

The Etrusco-Libyan Elements in the Song of the Arval Brethren.

By D. G. Brinton, M.D., LL.D.

(Read before the American Philosophical Society, November 4, 1892.)

In two communications to the American Philosophical Society, published respectively in 1889 and 1890, I offered a series of considerations which led me to believe that there existed an affinity, or ethnic relationship, between the ancient Etruscans and the Libyans, or Berber tribes, of North Africa.* In the present paper I would supplement what I there said by a brief study of the Etrusco-Libyan elements in one of the oldest literary monuments of Roman antiquity—the Song of the Arval Brethren.

These *Fratres Arvales* were a priestly sodality, which, according to tradition, dated back to the foundation of Rome, Romulus himself having been one of the twelve members of which the sacred college was composed. Their function was to perform certain acts of worship at a festival in the month of May in honor of “the divine goddess” *Dea Dia*, whose proper name is nowhere mentioned. The object of the festival was propitiatory to the divinities of agriculture, that the fields might yield bounteous harvests; whence the brotherhood derived its name—*ut ferunt fruges arva*. The rites consisted of sacrifices, processions, and, at a certain stage of the proceedings, of the repetition of a very ancient song, the words of which, as being too archaic for the members, were in the time of the Empire written down in small books, which the Brethren held in their hands as they chanted.

Although classical authors scarcely mention the Arval Brethren, we have very minute accounts of their rites, for it was their laudable custom at the close of each annual festival to inscribe the fact of the celebration with its date and some other particulars on a slab of stone. Nearly one hundred of these memorials have been discovered from time to time, and on one of the tablets, exhumed in 1778, recording the annual festival in May, A.D. 218, the Brethren had the happy idea to cause the song itself to be inscribed. They apparently gave the “copy” to the local stonecutter, and did not stay to read the proof, for he has made several palpable blunders, such as spelling the same word differently in different

* “The Ethnologic Affinities of the Ancient Etruscans,” *Proc. Amer. Phil. Soc.*, Vol. xxvi; “On Etruscan and Libyan Names,” *ibid.*, Vol. xxviii.

lines; but, as each line is repeated three times, we have a strong check on his vagaries. All critics agree, however, as to its value as a monument of antiquity, and one of its most recent editors does not go too far when he calls it "by far the most venerable specimen of Latin which we possess."*

Its interpretation has tasked the ingenuity of the learned; but, before I proceed to that, I will recall some facts about the origin of this priestly sodality. It was distinctly and wholly Etruscan, and was traditionally connected with the woman, Acca Larentia, and her Etruscan husband, Tarrutius. There are many stories told about Acca, and there are, according to some, a false and a true Acca; but those well acquainted with the kaleidoscope of mythology will find no difficulty in reconciling the beautiful and notorious Acca who was chosen, along with a plenteous board and a skin of old wine, to make merry the night with Hercules; the lascivious Acca, whom shepherds called *Lupa*, for she was as "salt as wolves in pride;" with the Acca who ruled the Lares, guardian spirits of the virtuous household, as her by-name *Larentia* indicates. As for her forename, *Acca*, *Axca*, it occurs in Etruscan inscriptions, though its form has been doubted by some good scholars.

The story—or one of the stories, and the most consistent—ran that Hercules, after his joyous rendezvous, gave her the extremely sane and modern advice to marry the first rich man she could capture. This proved to be the worthy Tarrutius, by whom she achieved the noble maternity of twelve sons, all of whom grew to manhood; and the position in the envied fraternity of the first who died was promptly taken by Romulus, who had already made a name for himself by plowing his furrow around the Palatine Hill, and declaring himself master of the situation. Acca survived her husband, inherited all his property, as the Etruscan custom was, and left it all by will to the Roman people, while her sons, along with Romulus, constituted themselves a holy brotherhood, pledged to call upon the ancient gods of their mother's religion once every year, in the springtime, to bless the fields, and send plenteous returns for the farmer's toil.

Such were the Arval Brethren; and in the pleasant Maytime of each year they met and fared forth from Rome along the Via Campana for five miles, when they reached the grove and temple

* F. D. Allen, *Remnants of Early Latin*, p. 66.

of the Dea Dia. There they spent three days—a charming escapade, no doubt, from city life—slaughtering a white heifer, also some specially fed young pigs, *porcilia piaculares*, and not forgotten by neighboring farmers with delicate spring vegetables, as we may gather from the records. Then came the antique song and solemn dance in the temple of the Goddess, the Brethren clad in quaint traditional garb, and crowned with wreaths of leaves and early wheat.

We may well suppose that with this history and these customs we should look among the Arval Brethren for true folklore, for the preservation of some of the ancient names and ideas of the Etruscan religion, in a day when they had quite passed out of the ken of the current worship and mythology of Rome. The place to look for it, of course, is in their Song, and I think we find it there with a plainness that cannot be mistaken, and yet which none of the commentators and critics has heretofore brought out, or even referred to.

The accurate text of that Song is subjoined. In giving it, I choose, in cases of discrepancy, where the majority of the sculptor's readings—that is, two out of three—are the same.

THE SONG.

ENOS LASES IVVATE

ENOS LASES IVVATE

ENOS LASES IVVATE

NEVE LVERVE MARMAR SINS INCVRRERE IN PLEORES

NEVE LVERVE MARMAR SINS INCVRRERE IN PLEORES

NEVE LVERVE MARMAR SINS INCVRRERE IN PLEORES

SATVR FVFERE MARS LIMEN SALI STA BERBER

SATVR FVFERE MARS LIMEN SALI STA BERBER

SATVR FVFERE MARS LIMEN SALI STA BERBER

SEMVNIS ALTERNEI ADVOCAPIT CONCTOS

SEMVNIS ALTERNEI ADVOCAPIT CONCTOS

SEMVNIS ALTERNEI ADVOCAPIT CONCTOS

ENOS MARMOR IVVATO

ENOS MARMOR IVVATO

ENOS MARMOR IVVATO

TRIVMPE TRIVMPE TRIVMPE TRIVMPE TRIVMPE

The translation of the first line offers no particular difficulty, as the initial *E* is prothetic and strengthening, and there are plenty of examples where *s* is preserved between two vowels for later *r*. Nor about line second is their serious controversy. The compound *iverve* may fairly be *luem ruem* (*ruinam*), and we may render :

“Help us, O Lares ;

And, O Marmar, let not blight nor ruin fall upon the flowers.”

Or, perhaps, instead of *pleores* = *flores*, we may take it *pleores* = *piures*, and translate “upon the multitude,” though this has less pertinence.

But the third line is where the commentators have broken down. The latest authority within my reach, Prof. Allen, of Yale College, gives it up as hopeless, and leaves it untranslated. Mommsen proposes that it shall be split in two, one half an appeal to the gods, *Satur esto, fere mars* ! “Be satiate, fierce Mars,” and the other half to the individual brethren, *In limen insili ! Sta ! Verbera* (*limen*) !

This is terribly strained. Mars was not a fierce deity, nor god of war to the Etruscan, but of peace, of agriculture, and of the springtime. He was guardian of the husbandman, not of the warrior. The word *Berber* is repeated three times, without any variation, and is plainly a reduplicated proper name, like *Marmar* in the previous line, to which it bears a distinct rhythmical relation. The stonecutter would not have made the same error three times over in such a common word as *verbera*, if that had been his copy. For these reasons, and others which he himself advances, and which, being of a purely scholastic character, I need not quote, the distinguished linguist of the Collège de France, Prof. Michel Bréal, proposes the reading :

“Sata tutere, Mars ; clemens satis esto, Berber.”

He is convinced that we must accept the last word as *Berber*, but as to its significance he is at a loss, and suggests that it may be “une variante de Marmar.”

This suggestion has not been admitted even by those who accept his reading. They have presented various guesses ; none near the mark, if we may judge by their reception.* But suppose, along

* See Ch. Schæbel, in *Actes de la Société Philologique*, Tome xiv, p. 200 sq.

with Lases, Marmar and Mars, it is a more or less Latinized form of a pure Etruscan word, what could we make of it?

The first difficulty is that the Etruscan probably had no *b*, in which they resembled many of the modern Berber dialects, where it is also lacking. There was some intermediate labial in Etruscan which the Romans rendered by either *f*, or *v*, or *b*. Probably it was close to the Greek digamma, *ϕ*. Did the Etruscans have a god *ϕer*, or *Ver*? Undoubtedly. That was the exact name of the deity whom Varro calls *Deus Etruriæ princeps*, "chief of all the gods of Etruria." The Latin writers give his full name as *Vertumnus*; but that the last two syllables do not belong to the name, but constitute an appellative suffix, the analogy of the Etruscan words *Vol-tumna*, *Luxumna*, and many others, has long since convinced Etruscologists.*

The functions of this god *ϕer* were most appropriate to the rites of the Arval Brethren. The gardens of the spring, the harvests of the summer, but especially the maturing grain and fruit of the autumn, were his special care. Thus he came to be a chief god, one who looked after home life and works. He was the culture-hero of the Etruscans, analogous to such figures as Michabo and Viracocha in native American mythology.

But here a striking identity meets us. Among the Libyans of Northern Africa this same divinity, with the same attributes and the same name, appears to meet us. Their chief god was also *Ber* (*Fer*, *Ver*); he was their protector and mythical ancestor; from him they claimed their name, *Berbers*, *Brebres*, etc.; and to this day the secluded tribes of the Sahara point to sacred spots where their famed progenitor and teacher was buried.†

It would be an easy error to suppose that *Ver* was the Latin word for spring from the Greek, and that in the Pantheon *Ver* was the personation of the season of spring; but this was not the case. The *Vertumnalia* were in the fall of the year, in the month of October, and were never supposed to have reference to any such

* See Deecke, note to Müller, *Die Etrusker*, Bd. ii, s. 51 *et al.* In some of the Latin geographers the name Berenice, that of a Libyan city, is spelled Verenice (Borsari, *Geografia della Tripolitana*, p. 191).

† "L'ancêtre commun de toutes les tribes berbères," Duveyrier, *Les Touaregs du Nord*. He is the *Iarbas* of Greek legend, son of Jupiter Ammon and a Libyan nymph, and king of the Getuli, to escape whose pressing solicitations Queen Dido plunged the sword into her own bosom. His immediate descendants are still referred to by the Touaregs as the *Iabbaren*.

impersonation. This fact brings out the antithesis in the line between the two divinities named. Marmar was the god of the early season and of the spring crops, Berber or Ver of the autumn and the late crops, and this was the reason for bringing them together in this adjuration for the fertility of the fields.

The meaning of Ber in the ancient Libyan language I have partly discussed elsewhere. It is from the biliteral root **BR**, the primitive meaning of which was "to overflow," or something equivalent to that idea. Applied to population, it was "to migrate," "to journey forth," and, as only freemen could have that privilege, it came to mean "to be free," and it was apparently in that proud significance in which it was adopted a patronymic. In its earlier sense it was and is applied to water which boils over, and in a neuter form it signifies "to be in excess," "to be abundant," and hence "to abound in," "to be fruitful in" (*foissoner*). Here we see where the meaning of *Ver* comes in, as the god of the harvest, of the fruitage and the vintage.

In the ancient Numidian epigraphy we find this name repeatedly inscribed on tombstones, usually with a similar suffix, *Vermim*, *Vermimo*, *Vermima*,* in which we easily see the biliteral Berber radical **MM**, from which are derived the terms for both mother *Imma*, and son *Emmi*. Whether the termination *-umnus*, so common in Etruscan names, and occasionally written *ummus* (*lucumno*, *lucummo*), is not this same termination may be suggested, in which case *Vertumnus* would mean "Son of Ber." And, in this connection, I must not omit to mention that precisely the reduplicated form *Marmar* is found on Numidian inscriptions two or three centuries before our era.†

Passing to the fourth line of the Song, its first word seems a stumbling block. Some think *semones* is an abbreviation of *semi-homines*, and means "demi-gods;" others would derive it from *sero*, *semen*, and take it to refer to gods of sowing, and hence agricultural; while Mommsen understands it as *se-homines*, "apart from men," applied to divinities in general. Most authorities suppose *advocapit* to be a mistake for *advocabite*; and the translation

* See Halévy, *Essai d'Epigraphie Libyque*, Inscriptions 7, 22, 23, 24, and others. The termination *mim* occurs in other inscriptions, as No. 47, *Uba-mim*; No. 152, *Ar-mima*, etc.

† As in Halévy's collection, No. 100, etc. The Libyan general conquered by Pharaoh Merenptah was named Marmariu, "Son of Marmar." The radical **MR**, in the Berber dialects, means "to be great" and "to be old," the ideas of age and power being in them, as in so many tongues, synonymous.

of the line is given, "Call ye, in turns, on all the Semones." I should prefer to consider that *semones* refers distinctively to the two gods named *Marmar* and *Berber*, and that *advocapit* is an abbreviated form of the passive future, used impersonally, while *conctos* should have its original meaning, not "all," but "conjoined," "united," referring solely to the two divinities who are appealed to in the Song. It should then be rendered, "To these united gods of the crops (*i. e.*, the one of the early, the other of the later, season) praise shall be rendered."

The last lines offer no particular difficulties, so I offer this free paraphrase of the whole Song :

THE SONG OF THE ARVAL BRETHREN.

Come to our aid, O Lares !

O Marmar ! Let nor blight nor ruin fall upon the flowers.

The sown seeds, O Marmar ! protect ; and favor the product, O Berber !

Praise shall be paid in turn to these associated gods of the crops.

Come to our aid, O Marmar !

Shout for joy ! shout for joy ! shout for joy !

The similarities which I here point out have an additional interest in the light of some recent discoveries in Egyptian archæology.

It has been generally accepted that the Tur-sha, who, about the close of the thirteenth century B.C., invaded Egypt from the West along with the Libyans, were Etruscans ; but only recently has it been shown by conclusive evidence that the Etruscans continued to live in the Western Fayoom and on the Libyan boundary of Egypt for many centuries afterwards. One part of this evidence is from Egyptian inscriptions. At Medinet Gurob, close to the Libyan boundary, Mr. Flinders Petrie exhumed the coffin of a man bearing the inscription *An-en-Tur-sha*, "A man of the Tur-sha," showing that prominent citizens of Egypt (the coffin was that of a wealthy person) were at that time recognized as of the *Tur-sha* blood.

Still more extraordinary was the discovery of an Etruscan Ritual Book in this portion of Egypt, the celebrated Agram Codex, which has lately been published by Prof. Krall, of Vienna. He considers it conclusive as to the existence of an Etruscan settlement in this part of the Egyptian dominions.*

* *Die Etruskischen Mumienbinden des Agramer National-Museums*, ss. 18, 19 (Wien, 1892). He quotes and discusses Petrie's researches at Medinet Gurob.

Such facts lead us to inquire particularly as to what we know from the oldest authors concerning the population of the territory immediately west of lower Egypt. On turning to the best and oldest authority, Herodotus, who obtained his information from members of the Greek colony at Cyrene, I was surprised to find that he locates precisely in the region referred to a tribe whose name, as he gives it, is evidently that of the Tur-sha—to wit, the *Adur-machides*.* It is possible that *machides* is a Cyrenaic Greek termination, meaning “warriors;” at any rate we have the stem *Adur* or *Atur*, which is precisely what recurs in *Etruria*. It is undoubtedly a Libyan word, from the root **DR** or **DR’R**, whence the words for mountain, *adar* or *adrar*. The *Tur-sha* were, therefore, the mountaineers, those dwelling in the range of mountains which rise to form the eastern Libyan plateau. The analogy between *adar* and *adrar* on the one hand, and *adur* and *etrur*, on the other, is very noticeable. As the Italian Etruscans made little use of the letter *d*, substituting for it the *t*, we have the very common Tuscan radical *tur* or *tar*, as in the name of the field which the mother of the Arval Brethren on dying left to Romulus, the *ager turax* or *tarux*.†

* He assigns their position as “from the borders of Egypt to Port Plynus,” and distinguishes them from the Ammonii of the Oasis of Jupiter Ammon, the modern El Giwah (*Hist.*, Book iv, cap. 168). The latter to this day speak a well-marked Berber dialect, as is proved by the short vocabulary collected by Bayle St. John.

† Both orthographies are sanctioned by Müller, *Die Etrusker*, Bd. ii, s. 107.



Brinton, Daniel G. 1892. "The Etrusco-Libyan Elements in the Song of the Arval Brethren." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for promoting useful knowledge* 30(139), 317–324.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/86372>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/212197>

Holding Institution

University of Toronto - Gerstein Science Information Centre

Sponsored by

University of Toronto

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Not provided. Contact Holding Institution to verify copyright status.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.