



THE DARK SIDE OF ETRUSCAN ‘MOON’: TIU AND TIUR*

Rex Wallace¹

¹Professor Emeritus, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Abstract

This paper investigates the Etruscan words *tiu* and *tiur* (*tiuur*), commonly associated with the lunar divinity, through an analysis of epigraphic evidence from the 6th to 1st centuries BCE. Drawing on inscriptions such as the Liver of Piacenza, votive texts, and the Liber Linteus, it reassesses their meanings and relationship. While both terms have been interpreted as referring to the moon, their usage suggests a more complex development.

The study argues that *tiur* is not a plural form of *tiu*, but a derived noun formed by means of the nominal suffix *-r(a)*, originally meaning “moon” and later shifting to “month.” In contrast, *tiu* is understood as an adjectival form meaning “associated with light,” which later became a noun denoting the moon. Rejecting theories of Latin borrowing, the paper supports an internal Etruscan origin and highlights the evolving link between language, religion, and time in Etruscan culture.

Keywords

Etruscan Language, Lunar Divinity, Epigraphy, Semantic Shift, Morphology

Introduction

The Etruscan words *tiu* (also spelled *tiv*) and *tiuur* (also spelled *tiur* and *tivr*) are understood by most Etruscologists to represent the divinity of the moon.¹ Evidence for the two forms comes primarily from a small number of inscriptions. As a result, our knowledge is limited in large part to the information that can be gleaned from these epigraphic sources.²

The Epigraphic Evidence

Tiu is attested four times in Etruscan inscriptions dating from the mid-5th century to the 1st century BCE. The most important source is an unusual epigraphic document known as the ‘Liver from Piacenza’ (*ET Pa 4.2, b1*).³ The ‘Liver’ is a life-sized replica of a sheep’s liver, which was used to train haruspices in the practice of divination. The upper surface of the model was divided into forty cells, which were filled with the names of Etruscan divinities. On the underside, the model was divided into two lobes; each lobe was incised with a theonym. The theonym *usils* ‘of Ushil’ (genitive case), the divinity of the sun, was written on the left lobe; *tivʒ* ‘of Tiu’ (genitive case), was written on the right lobe.⁴ It is reasonable to suppose that the names of these two divinities were intended to be contrasted with one another as polar opposites in terms of their divine influence. Following this analysis, *tiu* is interpreted as

* The title of this paper is a riff on the title of Pink Floyd’s classic 1973 album ‘Dark Side of the Moon’.

¹ Another theonym, *lusynei* ‘Luna’ (*ET Vs 7.42*), which was incised above the drawing of a female divinity, is, if the text is not a forgery as some suspect, a borrowing from an Italic language, possibly Umbrian. See Rix 1998: 218 for his analysis.

² The divinity *tiur* is also depicted on a mirror described in De Grummond 2021. The divinity *tiu*, on the other hand, is not depicted on Etruscan mirrors.

³ For photographs of the ‘Liver’, follow the link <https://www.ibcmultimedia.it/en/contenuti/il-fegato-etrusco-di-piacenza/>.

⁴ Some scholars read *tiur*, rather than *tius*, taking the final letter, which has a tiny loop at the top, to be *rho* rather than *sigma*. This is possible, but the letter has the shape of *sigma*, save for the loop. More important, the reading *tiur* leaves the theonym uninflected, although theonyms on the ‘Liver’ were incised in the genitive case when space permitted, cf. *usils*. For discussion of the form, see Maggiani 1982: 56, fn. 12.

the divinity of the moon, ‘Luna’, which was itself derived from the lexeme *tiu* ‘moon’, just as the theonym *uśil* ‘Sol’ was derived from the lexeme *uśil* ‘sun’.

Tiu also appears in an inscription incised on a ceramic vessel recovered from a votive deposit at the Campetti sanctuary near the Etruscan town of Veii. It is dated to the first half of the 3rd century BCE. Given the context in which it was found, *tiu* has been interpreted, convincingly so, as a theonym.⁵ The text, cited in (1), is in the form of an ‘*iscrizione parlante*’, which declares that the vessel in question is identified with an offering to the divinity *tiu*.⁶

- (1) *mi tiu* (ET Ve 0.28)
‘I (am) *Tiu*.’

On an Etruscan mirror dated to the 3rd c. BCE, *tiu* appears as a constituent in a caption for the figure of the divinity *mariś* ‘Marish’. In this caption, cited in (2), the genitive form *tius* is embedded in a determinative phrase dependent on the theonym *mariś*.⁷ The phrase *tiusta* delimits in some way the divine characteristics or attributes of *mariś*.

- (2) *mariś tiusta* (ET OI S.63)
‘*Maris* /*marif*/, the one associated with the moon (*vel sim.*)’

The oldest attestation of the word *tiur* (spelled *tiuur*) is found on an Etruscan votive inscription dating to ca. 500 BCE. The inscription, cited in (3), was incised on a small bronze plaque having the shape of a crescent moon. Although the find spot of the bronze is unknown, it is generally assumed to come from the sanctuary of *Silene* in the *Ager Clusinus*, located between Cetona and Città della Pieve, where another bronze in the shape of a crescent moon, this one anepigraphic, was recovered.⁸

- (3) *mi tiuuro kaθuniasoul* (ET Cl 4.1)⁹
‘I belong to *Tiur* (the divinity ‘Luna’) *Kathunias*.’

Given the shape of the object—a crescent moon—the word *tiuuro* is appropriately interpreted as ‘Luna’, the divinity of the moon.¹⁰ The word *kaθuniasoul* is an epithet referring to the divinity’s sphere of activity. Unfortunately, we have no way of ascertaining the epithet’s meaning.¹¹ Its constituent structure is not transparent, apart from the fact that it is an *s*-stem.

In lines 4–5 of Pyrgi Tablet B (ET Cr 4.5), which is dated to the beginning of the 5th century BCE, the sequence *tiur* | *unias* is attested. *Tiur* is at the end of line 4 and *unias* at the beginning of line 5. The sentence in question is cited below in (4).¹² If the sequence *tiur* | *unias* is treated as a word, then it is inflected in the genitive and dependent on the noun *masan*. Unfortunately, apart from the case ending, the morphological structure of the form *tiurunias* is not clear. It may be parsed as *tiur-* + *uni-* + *-ia* + *s*, and the suffix *-ia* identified as the same adjective forming suffix found in *tularias* ‘of the boundary’ (gen.), etc. In this case, the adjective functions as a substantive. Regardless, the meaning and the interpretation of *tiurunias* and of the clause in which it is embedded are uncertain.¹³

- (4) *masan . tiur | unias . ζελace* (Cr 4.5)
‘(and) he (Thefarie Veliunus) celebrated/initiated (?) the festival (?) of *tiurunia*.’ (?)

⁵ See Maras 2009: 407.

⁶ The theonym *tiu* also serves as the base for personal names (*tiuza*) and family names (*tiu*) in late Etruscan inscriptions from Clusium. See De Grummond / Maras 2021: 359, Rigobianco 2013: 62–63.

⁷ *Etruskische Texte*, following Rix, prints the determinative phrase as *tiusta* ‘the (one) of Tin(i)a’. Although an epigraphically dubious reading, it has gained some favor because of a mirror in which *Mariś* is seated next to *Tinia*.

⁸ See Benelli 2007: 217.

⁹ For the inscription and commentary, see Cristofani 1998: 16, Maras 2009: 239, and Sannibale 2018: 256–258.

¹⁰ See Benelli 2007: 217–218 for an interpretation. For a more cautious approach, compare Facchetti 2015: 160, fn. 64.

¹¹ *Kaθuniasoul* is sometimes thought to be a derivative of the theonym *caθa*, a late chronological variant of *cavaθa* and its syncopated relative *cavθa*. See, for example, the discussion in De Grummond 2004: 366, fn. 78. However, inscription (3), which dates to ca. 500 BCE, is far too early to suppose that the stem *kavaθa-* was subject to medial vowel syncope and the change of *av* to *a*. As a result, the connection between the *kaθ-* of *kaθuniasoul* and *cavaθa*, *cavθa*, *caθa* is illusory.

¹² In *ET*, the phrase covers two lines and is printed as *masan tiur | unias*.

¹³ For discussion, see Belfiore 2014: 155–156 and 2016: 124–125, and Adiego 2016: 147–148.

A recently published bronze mirror of unknown provenance, but possibly from Volsinii, and likely dated to the 4th century BCE, features a scene of three goddesses, one of whom is a winged female whose caption is *tiur*, the goddess of the moon.¹⁴

In later Etruscan inscriptions, all dating to the 3rd – 2nd centuries BCE, the meaning of the word *tiur* is ‘month’, as in the texts cited in (5), (6), and (7).

In the epitaph of Vel Vipinanas (5), which was recovered from Calcarella in the *Ager Tarquiniensis*, *tivr* is a constituent in a noun phrase specifying the age of the deceased.

- (5) *vipinanas : vel : cla*
n̄te : ultnas : la<r>θal clan
avils XX tivrs óas (ET AT 1.22)
 “Vel Vipinanas, adoptive son of Larth Ultnas, (died) at 20 years (and) four months”

In the *Liber Linteus*, *tiur* appears 9x in a clause indicating that rituals and prayers elaborated in earlier sections of the text are to be repeated annually on the same day of the same month of every year. In sentence (6), *tiuri* ‘month’ is coordinated with *tinsi* ‘day’ by means of the conjunction *-m*, and both are inflected in the locative/instrumental case (*tins-i*, *tiur-i*). In this context, the meaning ‘month’ provides the most serviceable interpretation of the passage.

- (6) *eθr̄se tinsi tiuri=m avilσ χισ (ET Liber Linteus II 3, 6; III 21–22; IV 2; V 4; VIII 1, 15; IX 3, 11)*
 “you are sanctified (?) on (this) day and in (this) month (September 26) of every year”

tiur also appears in the section I.1 of the *Aes Cortonensis* in a sentence that is difficult to assess syntactically, but most scholars agree that the word functions as a temporal adverb meaning ‘within a time-period of a month’. The passage in question is cited in (7).

- (7) *tiur ten[θ]ur=c tenθa zacinat prinšera=c zal (ET AC 6–7a)*
 “and over the course of a month the *zacinat* (an administrator?) and two *prinsher* (his assistants?) shall measure the *tenthur* (the plot of land?).”

Finally, the words *tiu* (abs.) and *tiuras* (gen.) appear on the Lead of Magliano (AV 4.1), which is dated to ca. 450 BCE. *Tiu* appears in the inscription on side a, *tiuras* on side b, but both forms are in syntactic contexts that are too opaque to be interpreted.¹⁵

The lexical relationship

Tiu and *tiur* are distinct lexemes in Etruscan, although they are morphologically and semantically related to one another. The exact nature of the relationship is the subject of debate. Competing proposals are discussed below.

One proposal is that *tiur* was in origin the plural of *tiu* and that as a plural one of its meanings was ‘phases of the moon’.¹⁶ The fact that periods of time are commonly measured by the cycle of the moon led to the reinterpretation of the plural *tiur* as ‘month’. Semantically, this reanalysis is acceptable, but it is not a satisfying solution morphologically because Etruscan does not form plurals to inanimate nouns such as *tiu*- ‘moon’ by means of the *r(a)*-suffix.¹⁷ Moreover, when inanimate nouns are modified by numerals greater than one, as is the case of the nouns *avils* ‘year’ and *tivrs* ‘month’ in inscription (4), they are not inflected in the plural, but rather stand in their inflected singular forms, e.g., *avil* + *-s* (genitive). These facts, taken together, suggest that *tiur* is not to be interpreted as the plural of *tiu*.¹⁸

A more promising approach is one that treats *tiur* as an uninflected, absolute form, derived from the stem *tiu-* by addition of a *-r(a)*-suffix, which formed denominative nouns, e.g., *tul* ‘boundary’ → *tular* ‘boundary stone/marker’, *hil* ‘limit’ → *hilar* ‘fence, wall’.¹⁹ Following this proposal, *tiur* ‘moon’ would be derived from *tiu*,

¹⁴ An interpretation of the scene is provided by De Grummond 2021: 355–56.

¹⁵ For discussion of AV 4.1, see Massarelli 2014.

¹⁶ For this idea, see Rix 1998: 219. Rigobianco 2013: 60–67 attempts to justify this analysis by reconstructing the prehistory of plural formations in Etruscan, wherein such inflection was possible with inanimate nouns.

¹⁷ For the division of Etruscan nouns into the semantic classes animate and inanimate and the inflection of each class, see Agostiniani 2013: 474.

¹⁸ Belfiore 2014: 155–156, Massarelli 2014: 78–80, and Rigobianco 2013: 60–67 discuss the problems with this proposal.

¹⁹ For the derivational suffix *-r* see Belfiore 2014: 168 and Rigobianco 2017: 197–198. For the forms *tular* and *hilar*, see Belfiore / Van Heems 2010: 115.

a form whose original meaning must have been something along the lines of ‘associated with light, shiny’.²⁰ At some point, perhaps near the end of the 5th century BCE, *tiur* underwent a semantic shift from ‘moon’, its original meaning, to ‘lunar period, month’, the meaning attested in later Etruscan inscriptions.²¹ Following this change, *tiu* also underwent a semantic change, acquiring the meaning ‘moon’. This approach to the relationship between *tiur* and *tiu*, although speculative, has several advantages. First, it makes use of an existing Etruscan word-formation process in the derivation of *tiur*. Second, it provides an explanation for the chronologically distinct meanings of *tiur* and the semantic shift from ‘moon’ to ‘month’. And finally, it accounts for the fact that *tiu* appears as the theonym for ‘Luna’ in later Etruscan inscriptions. The plausibility of this explanation is supported by the fact that the semantic changes such as those posited here are common cross-linguistically.²² Also, changes in the meaning of one word in a language’s lexicon can trigger changes in the meaning of other words, particularly if they are members of a semantically related network, as *tiu* and *tiur* surely were.

Origins

Tiu and *tiur* are, despite claims to the contrary, native Etruscan words. Rix’s idea that *tiu* was borrowed from an early Latin form **diwiyōn-* ‘the shining one’ has its adherents, but the proposal is not free of problems.²³ The fact that *tiur* is attested at the end of the 6th century presents a chronological obstacle. The change in Latin that eliminated the sound /w/ between vowels of the same quality did not take place before 500 BCE. Consequently, the hypothetical form **dīyō*, which is required as the source for Etruscan *tiu* (**diwiyōn-* > **dīyō*) did not exist in Latin at this early period.²⁴ The borrowing hypothesis also eliminates the attractive proposal of connecting *ti-*, the lexical root of *tiu*, with the root of *tins* ‘day’ and *tin(i)a* ‘the divinity Tinia’.²⁵ The words *tins* and *tinia* are nominal formations, whereas *tiu* is an adjective formation in *-iu* (*ti-* + *-iu* /ti-ju/ → *tiu* /tiu/). If the root *ti-* meant ‘light, brilliance’ in Etruscan, as is generally assumed, an appropriate meaning for *tiu*, as an adjectival derivative, would be ‘associated with light; shiny’. The meaning ‘moon’ then is a nominalization of an adjective (‘associated with light’ → ‘the one associated with light’ → ‘the moon’).

Concluding notes

In the view presented here, *tiur* is the original Etruscan word for ‘moon’. After the semantic change by which *tiur* acquired the meaning ‘lunar month’, the adjective *tiu* ‘associated with light’ was substantivized with the meaning ‘moon’. Admittedly, the scenario described here is hypothetical, but it better explains how Etruscan came to have two morphologically related but chronologically distinct words for the divinity ‘Luna’.

The fact that *tiu* and *tiur* are found in votive inscriptions (*ET* Ve 0.28, *ET* Cl 4.1) with the meaning *Luna* suggests that the lunar divinity was an object of worship, at least in the Etruscan communities in which the votives were recovered (*tiu* at Veii and *tiur* at Clusium and environs). The appearance of *tius* (genitive) on the ‘Liver of Piacenza’ is evidence of the divinity’s role in divination, although what that role might have been, cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.

In the end, despite the epigraphic evidence, much about the Etruscan divinity ‘moon’ remains shrouded in obscurity. We do not know the extent of the divinity’s worship in Etruscan communities, nor do we know much about the divine characteristics and the spheres of activity the Etruscans attributed to it. This is the dark side of Etruscan ‘moon’.

Abbreviation

ET = Meiser, *Etruskische Texte*

²⁰ See Belfiore 2014: 168.

²¹ For the derivational affix *-iu*, see Belfiore 2014: 156. However, she considers *tiu* to be a diminutive formation.

²² See Russian and Ancient Egyptian for the change of ‘moon’ to ‘month’. In Prehistoric Latin, **lowksnā* ‘bright, shiny’ developed to *lūna* ‘moon’.

²³ See Rix 1998 for the idea that *tiu* is a borrowing from an early Italic form **diwiyōn-* ‘the shining one’.

²⁴ See de Simone 2009: 230, fn. 40 for a critique of Rix’s proposal.

²⁵ See Belfiore 2014: 156 for the idea. She mentions the idea that the root **ti-* is generally connected with the Indo-European root **dyew-/div-*. However, there is no reason to see the root as a borrowing.

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