

## Being Etruscan in Latin: Epitaphs from the Rafi Family Tomb at Perugia

The value of Romanization as an interpretive model for understanding cultural change in the Roman world has in recent years come under increasing scrutiny (for a brief summary, see Laurence 2012, 59-73). Despite its evident limitations, a unilateral Romanization model is still commonly used in recent historical studies of cultural changes in Etruria (Jolivet 2013; Ceccarelli 2016). A number of scholars cite as support for this model the Latin epitaphs found at Late Hellenistic (third to first century BCE) necropoleis in northern Etruria (Harris 1971; Adams 2003). The appearance of Latin inscriptions in the cemeteries of Etruscan cities seems to indicate that, sometime around the first century BCE, when the people of Etruria first received Roman citizenship (90 BCE), Etruscans began to abandon their native language in favor of Latin. The evidence comes predominantly from Latin inscriptions found in the cemeteries of two Etruscan cities—Chiusi and Perugia (Kaimio 1975). The cemeteries of Perugia alone have yielded over 130 Latin inscriptions, which would seem to provide abundant evidence for the Romanization of Etruria.

Some scholars, however, have questioned the validity of the Romanization model for understanding such epigraphic changes. They argue instead that, alongside the appearance of Latin epitaphs, there is evidence for the maintenance and persistence of pre-Roman, Etruscan funerary practices well into the first century BCE and beyond (Kaimio 1975; Benelli 2001; Huntsman 2015). In this paper, I extend their approach by developing it along two complementary lines. First, those who use the appearance of Latin in the epigraphic record to support the Romanization model tend to assume that the linguistic shift was gradual and linear: over time epitaphs became increasingly Roman in character, until Etruscan features no longer existed. In fact, these Latin epitaphs preserve a high number of Etruscan epigraphic and

onomastic features. For example, my research indicates that more than half of Latin epitaphs in Perugia (perhaps as much as 75 percent) bear demonstrably Etruscan onomastic elements. Secondly, most scholars focus on the bare texts of the inscriptions, in isolation from their material contexts. A close examination of these contexts, however, reveals a much more complex cultural situation. In Perugia, for example, the cinerary urns with Latin epitaphs are nearly identical in form, material, and decoration to those that bear Etruscan inscriptions. In order to make my argument brief and focused, I use the Rafi family tomb—a large chamber tomb discovered near Perugia in 1887—as a case study for my presentation.

A reconsideration of the epigraphic and archaeological evidence undermines traditional arguments for a linear and unilateral ‘Romanization’ of Perugia, and Etruria in general. Contrary to traditional historical interpretations, I maintain that the Latin epitaphs of Perugia and their archaeological contexts reveal a complex discourse between the people of Perugia and Rome: within their family tombs the people of Perugia used their urns and epitaphs to construct, negotiate, and maintain both Etruscan and Roman identities in the midst of the crucial socio-political changes occurring in first century BCE Italy.

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