PREFACE

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During the spring term of 1999, the Department of Classics at The Florida State University organized and hosted a conference, the title of which was "The Religion of the Etruscans," in honor of Erika Simon, who was in that year the Langford Eminent Scholar in Classics. The Eminent Scholar's chair and the expenses of the conference were made possible by funding from the George and Marian Langford Family Endowment in Classics. The smooth running of the conference was owed to the congeniality of the participants and to the industry of several individuals: Susan Stetson, the department's office manager; Kimberley Christensen, Harry Neilson, and Sarah Stinson, graduate students in the department; and Nancy de Grummond and Leon Golden, who were the faculty coordinators of the conference.

It is difficult to imagine a more important, or more formidable, subject than Etruscan religion. Readers of this collection will not need telling that the Etruscans were without question the pivotal people of central Italy during the Archaic period or that their effect on later Italian culture, owing to their influence on Roman civilization, was considerable, if not yet quite completely sorted out to everyone's satisfaction. The religion of any society is crucial to its proper apprehension. All the more so for a nation that, as Livy put it, was "more than any other dedicated to religion, the more as they excelled in practicing it" (Livy 5.1.6; cf. Appendix B: Selected Latin and Greek Literary Sources on Etruscan Religion, Source no. 1.1). The significance of this remark is underscored by the fact that, from the perspective of the Greeks, the Romans themselves were quite exceptional in their scrupulous religiosity, a quality that Polybius deemed one of the strengths of the Roman constitution. Etruscan religion can hardly be said to be an unexplored topic, though it is far too little discussed in Anglophone scholarship, a state of affairs this collection will go a long way toward correcting. The extent to which past examinations of Etruscan religion have resulted in infallible conclusions, on the other hand, must remain an arguable matter.

The impediments to the recuperation of any alien religion are several and severe, and this must especially be so for an extinct tradition. Which means that the study of any ancient religion demands an inordinately high degree of methodological self-consciousness, a resistance to neat and easy conclusions that must be reinforced even more when the information for that tradition tends to derive from material evidence and from secondary sources scattered over a considerable period of history, which is the state of affairs that obtains for the study of Etruscan religion. Indeed, it is fair to say that the problematic nature of all literary sources for Etruscan culture constitutes the principal difficulty confronting Etruscan studies, a difficulty that is sometimes finessed by a perhaps too ready recourse to speculation or at least a recourse to speculation that is too ready to carry conviction among minds of an Anglo-Saxon bent.

The study of Roman religion can be illuminating in this regard. The Late Republic supplies an abundance of written sources—historical, philosophical, oratorical, and literary—for the religious practices and the religious mentalities of the Roman elite. Ample material exists from a variety of genres, all originating in a well-defined and reasonably well understood milieu. Yet only in the past twenty years have students of Roman religion succeeded in recognizing the Christianizing assumptions that have colored their interpretation of these sources, an important step forward. One may still insist, however, that scholars have to too large an extent tended to swap their Christian framework for an anthropological one, by which I mean the anthropology of the 1970s and not of the 1990s (or of the current decade), which is far from the same thing.[1]

Still, the current state of affairs is a healthy agnosticism or at the very least a sane confusion. To take only one instance, it would be a rash scholar these days who, after reading Beard or Schofield, claimed to know exactly what were Cicero's views on divination.[2] Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that we must be more careful in our atten-

tion to the plurality of voices that speak to us from the past, not least because, even on fundamental issues such as augural law, Romans of the elite classes held strongly conflicting opinions, none of which can legitimately or meaningfully be discarded as "wrong."[3] In sum, the recuperation of Roman religiosity in the Late Republic, a period of extraordinarily rich documentation, remains elusive and challenging, to say the very least. How much harder, then, is the recuperation of Etruscan religion.

And how suggestive, though inconclusive, are our sources! Let me avoid becoming bogged down in distinguishing Etruscan from Hellenic patterns of worship and of religious representation and turn directly to Etruscan divination. Though we enjoy an abundance of references to the *Etrusca disciplina** and its practitioners, whom the Romans called *haruspices,** we are confronted by difficulties at every turn. In the middle of the second century, the elder Cato wondered how a *haruspex* could pass a colleague on the street without giving him a wink (Cicero, *De div.* 2.52). At about the same time, Ti. Gracchus, the consul of 177, spurned the instructions of the *haruspices* by sneering, "Who are you Etruscan barbarians to know the Roman constitution?" (Cicero, *ND* 2.11). Yet these events transpired, if Cicero is honest in recounting them, at the very time when Polybius was informing the Greek world of the Romans' punctiliousness in all matters religious, an attitude he described as their "fear of the gods." The apparent contrast matters.

By the end of the century, however, the consultation of Etruscan *haruspices* had been assimilated to the mechanisms of civic religion: the Senate could consult the *haruspices* through the mediation of the *Decimviri* (later the *Quindecimviri*) *sacris faciundis,* the college that also consulted the foreign Sibylline books. In this regard, Etruscan religion was treated by the Romans little differently from Greek religion, which, as Denis Feeney has made clear, the Romans appropriated sometimes without comment and without historical memory but sometimes through "elaborate and self-conscious mechanisms for preserving a sense of distance and difference from the Greek element in their religious life."[4] Indeed, it was by carefully maintaining Greek, and Etruscan, religion as simultaneously integral and marginal that the Romans made it *Roman,* all of which highlights an approach to religion that must render all Roman practices, and all Roman references to Etruscan religion, an interpretive challenge of the highest order.

Inscriptions are hardly more straightforward. Though we possess an inventory of Tarquinian *haruspices,* it is by no means clear that we have to do with anything more than a local organization, despite the more powerful claims that have been made for this information. We do not even know if there was a formal *ordo* during Cicero's day.[5] The orator's serious attempt to interpret the most famous of all haruspical responses in the speech *De haruspicum responso* tells us next to nothing about its authors. Nor does Cicero denigrate the importance of the *responsum* itself, the proper interpretation of which was deemed by the whole of the Roman elite to be a matter of vital concern. Indeed, Cicero's enemy, Clodius Pulcher, was endeavoring to exploit this *responsum* so as to overturn nothing less than a previous decision of the pontifical college and a decree of the Senate pertaining to (Roman) religion, strong evidence of the value placed by the Roman elite in the *Etrusca disciplina*.[6] No surprise, then, that Late Republican antiquarians, some with Etruscan credentials, endeavored to provide accounts of Etruscan religion. Let us hope they were more successful than Varro in avoiding the Hellenizing and philosophical influences that permeated the intellectual life of the time.

The status of the *haruspices,* high in the first century BCE, continued to rise. The emperor Claudius established a formal *collegium,* which he removed to the supervision of the pontiffs. As is well known, it was also the opinion of his attending *haruspices,* whether members of a state *collegium* or not we cannot say, that inspired Diocletian's distaste and distrust for Christianity. Even the *haruspices,* however, could not withstand the grey-eyed Galilean: Constantine crushed Maxentius despite their advice, and, the support of Julian notwithstanding, the *disciplina* was outlawed at the end of the fourth century by Theodosius. Even the Christians were impressed: Arnobius, in an expression that does his Latin little credit, described Etruria as *genetrix et mater superstitionum* (*Adv. nat.* 7.26; Appendix B, Source no. 1.2). Much, then, can be said about the *haruspices,* and much else about Etruscan religious practices circulating in Roman writings. But the provenance of this material ought at least to give one pause, and the dangers of selecting information from various periods of Roman history ought to be too evident to require comment.

All of which is to say that the contributors to this volume were faced with a task as daunting as it is important. I think it is fair to say, however, that their efforts show a good measure of success. Whatever the weaknesses of modern times, we are, thankfully, no longer at the mercy of the shapes and the patterns of entrails. "Diligence is the mother of good fortune," as Cervantes put it, and, in the absence of a visitation by Vegoia (cf. Source no. 11.1), diligence and good fortune must remain essential elements in the endeavor to recover the nature of the Etruscans' beliefs and practices.

NOTES

1. A brief selection of recent and fundamental work (with further literature): Beard 1994; Beard, North, and Price 1998; Liebeschuetz, 1979; Linderski 1997; North 2000; Price 1984.
2. Beard 1986; Schofield, 1986, 47–65.
3. Tatum 1999b.
4. Feeney 1998, 26.
5. Rawson 1991, 302–303.
6. Discussion of this episode: Tatum 1999a, 215–219.

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