urna cineraria; Chiusi; Iscrizione (dipinta); Etrusco; Field Museum (Chicago, IL)


ABSTRACT: A terracotta cinerary urn in the collection of the Field Museum (Chicago, IL) displays an unpublished Etruscan inscription. In this paper, we discuss the features of the cinerary urn and propose a reading and restoration of the inscription painted along the casket's upper border.

KEYWORDS: Cinerary urn; Clusium; inscription (dipinto); Etruscan; Field Museum (Chicago, IL)


theresah@seattleartmuseum.org

 ORCID: 0000-0003-0323-7778


Seattle Art Museum

 ROR: 021wtff78

rwallace@umass.edu

 ORCID: 0009-0008-2580-5979

University of Massachusetts

 ROR: 0072zz521

1. A terracotta cinerary urn in the collection of the Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois, bears a previously unpublished funerary inscription (inv. no. 105225)¹. The urn, possibly recovered from Clusium (Chiusi), was acquired by the museum through their buyer in Europe, E. E. Ayer, and accessioned along with other Etruscan objects in 1908 (Fig. 1)².

2. The lid measures 35.5 × 19.5 × 23.4 cm, and the casket measures 33.5 × 14 × 21.5 cm. It is unknown whether the lid and casket belong together, but their measurements and wear are compatible. When Huntsman examined the urn in 2011, there was a significant amount of osteological material in various states of burning, both loose in the casket and in a separate bag. The bag included a note saying that the fragments were placed with the urn in 1974. It is unknown whether this material was originally found with this urn³.

On the lid is a mold-made figure of a veiled, reclining female. Her tunic is belted beneath the breast with a knot and two strands of the belt hanging down. She wears two rings on her proper left hand, which grips a cushion. She also wears earrings and perhaps a necklace. Details of the figure were executed by hand, such as the locks of hair. The casket bears a molded relief of a four-figure ‘plow hero’ scene common to urns from Clusium dating to the third or second century BCE. There are significant areas of white *ingubbiatura* preserved on the lid and the box, as well as substantial areas of red pigment.

¹ The urn is illustrated in DE PUMA 1987 and discussed in HUNTSMAN 2014.

² The authors would like to thank Jamie Kelly, Head of Anthropology Collections and Collections Manager at the Field Museum, for facilitating our research visits, and for providing us with photographs of the urn and permission to publish.

³ The presence of osteological material remaining in urns of this type is not uncommon. Due to excavation and collecting practices of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is impossible to know whether the material is original to a specific urn. HUNTSMAN’S (2014) examination of over 800 urns from Clusium across museum collections in Europe and North America revealed undocumented or minimally documented remains in a number of examples.

3. An inscription was painted in red pigment along the upper border of the casket in right-to-left direction (Fig. 2). Unfortunately, some letters are no longer visible, and others are poorly preserved, making the reading and restoration of portions of the inscription difficult (Fig. 3).

The inscription consists of an onomastic phrase composed of three constituents. The deceased's praenomen is $\theta\alpha\eta\alpha$ ⁴. Sizable portions of the *theta* and of both *alphas* are visible. Also, a faint outline of the letter *ny* can be seen between the *alphas*. A punctuation mark in the form of a period placed at mid-height level separates the praenomen and the nomen. The latter is more challenging to read and restore. The form of the first letter, *tau*, is visible under magnification. The letter's short transverse bar, which bisects the upright bar just above its midpoint, descends in the direction of writing. Following *tau*, five letters are missing before word-final *iota*. The surviving skeleton of the nomen is $t\dot{f} . . . j\dot{i}$. Following a punctuation mark, there is a short space before the initial letter of the final constituent. The first three letters, *cei*, are clearly visible. After the sequence *cei*, there is a gap in the text where the top of the cap of the figure on the left encroaches on the writing space of the casket's upper border. To the left of the cap, a curved segment of a letter is visible at the bottom of the writing space. A short segment of the same letter is also visible at the top of the writing space. We propose to read this letter as ζ . Segments of two letters following ζ are also visible. Of the first letter, the lower and upper segments of an upright bar can be seen. Two short segments of the second letter are visible as well. One segment belongs to the midsection of an upright bar; the other segment, which is at the summit of the letter, curves to the left. It may be the initial segment of the left sidebar of an *alpha*. Following this letter, there is space for two or three letters at the end of the casket's upper border. We transcribe the surviving portion of the inscription in (1).

⁴ We employ the following epigraphic symbols in this article. A period within square brackets indicates a missing letter; the sign \times is used to indicate a letter whose form cannot be determined; the underdot \dot{f} indicates a character that is no longer clearly legible and is restored by the editor. Letters in square brackets are missing and have been replaced by the editors.

(1) $\theta\alpha\eta\alpha . \tau[\dots]i . \text{cei}\zeta \times \times [- 2/3 -]$

The initial and final letters of the nomen limit to some degree the possibilities for editorial reconstruction. Of the possibilities, we think that a nomen of the form $\tau[\text{le}\acute{s}ne]i$ is plausible because the nomen *tleśna* and its feminine counterpart are well attested at Clusium⁵. We restore the final constituent of the onomastic phrase as *ceiçna[śa]*, the articulated form of the nomen of the deceased's husband. The entire inscription, following our reconstruction of the individual constituents, is given in (2)⁶.

(2) $\theta\alpha\eta\alpha . \tau[\text{le}\acute{s}ne]i . \text{cei}\zeta\eta\alpha[\acute{s}a]$
 “Thana Tleshnei, the (wife) of Ceicna”

4. The surviving letters of the inscription belong to Adriano Maggiani's northern style of alphabet, type II, which was current in the third/second centuries BCE at sites in northern Etruria such as Clusium (Figure 4)⁷. *Theta* has the form of a circle. The first *alpha* of the praenomen *thana* has the following shape: A . The letter's left bar is curved at the top; the transverse bar descends in the direction of writing. The *alpha* at the end of the praenomen appears to have a similar form, but the letter is marred in several spots making identification of its exact form more difficult⁸. *Gamma* has the shape of a half-moon. Though faintly visible, the letter *ny* has a form in

⁵ The *gens tleśna* is included among the prominent families at Clusium. For a list of these families and a discussion of the evidence for the compilation of the list, see BENELLI 2009.

⁶ The character *ś* represents a palatal sibilant /ʃ/.

⁷ See MAGGIANI 1990, pp. 188-193.

⁸ The form of this letter may be distorted due to the urn's original form or present condition, or possibly a combination of the two. In this area of the flat register above the scene, the end of the plow and the hero's hand extend up into the field, causing the flat surface to bulge and making it difficult to paint straight lines. Additionally, subsequent wear and exposure to soil and moisture after deposition has caused the painted surfaces to lift, crack, and bubble. This may also have distorted the letter form.

which its upright bars are spanned by a transverse bar descending in the direction of writing. The transverse bar is attached near the summit of the right upright bar and ends near the midpoint of the left upright bar (H). The most distinctive letterform is *epsilon*. Its upper sidebar is nearly horizontal, and it curls downward at its tip. The medial sidebar is short. The lower sidebar is longer than the other sidebars.

5. We acknowledge that our restoration of the nomen on the cinerary urn is guesswork, and that at least one other name in the corpus of nomina at Clusium, namely *tetinei*, is also a possible restoration⁹. However, restoring the nomen as *tlešnei* is, in our opinion, the better option because it yields an onomastic phrase that was particularly common among female members of *tlešna*-family¹⁰. *θana* is attested in eight of the fourteen funerary inscriptions of female members of the *gens*¹¹. And the praenomen *θania*, a variant of *θana* derived by means of the Italicizing suffix *-ia*, is attested in two additional inscriptions¹². In our opinion, then, *θana tlešnei* is an appropriate restoration for the name of the deceased on the Field Museum inscription, even though the ultimate form of the nomen cannot be securely determined.

Urns of this type bearing inscriptions are widely dispersed among museum and private collections across the globe, particularly in Europe and North America, and there is reason to believe there are numerous unpublished funerary inscriptions from Clusium in collections today. Agents such as E.E. Ayer were acquiring Etruscan

⁹ One member of the *gens tetina* married a *θana tlešnei*. See *ET Cl* 1.2547 (*tetinaša*).

¹⁰ *θana* is the most popular feminine praenomen at Clusium, far surpassing the number of other feminine *praenomina* in use, e.g., *fašti/faštia*, *hašti/haštia*, *larθi*, *ramθa*, and *šeθra*.

¹¹ For the onomastic phrases, see *ET Cl* 1.241, *Cl* 1.266, *Cl* 1.952, *Cl* 1.2524, *Cl* 1.2530, *Cl* 1.2531, *Cl* 1.2532, and *Cl* 1.2547.

¹² For *θania tlešnei*, see inscriptions *ET Cl* 1.242 and *ET Cl* 1.1995. Interestingly, in two funerary inscriptions belonging to the same person, the deceased was referred to as *θana tlešnei* and *θania tlešnei*. The praenomen *θana* was incised on a funerary tile (*Cl* 1.241) while the praenomen *θania* was placed on the lid of a cinerary urn (*ET Cl* 1.242).

objects at the same time and from the same sources as other major collecting institutions. Moreover, a number of these institutions, like the Field Museum, have shifted their focus and mission over time, meaning that a lack of specialist consideration has led to only basic database records for these objects. There is much to add to the Etruscan epigraphic record through collaborations such as this.

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Fig. 1. Terracotta cinerary urn with Etruscan inscription, ca. 3rd–2nd c. BCE. (Inv. no. 105225. © The Field Museum. Photo: Diana Alexander White)



Fig. 2. Detail of casket (Inv. no. 105225_UrnFront.JPG © The Field Museum. Photo: Jamie Kelly)



Fig. 3. Detail of inscription (Inv. no. 105225. © The Field Museum. Photo: Jamie Kelly)



Fig. 4. Outline of surviving letterforms of inscription (Inv. no. 105225. © The Field Museum. Drawing: Rex Wallace)