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ETRUSCANS IN *AENEID*

As it is well-known, Virgil's *Aeneid* and its importance sufficiently surpass the limits of belles-lettres. The poem provides various information which attracts a special attention of the scientists working in literature, history, mythology, linguistics, politics etc.

This fact is naturally explained by the content of *Aeneid* – Virgil presents a mythological version of originating and development of Roman civilization. At the same moment here coexists myth and historical reality, fantasy and a reliable information.

It is very difficult to conclude how people in antiquity distinguished the spheres of history and mythology. This is quite another matter, which goes far beyond the limits of our paper. The only thing that may be said definitely is that a concrete mythological plot is often connected with a certain historical event. It's also quite complicated to speak about a mechanism, according to which a myth is created. Of course here exists an exception – when the myth has its own author.

In the case of *Aeneid*, Virgil can be defined as an author of the mythological essence of his poem.

Of course, Virgil had a concrete basis for his mythological conception. In order to give to his plot a convincence and realism (which was important to make an official version ordered by the emperor Augustus), Virgil studied historical, mythological and literary heritage of Greece and Rome.

But all this information was not enough to complete the whole story about Aeneas. As it is known from the poem, Aeneas meets in Italy a lot of local tribes and people, who have their own culture – history, mythology, religion, language and lifestyle. So it was also important to know everything about this peoples, because they had to become not only the characters of *Aeneid*, but the characters of the Roman mythological history.

This fact, in our opinion, explains another reason which prompted the emperor to decide on Virgil as the future author of *Aeneid*. Besides exceptional poetical talent, moderateness and academic education, Augustus and his counselor Maecenas took into consideration the place the poet came from.

Virgil was from Mantua – a little ancient city on the north of Italy. This city was founded by Etruscans and during the centuries there lived many nationalities of antique Italy: Etruscans, Venetians, Latins, Ligurians, Greeks. Here peacefully coexisted the culture, religion, mythology of these peoples and tribes. In *Aeneid* Virgil comments:

"Mantua, dives avis, sed non genus omnibus unum:
gens illi triplex, populi sub gente quaterni,
ipsa caput populis, Tusco de sanguine vires"

(X, 201-203)¹

It may be said definitely, that among these peoples Virgil gave a special place to Etruscans.

Some scientists propose, that the reason of this fact can be explained by two circumstances:

1. Virgil use a lot of Etruscan myths in the plot of *Aeneid*, a great part of which was narrated by Gaius Maecenas, poet himself, an Etruscan nobleman from Arezzo;
2. Maecenas paid special attention to Etruscans. He had a great influence on Augustus and wanted to give glory and fame to his compatriots.²

We must note that this opinion is only partially true.

More convincing is to suppose that Virgil brought the information about Etruscans according to the historical regularity – because of the following reasons:

1. Etruscans were the nearest neighbours of Romans and their culture together with the culture of Greeks was an example to follow for Latins;
2. Etruscan state was the first to dominate in Italy before Rome. As Servius notes: "In Tuscorum iure paene omnis Italia fuerat (Serv., in Aea., XI, 567)

Their power was great on the land and on the sea. It is not fortuitous, that the Tyrrhenian sea took it's name from the ethnic name of Etruscans, the way Greeks called them.

However, at the moment Virgil was composing the poem, Etruria, as a political union of the state-towns, already belonged to the history. How-

¹ Verg., Aen.

² Cristofani, M., Dizionario illustrato della civiltà etrusca, Giunti, Firenze 1999, 60.

ever, its culture, language and religion had retained their significance for centuries in the political and cultural life of the Roman Empire.

This way, the existence of the Etruscan material in *Aeneid* is a natural historical phenomenon.

Which spheres of Etruscan civilization are covered in *Aeneid*? We can distinguish the following semantic groups:

1. Historical-geographical environments (towns, geographical place-names, historical characters);
2. Mythology (mythological characters, plots);
3. Religion and cult (gods, divination);
4. Lifestyle (ceremonies, dress, foot-wear, musical instruments);
5. Characteristics of Etruscans (ethnic properties).

Historical and geographic environments

It must be said, that in *Aeneid*, according to antique tradition, Etruscans are nominated by four ethnic names:

1. "Etrusci" (VIII, 48) or "Tusci" (X, 199); 2) "Tyrrheni" (XIII, 555); 3) "Lydi" (II, 781); 4) "Meoniae iuventus" (VIII, 499).

The first name Etruscans got from Romans (Etruscans, as it is known, called themselves "rasenna"), the others – are based on the information of Herodotus. Herodotus affirms that Etruscans had to come to Italy from Lydia. Once a terrible starvation started there during which Tyrrhenos, the son of the king, took one part of the people with him by sea in search of a new land. Lydians reached the new motherland in Italy, where Umbrians lived. Tyrrhenians founded a lot of towns.³

Although there existed various theories offered by other authors of antiquity (Hellanicus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus), this opinion was legalized not only in Greece but also in Rome and was accepted by Virgil.

Towns

In *Aeneid* the names of several Etruscan towns are mentioned:

Corythi Tyrrhena (VII, 204-29) – a city, from which, according to Virgil, the legendary king and founder of Troja starts his voyage to the mountain of Ida. Corythi can be identified with Etruscan city Cortona (etr. curthute, lat. Kortona, Kroton, gr. Corythus)⁴

Agylliane (VIII, 479) – the first city, according to *Aeneid*, founded by Etruscans – Greek version of the name of Etruscan city Caere, modern Cerveteri.

³ Herod., I, 93-94.

⁴ Cristofani, M., 79.

Clusium and Cosae (X, 167-168) (etr. cusate. gr. Kossai, lat Cosa, Cosae) – the cities founded in 273 B.C.

Populonia (X, 172) – (etr. Pupluna, Fulfunia, lat. populonia).

Pisa (X, 182) (gr. Pisa, lat. Pisae).

Caerete (X, 182) – (etr. Ceisra, gr. Chaire, Agylla, lat. Caere).

Pyrgi (X, 184) – (gr. Pyrgoi, lat. Pyrgi).

Gravisca (X, 184) – (lat. Graviscae) – founded in 181 B.C. modern -Porto Cementino (VI)

Mantua (X, 201) (etr. Manthva, grec. Mantoua, lat – Mantua) modern Mantova.⁵

It is significant that Virgil in his list of towns does not mention Tarquinia – the main city of Etruria. This fact is explained by the opinion, that Tarquinia is ignored by Virgil because of opposition and strained relations between Tarquinia and Rome (Liv, VI, 4,7-11).⁶

Place Names

1. "Island Ulva" – (X, 1973) – "insula in ex haustis Chalybum generosa mettalis" – modern isle Elba.

2. River Thybris (II, 78) – is named as Lydian "ubi Lydinus arva inter optima virum leni fluit agmine Thybris" or Tyrrhenian "Tyrrhenum Thybrim (VII, 242)"

3. Tyrrhenian Sea – "Tyrrhenium mare (I, 67)" etc.

Historical Characters

1. Tarquin dynasty – "Vis et Turquines reges animaque superbum" (VI, 817).⁷

Tarquin Dynasty in history is represented by two kings of Rome – the fifth – L. Tarquinius Priscus and the seventh – L. Tarquinius Superbus.

L. Tarquinius Priscus came to Rome from the Etruscan city of Tarquinia. He had changed his Etruscan name Lucumonius into Roman Lucius (Livius, Ab Urbe condita, VI, 2).

2. Porsenna – (VIII, 646) (etr. Laris or Larth Pursiena). The king of Chiusi, who gave refuge to persecuted Tarquinius Superbus. In 509-504 BC he besieged Rome but was defeated. Porsenna and Tarquinius Superbus in

⁵ De Simone, C., Il nome etrusco del paleonimo Mantua, SE, vol LVIII, 1993.

⁶ See: Camporeale, Ai primordi di Roma in the book: Die integration der Etruscher und das Weiterwirken etruskischen Kulturgutes im republikanischen und kaiserzeitlichen Rom, Wien 1998, 151.

⁷ Pellegrini, G.-B., Metodologia nell' esplorazione della Toponomastica Etrusca, Secondo congresso internazionale etrusco, ATTI, vol I, Supplemento disc, 1989 1587.

Aeneid became symbols of tyranny, against which Romans struggled defending their own liberty: "Aeneadae in ferrum libertate ruebant" (VIII, 647) and overthrew the monarchy in Rome.

2. Mythology

Mythological characters

Tarchon – One of the main characters in *Aeneid*. He is the main ally of Aeneas (VII, 505). Tarchon, according to Virgil, the king of Agyllae, struggles against the tyrant Mezentius and the Rutuls.

Tarchon is the well-known character of the Etruscan mythology. He was the son (or the grandson) of Tyrrhenos. He, according to his father's will had founded 12 towns of Etrurian and created the main principles of state organization. The fact that Tarchon is related to Etruscan is well known. On one of the mirrors from Toscana, Tarchon takes part in the examination of sheep's intestines.⁸

According to Titus Livius (De ost, c.3, 10A), Tarchon was the ploughman, who met Tages, a legendary foreteller, a grizzled baby, who jumped out of the ploughed land and explained to the peasant the main principles of "divinatio".

Virgil, as we see, used the name of the well-known and popular character to make his "invented" king Tarchon appear realistic in terms of mythology.

Mezentius – According to *Aeneid*, the king of Agyllinae, which during a long period held this proud people (Etruscans) in restraints. He was known by his exceptional cruelty and a terrible method of punishment. He used to tie a living person face to face with a dead man and have die slowly.

Mezentius was ousted from the city. He found a shelter with Rutuls – their king Tumus. Virgil notes:

"Ergo omnis furiis surrexit Etruria iustis, regem and
supplicium praesenti Marte reposcunt"

(VIII, 494-495)

Virgil composed this mythological passage after historical facts. Porsenna, a historical king of Chiusi, as we have mentioned above, gave refuge to Tarquinius Superbus. The exceptional cruelty of the king of Caere Mezentius is based on the information of Herodotus (Historiae, I, 167) – During the naval battle in 540 BC the fleet of Etruria and Carthage beat Greeks (phocidians) and Greek captives were stoned by the habitants of Caere.

⁸ Brendel, O. J. Etruscan art, ed. E. H. Richardson, Harmondsworth, 1985, 417. fig. 316 von Vacavo, O. W., Die Etrusker in Der Welt Der Antike, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982, 148-149.

3. Religion

Etruscans were considered to be the most religious people⁹ ever since the outset of antiquity.

We have studied this part of their life before.¹⁰

According to antique historical sources and the new archeological material, modern scholars had an opportunity to consider various spheres of religion and cult in Etruria.

In the present paper, we shall dwell our attention solely on those moments of Etruscan religious life that are mentioned by Virgil.

1) Divination

When Virgil enumerates Etruscan leaders who supported Aeneas, he mentions Azyx, a fortune teller.

"hominum divumque interpres...
cur pecudum fibrae, caeli, cui sidera parent
et linguae volucrum et praesagi, fulminis ignes" (X, 175-178)

Virgil speaks about all directions of Etruscan prediction: forecast of human fate, prophesy according to stars, lightnings and forecast based on observation of entrails of the sacrificed animal.¹¹

It's not occasional that Virgil pays a special attention to this sphere of Etruscans' spiritual life.

In Rome, Etruscans had always had a reputation of reliable predictors. Cicero writes that Etruria was well-known for an excellent interpretation of divine signs and miracles from ancient times. This prompted Senate to have ten boys from Etruscan noble families get skilled in this art (De divin, I, 92).

This way the institution of erudite predictors was formed, which had a special honour in Roman society. After Virgil, the state continued to depend on this institution. Tacitus narrates that once Claudius himself made a report about the importance of preserving Etruscan institution (Annales, X, 15).

It's also important to remember that as it was known, an emperor Claudius was the author of the work *Tyrrhenika* written in Greek – which consisted of 20 book and was dedicated to various aspects of Etruscan predicting art.

In Rome the whole doctrine of Etruscans was called *Etrusca disciplina*.

⁹ Liv., Hist., V, 16.

¹⁰ See კობახიძე, ე. ეტრუსკული საკულტო გერმინოლოგია, 1994, ლოგოსი.

¹¹ MacBain, Prodigy and Expiation a Study in Religion and Politics in Republic of Rome, Bruxelles, 1982. 60.

Modern scholars refer to antique sources (Servius, ad Aeneidas, IV, 166, Titi Livii, ab urbe cond., V, 15, Plinius, nat. hist., II XI, Amobius, ad vers. nat., III,40; Cicero, har. resp., 18) while supposing that the doctrine consisted of the following volumes: libri fulgurales -prophesy according to lightnings. libri haruspicini – prophesy according to entrails, libri fatalis – prediction of human fate, libri acherontici – a book about the other world, ostentaria – interpretation of divine signs and miracles.

Virgil in *Aeneid* does not mention Etruscan gods. Etruscan Arruns prays before a battle, but he appeals to Apollo of Soractis (a mountain near a Rome, where there was an ancient sacred place):

"Arruns sic voce precatur:

Summe deum, sancti custos Soractis (XI, 784-785).

Virgil mentions the god of the river Thybris, from whom Aeneas got a prophesy (VIII, 31-66). Thybris, according to *Aeneid* a tyrrhenian river (an Etruscan god of the river). Thybris married Manto, daughter of Tiresias and had a son Ocnus, who was considered to be the founder of the city Mantua (X, 198-201).

The name of god Thybris is not familiar to the Etruscan religion, but there is a name of another god Mantus preserved, who gave a name to the city of Mantua.¹²

The version of Virgil about the city Mantua is based on the passage of Servius (ad Aen, X, 19). (It must be noted that Servius offered another version – Mantua is founded by Tarchon).

4. Lifestyle

In *Aeneid* there are some details describing Etruscan lifestyle.

Adress, shoes

It's significant that Etruscans were well known in antique world as a people who love luxury. The format of our paper does not allow us to discuss the basic tendencies of Etruscan fashion, which is clearly presented in the wall-painting.¹³

Virgil mentions the dress of Romans and Etruscans, especially togas (VIII, 458), but once he writes about "Tyrrhene plantis" – Tyrrhenian sandals with straps. These were the shoes that old Evandros wore:

"Tyrrhena pedum circumdat vincula plantis" (VIII, 212)¹⁴

¹² Schulze, W., Zur Geschichte der lateinischen Eigennamen. Berlin, Zurich, Dublin, 1966, 274.

¹³ Camporeale, G., Gli Etruschi, Utet, 2000, 184-186 Abbigliamento e calzature.

¹⁴ Bonfante L., Etruscan Dress, Johan Hopkins Univ.-Press, Baltimore and London, 31; 59.

Sandals, as it is known from the archeological material, became popular in Etruria only from VI BC as a result of Greek and Oriental influence. Before sandals were introduced, Etruscans used to wear curved-nosed high boots – calcei repandi

Etruscans had modified the sandals – they had covered the wooden soles of the shoes with bronze, they divided laces of sandals into two parts and made them gold-brocaded. This modification of Etruscans became very popular and got the name of Tyrrhenian sandals. This kind of sandals according to scholars, are worn by the statue of Athene made by Phidia¹⁵

The popularity of the Etruscan sandals is confirmed by Virgil – Tyrrhenian sandals is worn by Ausonian Evandros.

In another passage of the poem, Venus gave the sign to Aeneas with the lightning and thunder. The sound of the thunder, as Virgil mentions, shook the sky like a tyrrhenian horn:

"Namque improviso vibratus ab aethera fulgor
cum sonitu venit et ruere omnia visa repente
Tyrrhenusque tubae mugire per aethera clangor" (VIII, 524-526).

It must be said that Tyrrhenian horn is well-known in Greek literature (Aeschylus, *Eumen.* 567 sgg; Sophocles, *Ajax*, 17; Euripides, *Fen.* 1377 sgg and others).

Tyrrhenian sandals, which were brought into Greece from Etruria, had military and religious functions.

There were of two different types: short, bow-shaped and long, rectilinear, arched at the end.¹⁶

5. Personal qualities of Etruscans

According to *Aeneid*, during the war against Rutuls, Evandros, proposed and introduced to Aeneas in a new ally – Etruscans – people, who came to Italy from Lydia and are famous by their exceptional military qualities "gens, bello praeclara" (VIII, 480).

This opinion about Etruscans is repeated by Virgil to characterize not only the whole people ("expertos belli iuvenes" – X, 173), but also a single character: Tarchon, Azyll, Orynthos and Mezentius.

It's evident, that the ally of Aeneas had to be distinguished, first of all, by their martial qualities. Virgil always maintains accuracy of a scholar – all his assertions are based on historical sources:

¹⁵ Cristofani, 186.

¹⁶ Pallotino, M., *Etruscologia*, Milano 1984, 353. Keller, W., *La civiltà etrusca*, Garzanti 1985, 387.

"Etrusci bellicosimi et gens magna fuit (Ad Georg. II 533); "Sane notum est bello multum potuisse Tyrrhenos" (Serv. in Aen., VII, 426).

Livy wrote about the glorious past of Etruscans: "Quamquam tanta opibus Etruria erat ut iam non terras solum sed mare etiam per totam Italiae longitudinem ab Alpibus ad fretum Siculum fama nominis sui implesset" (Liv, I, 2, 5).

"In Tuscorum iure paene omnis Italia fuerat" (Serv., in Aen., XI, 567).

Another quality, that adds an honour to Etruscans is irreconcilability against tyranny – king Mezentius:

"at fessi tandem cives infanda furentem / armati circumsistunt ipsumque domumque/ obruncant socios, ignem and fastigia iactant" (VIII, 483-491).

It's also important to mention that in *Aeneid*, Etruscans are not only devoted allies to Romans, but also their worthy enemies (Mezentius).

Virgil wants to connect this fact (that Etruscans struggled against the Romans) with real facts – according to the history, relations between the towns of Etruria and Rome were not always friendly.

The nearest city of Etruria – Veii struggled against Rome for almost hundred years (482-396 B.C.) in three bloody wars. This list continues – Pyrgi, Tarquinia, Felsina, Arezzo ...

Were Etruscans and Romans allies in reality or not?

The first encounter of Romans with Etruscans took place in 504 B.C, but then they were enemies, not friends. Romans had an ally – Greeks from Cuma and they won.

In 354 B.C – Etruscans and Faliscans tried to stop the Roman victorious advance in the Appenines. In 298-290 – Etruscans together with Sannits, Sabins, Umbrians and Galls were destroyed by Romans.

It was only in 225 BC that Etruscans and Roman were allies – they defeated the Galls.

According to the material collected by us in *Aeneid*, it may be said distinctly, that all the information can be divided into two groups:

1. Materials taken from Etruscan reality (historical events, characters, toponymy etc.)

2 Material accumulated through interpretation of the myth about Aeneas (characters mythological plots). Material from the second group are provided by Virgil on the basis of existing historical facts mentioned by other authors of antiquity.

New plots are composed by means of generalization of concrete historical facts, and a new character is connected with a concrete mythological or historical prototype.

There are some cases when Virgil changes historical facts, ignores them or tries to "correct" them by mythological plots.

These corrections made to the history of Etruscan and Roman relations, in most cases, are based on the instructions of the customer – emperor Augustus or his advisor – G. Maecenas. These corrections were consistent with their political course, as it was more favorable to maintain peace and balance in the state.

In spite of the above mentioned artificial interference, the poem does not lose its highly artistic qualities and purity.

The information about Etruscans and their culture affirms great importance and influence of Etruscans and points to various aspects of their culture which had a strong impact not only upon Roman, but also upon all the contemporary antique civilizations.