

Reviews

I. HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

J. M. TURFA, *DIVINING THE ETRUSCAN WORLD: THE BRONTOSCOPIC CALENDAR AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xiii + 408, illus. ISBN 9781107009073. £65.00.

The *Brontoscopic Calendar* preserved in John Lydus' *De ostentis* (27–38; sixth century A.D.) is an astonishing document that has been of interest up until now mainly to scholars of Byzantine texts, historians of Roman Republican literature and specialists in Etruscan religion. The Greek purports to be a translation of a Latin work by the first-century B.C. Roman antiquarian Nigidius Figulus, who, in turn, had made a translation 'word for word' from a book by the Etruscan prophet Tages. Jean MacIntosh Turfa has reclaimed the text for modern scholarship by making the first translation in English (N. de Grummond and E. Simon (eds), *The Religion of the Etruscans* (2006), 182–90), which has been presented anew in the book under review, polished in every detail and contextualized in a thorough and wide-ranging manner by scholarship on the sources for brontoscopy in the ancient world, on the way in which such lore was transmitted to Etruria, and on the nature of the Etruscan society in which the *Calendar* took root.

The literal centre-piece of the volume is the Greek text and authoritative English translation (Part II, 73–101), but the introductory Background (Part I, 3–70) and the Thematic Analysis (Part III, 105–313) are of great importance for beginning to understand this text — mysterious and, at the same time, amusing at first sight. The *Calendar*, beginning in June and running through May, systematically provides predictions that may be consulted on any day when thunder occurs. Typical entries from the month of February convey the range of predictions about politics, health, fertility, food supply, weather and other natural phenomena:

Feb. 8 – If it thunders, the greatest affair will inflame the state, and also fish will increase and yet dangerous wild beasts shall perish.

Feb. 11 – If it thunders, good deliveries in childbirth for women.

Feb. 18 – If it thunders, it threatens a heavy wind and eruption of pustules on bodies.

Feb. 19 – If it thunders, there will be a throng of reptiles, and in addition, of worms.

The format is of crucial importance: 'If X occurs, then Y will occur.' This is the formula used over and over in a vast body of Mesopotamian divination texts running from Sumerian to Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian: that is, through different languages and different scripts, from the third millennium B.C. down to the Hellenistic period, in what was called by A. Leo Oppenheim a 'stream of tradition'. There can no longer be any doubt that the Etruscans entered into that stream. T. has traced the course from Nippur and Nineveh (as demonstrated by texts from the library of Ashurbanipal, seventh century B.C.) to the Phoenician coast of the eastern Mediterranean and from there to Etruria, a route that is completely convincing given all the evidence about Phoenician activity in the West and specifically in Etruria, much of it assembled by T. herself in the past and in this volume. She courageously tackles the issue of transmission of multilingual divination literature, hypothesizing the exchange as taking place through close personal contacts of powerful families, perhaps including rulers, ambassadors and traders. This reviewer would also stress the possibility of itinerant religious figures, not exactly apostles or missionaries, but on a model suggested by W. Burkert, mobile doctors and seers summoned from afar and accorded more respect than local prophets (*The Orientalizing Revolution, Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (1992), 41–6).

Not quite as convincing, but absolutely intriguing, are T.'s hints that this kind of text may have been transmitted from the East as early as the eighth century B.C., the time of the earliest urbanization in Etruria, for which she reconstructs an extreme period of weather that would have made the calendar particularly relevant. Her hypotheses on the numerous conditions of society, health and agriculture in the Etruscan Iron Age are brilliant and useful, but the dots do not quite connect with a sophisticated text like Lydus' *Calendar*, especially since the earliest known Etruscan

inscription dates to around 700 B.C. Just how much the conjectured text may have been edited and adjusted to fit later conditions under which it was used remains problematic. For example, the colophon states that Nigidius said the calendar was valid for Rome (not Etruria); and there are various details that simply cannot go back to Etruscan Tages: for example, the month of August is referred to as ΑΥΤΟΥΣΤΟΣ.

The book contains a treasury of appendices of texts on Etruscan religion, sample Mesopotamian documents of divination, other brontoscopia, a time-line and a glossary. The carefully selected album of images at the front of the book is useful (though the publisher by reducing them to postage-stamp size has not done them justice). *Divining the Etruscan World* is a stimulating and pioneering work of interest and value for all Etruscan researchers and to a wide spectrum of scholars of ancient religion in Etruria, Italy and the Mediterranean. T. has pointed out in an authoritative way the specific path of divination from the Near East to Etruria, and now it is a challenge to others to test her conclusions by tracing the route (was there a significant stage along the way on Cyprus, an idea floated by T.?), by applying the proposed chronology, and by examining anew the evidence for other types of attested Etruscan divination (for example, augury, hepatoscopy, scrying) and whether and how they too may have been transmitted to Etruria at an early date via the Mesopotamian stream of tradition.

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L. B. VAN DER MEER, *ETRUSCO RITU: CASE STUDIES IN ETRUSCAN RITUAL BEHAVIOUR*. Louvain/Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011. Pp. vi+167, 33 illus. ISBN 9789042925380. €78.00.

Naturally, examination of ritual material dominates scholarship of the Etruscan culture, given the relatively small number of residential, or otherwise non-ritual, sites. In van der Meer's *Etrusco Ritu*, he organizes the material into three main chapters of family rituals, funerary rituals and public rituals. While these categories are not mutually exclusive in general, he makes a distinction between family rituals, which are usually practised once in a person's lifetime, and public rituals that are usually repeated (14).

Preliminary chapters set the scene by detailing definitions and views of rites and rituals with reference to ancient and modern analogies, as well as surveying recent scholarship on Etruscan rituals. More specifically, in ch. 3, M. includes a welcome description of some of the well-known anthropological and archaeological definitions of ritual. After much discussion of the strengths and shortcomings of the pedigree of definitions related to 'ritual', he states simply 'rites are here intended as single activities and rituals as a series of rites' (13). He then clarifies his goals by questioning 'can we recognize and reconstruct private rituals, especially rites of passage, funerary, which are both private and public, and public ones in Etruscan material culture, inscriptions, and Greek and Roman literature' (13). The appendices include a discussion of Livy's description of the *evocatio* of Juno after the Roman victory at Veii in 396 B.C. and a translation of the Iguvine Tablets (139–43).

Many of the subsections are extremely short, for instance the discussions on birth and perinatal rites are each less than a page long. Throughout the chapters, the author acknowledges other scholarly interpretations. For example, in the wedding section, M. admits that even the identification of the sex of the individuals sculpted in low relief on a cippus from Poggio Gaiella has been interpreted differently with contrasting conclusions by J.-R. Jannot (15–19). It is also significant to note that not all of the objects referred to in the discussions are included in the figures; at times, this can hamper the reader's ability to judge the analysis. In numerous instances, excerpts of Latin descriptions of Roman rituals are used to find meaning in Etruscan iconography of much earlier date, suggesting long-term continuity of practice between the two cultures — at least according to the author.

In the chapter on family rituals, M. discusses six areas related to important once-in-a-lifetime events as mentioned above: weddings, births, transition to adulthood, immersion and healing, perinatal rites and adoption, along with two additional categories of divination and consecration. With the aid of a sarcophagus lid from Volterra and two bronze mirrors, an insightful discussion of the Etruscan origins of bullae is created in the transition to adulthood section. In the next