An inscribed bucchero aryallos

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The bucchero aryallos (fig. 1) treated in this note bears a well-known retrograde Etruscan inscription:

mt larthaia telicles lechtumusa (I am the little lekythos of Larthai, the daughter of Telicle)

My primary concern is with the typology and relative chronology of the vase itself, and with the light that these can shed on the seemingly mixed (Etruscan and Greek) origin of the individual who is defined epigraphically as its owner.

This interesting artefact, first published in 1930 and long thought to be lost, appeared on the New York antiquities market in 1959. It has now joined the collection of classical antiquities at New York University, where L. Bonfante has defined its shape in two brief presentations as a “squat lekythos” (“with an ovoid body”) of the 6th c. B.C. For my own part, I believe that it can safely be assigned to a date around the middle of the 7th c. As for the shape, and its name, Bonfante is undoubtedly correct to call the vase a “lekythos”, though in the perhaps slightly misleading sense that the vase is a deliberately-achieved bucchero version of an Early Proto-corinthian (hereafter EPC) shape that a Corinthian would have regarded as a lekythos. This very word is inscribed in the Corinthian alphabet on Titaie’s famous aryallos, exported from Corinth to Campanian Kythrem, but, for reasons that have been helpfully rehearsed by M. Kanowski and others, it is now too late in practice to break with the modern convention that small Corinthian (and Corinthian-inspired) unguent vessels should be referred to as “aryballoi”.

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1 Select bibliography: M. Hammarström, "Eine archaische etruskische Vasenanschrift," StEtr 4 (1930) 261-66 (editio princeps); C. de Simone, Die griechischen Entleihungen im Etruskischen I (Wiesbaden 1968) 89; id. in ANRW 1,2 (1972) 506-9; TLE 2 no. 761; G. Colonna, MEFRA 82 (1970) 649-50, n.4; 651, n.3: 654-55, fig. 7 (fig. 15); id. in ArchCI 25-26 (1973-74) 143-44; L. Agostiniani, Le iscrizioni parziali dell’Italia antica (Florence 1982) 138 (no. 522), 193; ET 336 (OA 2.2); G. Bagnasco Gianni, Oggetti iscritti di epoca orientalizzante in Etruria (Florence 1996) 315 (no. 313); ms., in Dall’Indo a Thria: i Greci, i Romani, gli altri (Labriani 24, Trento 1996) 310-12; S. Marchesini, Studi eonastmatici e siconloinguistici sull’Etruria arcaica. il caso di Caere (Florence 1997) 36-37 (no. 42), 130-31, 163-64; G. and L. Bonfante, The Etruscan Language an introduction (2nd edn., Manchester 2002) 138-40 (Source 11).

2 This is in effect the translation proposed by Hammarström (supra n.1) 266 and accepted by S. P. Cortese, Glotta 23 (1935) 150; so too G. and L. Bonfante (supra n.1) 138 and L. Bonfante 2004 (infra n.3, both works). Although the individual concerned has in the past been regarded as male by some authorities (possibly by the present writer: CAH2 IV [1988] 664), a female identity is now generally agreed: on the distinction between Larth (m.) and Larthai (f.), see C. de Simone, I Timeni a Lemnos (Florence 1955) 1; Marchesini (supra n.1) 130-31.


4 See, e.g., the following items all cited supra n.1: de Simone 1968 and 1972 (second half of 7th c.); Colonna 1970, 654-55, fig. 7 (fig. 15: "660-690 a.C."); id., 1973 74, 143 ("metà VII sec."). Note too that Colonna had previously (infra n.9) proposed a slightly earlier date, not later than 675); Bagnasco Gianni, Oggietti 115-18 ("prima metà" or "metà" del VII sec. a.C."). Agostiniani 138 and Marchesini 36 suggest "650-625 a.C.".

5 L. J. Jeffrey, Local scripts of Archaic Greece (2nd edn., Oxford 1996) 240 (no. 3), 454 with pl. 47; A. Bartone and G. Buchner, Die Sprache 37 (1995) 199-200, no. C1. Three of the other four aryallos: attributed to the same hand as Titaie’s aryallos by C. W. Neef (Proto-corinthian Subgeometric aryallos [Amsterdam 1987] 106-7, list III) come from Motya, Pethkoussai, and Tarquimna — which suggests that Corinthian terminology might well have been known in Italy by the 7th c. Titaie was most probably Etruscan or Italic. M. Frederiksen in D. and F. R. Ridgway (edd.), Italy before the Romans (London 1979) 296, so too Colonna in Le céramique grecque ou de tradition grecque au VIIIe siècle en Italie centrale et méridionale (Naples 1982) 189-99.

6 M. G. Kanowski, Containers of Classical Greece (St Lucia 1984) 27-29 and the ancient and modern references there cited.