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Sinclair Bell, Alexandra A. Carpino (ed.), *A Companion to the Etruscans. Blackwell companions to the ancient world.* Oxford; Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. Pp. 528. ISBN 9781118352748. \$195.00.

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[Preview](#)

[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

This volume is an important contribution to the growing number of publications and exhibitions in Etruscan art and archaeology in recent years. In the case of the former, the trend has been marked by a collection of essays on different aspects of Etruscan culture by a large number of contributors gathered in a single volume. I am here specifically referring to Jean MacIntosh Turfa's (ed.) *The Etruscan World* and, most recently, to the leading publication by Alessandro Naso's (ed.) *Etruscology*.¹ In this context, the book edited by Sinclair Bell and Alexandra Carpino is not different than the others, but it stands out in that its purpose is not to provide a comprehensive picture of the Etruscans. Instead, this volume offers fresh perspectives and up-to-date insights that scholars and graduate students in the field will certainly appreciate.

Among its many outstanding contributions (28 authors over 30 essays), a few points deserve particular attention. First, it reassesses and evaluates traditional topics like funerary and domestic architecture, tomb painting, ceramics, and sculpture, as well as new ones such as textile archaeology. Second, some papers offer new perspectives on topics that still need further investigation, such as the social function of jewellery and the misconceptions behind the Greek and Roman views on the Etruscans. Third, it presents substantial and innovative theoretical discussions on, for example, the material culture of rituals (Corinna Riva), the reception of Greek ponderation – the distribution of the body weight for standing statues– (Francesco De Angelis), and the uses of violent images in Etruria (Alexandra Carpino).

The volume is divided into five parts followed by an Appendix that reviews the Etruscan art displayed in North American museums, and an Index. Like other similar publications of collected studies on a broad subject, the variety of topics discussed in each part is not always clearly organised. For example, Part III: "Evidence in Context" starts with a discussion of Etruscan skeletal biology. Then it moves to language, followed by five chapters discussing different aspects of material culture, and three chapters discussing literary sources. A division of Part III into sub-areas would have made the section clearer to the reader. Some of the essays are not original. Margarita Gleba and Stephan Steingraber, for example, present updated versions of essays already published in similar editions. ² Furthermore, the informed reader would have expected a more original approach—rather than condensed summaries—of familiar topics in the field such as language and myths. Thematic overlaps are also present: Gunter's discussion in Part IV does not really add much to Camporeale's in Part II, for instance. Cross-references by the contributors to other chapters in the book are frequent, inviting a reader to explore the volume further.

In Part I (History), Simon Stoddart examines the sociopolitical transformations that shaped the Etruscans' identity from the Bronze Age and into the first Iron Age. Skylar Nail then expands further on the expression and negotiation of Etruscan identity up to the end of the Classical Period. This chapter essay is followed by Letizia Ceccarelli's discussion on some Roman strategies adopted during the Romanization of Etruria such as road infrastructure, the establishment of colonies, and the creation of alliances with the ruling Etruscan elite which conveyed linguistic, religious, and iconographic changes.

Part II (Geography, Urbanization, and Space) centres on the significant aspects of Etruscan material culture, identity, and their prominence in Central Italy and the Mediterranean. In Chapters 4 and 5, Stoddart discusses the key landscape features of Tyrrhenian central Italy and the relationship between rural and urban landscapes from the Orientalising period onward. Giovannangelo Camporeale examines the sources of evidence to show how maritime trade contributed to significant cultural changes and how the Etruscans' wealth was inexorably linked to the sea. Next, an illuminating study by C. Riva reconsiders the evidence for rituals—sometimes interpreted as foundation rites—that occurred during the early phases of Etruscan urbanism. She concludes that the later Roman sources often used as evidence are more informative about the foundation of Roman, rather than Etruscan, colonies. Other essays provide updated synopses of particular sites, such as Poggio Civitate (Anthony Tuck) and current excavations (Claudio Bizzarri). The final chapters of this section (10, 11, and 12) cover aspects of the Etruscans' domestic (Bizzarri and David Soren), funerary (S. Steingraber), and sacred spaces (Gregory Warden). Among them, Steingraber's call for the necessity of a comprehensive handbook of all Etruscan cemeteries, tombs and tomb architecture, is worthy of special consideration.

Part III (Evidence in Context) opens the discussion with two chapters on the long-standing question of the Etruscans' origins, followed by five papers that examine diverse art forms in context. Three final chapters reconsider the ancient literary sources that mention the Etruscans. Marshall Becker demonstrates that, given the genetic diversity of their population and the lack of high-quality skeletal material, modern DNA studies are unreliable sources for a precise answer to this question. A different sort of evidence is discussed by Rex Wallace in his analysis of the Etruscans' language, alphabet and linguistic affiliation. While philological analysis shows that Etruscan, Lemnian and Raetic (a language spoken in the sub-Alpine regions of eastern Italy) belong to the same family of languages, it does not provide an answer to the question of the Etruscans' origins. Different art forms are discussed by Philip Perkins (bucchero), Lisa Pieraccini (wall painting), Helen Nagy (votives), and Alexis Castor (jewellery). Gleba's on textiles, a subject introduced by the author in other recent compendia, deserves particular attention because it is a relatively new field in Etruscan archaeology. ³ After discussing some data generated by new scientific methods to understand the extant textiles' chronology and provenance better, Gleba focuses on the different contexts of textile production and the information they give us about Etruscan women's contributions to ancient economy. The papers that examine the ancient literary sources in this volume stand as significant contributions to Etruscan studies on account of their originality and rewarding conclusions. In Chapter 20, Hilary Becker distinguishes two common topoi in many Greek and Roman authors who wrote about the Etruscans: wealth and decadence. She argues that constructions of the Etruscans based on these authors' portrayals were deliberate distortions designed to emphasise not Etruscan, but Greco-Roman real life. Next, Gretchen Meyers discusses the literary sources that mention the famous Etruscan queen Tanaquil, considering both her Etruscan and Roman identities, as well as Etruscan women's actual role in the production of ceremonial textiles. Finally, in Chapter 22, Jean MacIntosh Turfa reconsiders some of the literary conventions behind the *obesus etruscus*. By comparison to

archaeological and artistic evidence, she concludes that these later portrayals of the Etruscans do not, in fact, reflect the majority of the members of its society.

Part IV (Art, Society, and Culture) includes papers on some well-known subjects in Etruscan art, its interaction with the Eastern Mediterranean (Ann Gunter), the active role of Etruscan artists (Jocelyn Penny Small), and the iconography of myth (Ingrid Krauskopf). However, two other outstanding papers are worth mentioning here in more detail. In addressing the use of ponderation in different media and its reception in Etruria, De Angelis argues against the irreconcilable distinction between “originality and derivation” in most approaches to Etruscan art. Instead, he concludes that this particular stylistic feature was both an “immediate and sensorial” response to the reception of Greek art in Etruria. This Etruscan stylistic response is, in fact, far from being as simple or unsophisticated as traditionally considered (p. 382). Alexandra Carpino’s discusses the different uses and contexts of violent images in Etruria. She demonstrates that some Greek tragic stories were selected not because the Etruscans had a “taste” for fierce visual representations, but because these particular subjects effectively communicated particular beliefs, values, and concerns about human behaviour. She also clarifies that the instances of this type of imagery are few and mostly confined to specific contexts (i.e., religious and funerary), which is indicative of other purposes, probably in connection with the ritual needs of the dead, rather than a desire for bloody depictions.

Part V (The Etruscans’ Legacy and Contemporary Issues), centres on the theme of Etruscan studies and their reception. Ingrid Rowland highlights Annus of Viterbo’s (1437-1502) importance in the groundwork and reception of the discipline during his time. Etruscan forgeries are the subject of Chapter 29. After discussing the motivation for their production, Richard De Puma explains how some well-known falsifications have inaccurately shaped our notions on the Etruscans. Finally, Gordon Lobay discusses some of the present and past problems concerning the looting and trade of antiquities in Italy and reviews the international regulations created to prevent the illicit traffic of archaeological findings.

Overall, the volume is carefully edited, with plenty of cross-references and few typos. Greek and Latin texts are presented in translation, but Etruscan inscriptions are bilingual. A full list of references and a “Guide to Further Reading” usefully complement each chapter. There are seven high-quality inserts for coloured versions of some of the figures in the text, but the numerous black-and-white photographs are not always clear. For example, the engraved mirror on p. 96 (Fig. 7.4) is almost illegible – a drawing next to it would have been more informative. The topographic map on p. 113 (Fig. 8.4) is impractical as colours are lost in its black-and-white version; the same applies to the map on p. 68 (Fig. 6.1).

To conclude, this volume represents a significant effort to bring together new work and novel approaches on the Etruscans. Although prior knowledge of the main issues in Etruscan studies is recommended, the book’s format makes it accessible to a broad audience as well. It would be a welcome addition to any Classics and archaeology libraries and will become undoubtedly a source of inspiration for scholars and students with interest in Etruria.

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1. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (ed.), *The Etruscan World*. London; New York: Routledge, 2013. Alessandro Nasso (ed.), *Etruscology*. Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017.
2. See Gleba's and Steingräber's contributions in MacIntosh Turfa 2013.
3. Gleba, M. 2013. "The World of Etruscan Textiles", in J. MacIntosh Turfa (ed.), Ch. 42; *Ead.* 2017. "Textiles and Dress", in A. Naso (ed.), Ch. 29.

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