

**An answer to Dr. Szilágyi's criticism of my book on Etruscan
by Mario Alinei**

Dr. János György Szilágyi is former head and now senior researcher of the Department of Classical Antiquities of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. In 1989 he organized an important exhibition on *The World of Etruscan Art*, and he is the author of several articles on Etruscan art. As such he is certainly one of the few Hungarian scholars, if not the only one, who has a professional knowledge of the Etruscan civilization and culture. This is why I was very interested, while in Budapest for the presentation of my book, when I was told that he had criticized my book in a radio discussion. Unfortunately, I was not able to get a recording of the discussion. But my hope was aroused again when, back in Florence, I received the news that he had published a critical note on my book in the Hungarian weekly *Élet És Irodalom* ("Life and Literature").

I was, however, deeply disappointed when I read it. And I was even more disappointed when, after sending my answer to the same journal with the request to publish it, I realized, after waiting a few days in vain, that not only had they no intention to publish it, but did not even bother to justify their decision with a polite answer. Silence is usually the weapon of those who have no arguments, but can also be used abusively, by people in a position of power.

So I am reacting here to two different events: (1) the unkind, uncivil and even undemocratic behaviour of a colleague and of the editor of a journal; (2) The almost pitiful insubstantiality of my colleague's criticism.

While for the first event no further comment is necessary, as unkind, uncivil and undemocratic behaviours speak for themselves, for the second I would like to justify my word, because it does not happen often that a scientist uses the words 'pitiful insubstantiality' for the writing of a colleague.

In the first place, my colleague cannot even count the number of pages. He states that I have consecrated only 50 pages of my 500-page book to archaeology. False: the number of pages is almost 90, from p. 393 to p. 482.

In the second place, Dr. Szilágyi claims that Hugh Hencken is the only professional book I have used for my theory. False: even in the limited bibliography of my Etruscan book there are several references that contradict him. More over, in my book I have clearly explained that my Hungarian-Etruscan thesis is based on the Palaeolithic Continuity Theory, which I have illustrated in the 2000-page, two-volume book, published by Il Mulino, Bologna, in 1996 and 2000, the title of which is *Le origini delle lingue d'Europa I: La Teoria della Continuità, II: Continuità dal Mesolitico all'età del Ferro nelle principali aree etnolinguistiche europee*. Both of these volumes are based on a bibliography of more than 1000 titles on European archaeology.

In the third place, Dr. Szilágyi finds it strange that the cover of my book reproduces a non-Etruscan inscription, and that the Hungarian title of my book does not render exactly my original title. Agreed. To these remarks, in fact, I would like to add one of my own, namely that all bibliographic references in the text of my Italian book have been eliminated by the publisher, in his effort, as he has explained to me during my recent visit, to render my book more popular. These remarks, however, should be addressed to the publisher, and not to me, especially as there is no law, in any European country known to me, which obliges publishers to obtain permission from their authors for decisions on such details.

In the fourth place my critic questions some of the ideas expressed by Denés Kiss' in his *Epilogue*, added to my book by the publisher. But Denés Kiss is a renowned poet and a keen and passionate person, yet not a scientist, and he expresses himself as a poet, and not as a scientist. However, when he says that in Hungary there is no Etruscology, in my opinion he is quite right. Exhibitions and translations – even if important and praiseworthy as the ones mentioned by Dr. Szilágyi – are informative, but not formative, at least not sufficiently formative as to activate research in a permanent and systematic way. Perhaps, future developments in Hungarian science

may indeed include investments in Etruscology in this more active sense, should my theory be accepted by Hungarian academy.

The only concrete reference that Dr. Szilágyi manages to make about my theory is in his comparing it to the theory illustrated by the French professor Jules Martha in his 1913 book. But in this comparison Dr. Szilágyi does not show much philological competence: first of all, I have clearly expressed my own radically negative opinion on Martha's theory, on p. 30, 265-66 of my Hungarian translation. Secondly, Martha was a professor of history of art, and not a linguist. Thirdly, and more important, his theory was not that Etruscan is connected to Hungarian, but to Finnish, and as a consequence he made almost constant and chaotic use of Finnish and/or FU "roots" for his Etruscan comparisons, producing only fantasy-etymologies and meaningless translations. For example, while for me the two Etruscan words *zila* and *canthe*, the well-known names of the two main Etruscan political leaders are the perfect equivalent of the Turkic-Hungarian leader *gyula* (also graphically: cfr. the Etruscan rendering of *Diomedes* as *Zimite*) and of the Turkic-Hungarian leader *kende*, for Martha *zila* and *canthe* are just two common words, which he connected, respectively, to Hungarian *tele*, and to Finnish *kama-la* 'rare, surprising, scaring'. As a consequence all the inscriptions showing these two words, fundamental for our knowledge of Etruscan society, are 'translated' by Martha without any connection to what Etruscology had already ascertained about them in the 19th century. My own translation – *gyula* and *kende* – not only confirms what every Etruscologist knows, but also traces the prehistoric and geographic origin of the Etruscan 'double leadership'.

So this is all Dr. Szilágyi has to say about my book. Though my Hungarian and international readers will find it hard to believe, what this man of science calls 'criticism' amounts to these five points: (1) an unsuitable cover, (2) a (wrong) count of page numbers, (3) a false information about my sources, (4) something written by someone else, (5) a gratuitous - because without any arguments to support it - comparison with another theory.

And this is why I can confirm in earnest that Dr. Szilágyi's criticism is pitifully insubstantial.

And since I can not imagine that Dr. Szilágyi, in his even longer career (he was born in 1918, I in 1926), has not learned how to distinguish between routine scholarship and innovative scholarship, I must conclude that Dr. Szilágyi's problem is not that he doesn't appreciate my book, but rather that he cannot forgive himself for not having seen, as an expert in Etruscology, something that he might have seen himself first.

Indeed, how is it possible that a Hungarian expert in Etruscology, who must have encountered *zila* in dozen of Etruscan inscriptions, as well as in publications about Etruscan culture and society, and must know it means "'the" Etruscan leader'; hoe is it possible that he has not thought himself of the Hungarian *gyula*? And what about the Etruscan king *canthe*, so similar, in word and function, to the Hungarian *kende*? And Etrusco-Latin *maro*, so obviously similar in his function to the Etruscan-Latin *gromaticus* 'field surveyor', and so similar to Hungarian word (*fold*)*mérő* 'field surveyor'? And Etrusco-Latin *balteus* 'belt for sword', so clearly connected to the Hungarian *balta* '(battle) axe'? And Etruscan *trut-*, the equivalent word, in a bilingual text, of Latin *haruspex*, so close to Ugric **tult-* and Hungarian *táltos* 'priest-magician, shaman'? And Etruscan *cep*, recognized as an important title, identical to Old Hungarian *kép* 'image, (sacred) symbol, representation and the like'? And what to say of *uru* and *ure*, which Dr. Szilágyi must even have seen with his own eyes on a number of Etruscan vases, so similar to Hungarian *úr* 'sir', obviously the vase owner? Incomprehensible! And I could continue for scores of other fundamental Etruscan words, similar to Hungarian or Ugric.

And, worse still, which Hungarian scholar who knows everything about Etruscan vases, as Dr. Szilágyi certainly does, could have failed to see that one of the most famous Etruscan vases, the *kyathos* from Vetulonia, bears an inscription that can be read in Hungarian almost by anybody who has finished high school? *Naceme uru ithal thilen, ithal ixē me...*, that is "nekem ú[am] ital[t] *tel-en (töltsd), ital[t] így (idd) meg..."? (in me, sir, pour the drink, drink up the drink). Forgetting

(since Dr. Szilágyi is also an expert in Classical Antiquities) that there are also Latin vases that bear similar invitations to drink, usually described in classical philology as “speaking” vases? As for example a vase from Reims with the inscription *a me, dulcis amica, bibe* “from me, sweet woman-friend, drink”, or a vase from Nimwegen: *ol(l)a(m) tene bibe* “take the vase and drink”?

Possibly, having failed to recognize these and other Etruscan words as ancient forms of similar or identical words in his own language, Dr. Szilágyi has avoided the confrontation by simply ignoring the issue.

And this is why I would like to finish my answer to his criticism with a hopeful question. Could it be that Dr. Szilágyi has just not read my book yet? That he has merely leafed through it, found the cover ridiculous and the presence of an Hungarian poet who dares to criticize the Academy outrageous, and then has assumed the theory as impossible and turned thumbs down? It would be human. But not scientific. Should this be the attitude of Dr. Szilágyi, it is one which in science is called “blind prejudice” or “bias”.