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**Bruno Poulle (ed.), *L' Etrusca disciplina au Ve siècle apr. J.-C. Actes du colloque de Besançon, 23-24 mai 2013. La divination dans le monde étrusco-italique, 10.* Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2016. Pp. 259. ISBN 9782848675527. €24.00 (pb).**

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This series of volumes has included several useful surveys of references to the Etruscans and divination, the last of which, published in 2005 and sadly very difficult to find, was devoted to the fourth century AD. This neat and comprehensive volume will hopefully remain more accessible; it offers a fascinating picture of the frustrations of distinguishing fact from fiction. The contributors were clearly given authors to consider, and the volume's scope is somewhat limited by the focus on divination. The absence of an index is unfortunate, but it is nonetheless a useful and well curated overview.

The volume is divided into four sections: pagan writers, Christian fathers, poetic or literary sources and the grammarians. Yet despite the different genres, what is clear is that knowledge of anything genuinely Etruscan was extremely weak, and to a large extent what we are seeing is the construction and repetition of a version of the Etruscan world that is to a large extent an invention. There is inevitably a degree of similarity between the authors surveyed so I shall pick out some key themes and findings.

The key focus of the volume is the *haruspices*, but an honourable mention has to be given Tages, who as the supposed founder or revealer of Etruscan religion, crops up repeatedly in ancient sources. Briquel once wrote that Tages was turned into a sort of pagan alternative to Jesus, and he was certainly mentioned frequently, without much consistency or detail. In fact, throughout the volume, the overwhelming sense is of authors with a handful of facts, and an apparatus of criticism. Even authors who appear to

know rather more relied on a small number of sources and possibly at second or third hand.

Macrobius stands out as perhaps having a significant and genuinely different set of evidence, with a reference at *Sat.* 3.7.2 to *Libri Etrusci* and an *Ostentarium Tuscum*. The unlucky trees that are described verge away from portents and into the sort of generalised description of the interrelationship between the natural world and the world of human action that one can also see in the brontosopic calendar which we have from Nigidius Figulus via John the Lydian. Oddly, this absolutely fundamental survival is treated rather briefly, and without reference to Jean MacIntosh Turfa's recent edition.<sup>1</sup> Guillaumont instead focuses on the treatment by Lydus and Proclus of the story of Tages.

Etruscan religion seems to have had the advantage of profound obscurity, which permitted it to be adapted to various uses. As Haack shows, there was an easy move to equate Etruscan religion with eastern or Orphic religion, and overlay it with Gnosticism, and this then only enhanced the Christian critique. Many of the writers surveyed made reference solely in a generic way to Etruscans, with a favourite criticism being that they had commerce with demons. Inevitably Augustine has the most nuanced and also destructive account; Champeaux and Buchet both show in different ways that even when Augustine was mocking the daft superstitions of the ancients he was aware of their potential power to mislead others (hence his critique of the maintenance of theatrical displays) and to do genuine mischief. For Augustine, as for some pagan writers, the Etruscan religion was of the same kind as that of the magi, and it had an element of the dangerous. It is interesting too that Jerome uses *haruspices* to translate into Latin the sense of the Chaldaean priests in the Book of Daniel, and perhaps the alleged eastern origin of the Etruscans aided this view.

Briquel shows that Orosius handles this rather differently. With his obvious classical source, Livy, Orosius engages rather in a reinterpretation and a recovery of the religious past of Rome, as a precursor to the true religion of Christianity. This is not dissimilar from the treatment of the scattered poetic references, though Zarini's account of Corippus, interesting as it is, fits less well and is less convincingly Etruscan.

Finally van Heems brings us face to face with hard realities. All the reminiscences of and remonstrations against Etruscan paganism can be as relatively light touch as they are because the religion had been comprehensively snuffed out by the late-fourth-century decrees against divination, and whilst fourth-century legal sources seem reasonably knowledgeable (if no doubt via tralatian copying), the fifth century shows less understanding, and the Theodosian and Justinianic codes are more or less silent on the topic.

Zosimus (5.41-2) has a strange story of Etruscan priests offering to help the Romans on the eve of the sack by Alaric—their activities had driven the enemy from the gates of Narnia. The pope Innocent I permits a secret

performance of the rites, but the priests insist on proper public performance, and no-one has the courage for that. The story raises the question as to whether there was more local performance than the sources give credit for—and maybe the insistence of the legal texts on private *haruspices* (CTh IX.16) is telling. Sadly the evidence for this is largely beyond our grasp, and the bulk of what is left to us, and which is presented here, bears only the faintest resemblance to the rich tradition of practice of the Etruscans, but attests to the later scholarly imagination of a world they had already forgotten.

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**Notes:**

1. J. M. Turfa, *Divining the Etruscan World: The Brontoscopic Calendar and Religious Practice* (Cambridge, 2012).

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