

Reconstructing Etruscan Domestic Life Through Inscriptions and Dress: A Childbirth Scene and A Proposed Textile Term

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ABSTRACT

This article offers two related case studies in the reconstruction of Etruscan domestic and material culture through a Turkic-based linguistic approach. The first examines a late fourth-century BCE bronze mirror in the British Museum, conventionally interpreted as a mythological scene in which Menrva holds the infant Maris Husrnana. By applying the Azerturk Linguistic Remodeling Method to the continuous rim inscription, the study proposes an alternative segmentation that yields a congratulatory speech addressed by an experienced mother to a woman who has recently given birth, together with practical advice concerning colostrum, waking, feeding, and rest. The second case study analyzes a two-line inscription associated in the author's archive with an ornamental, looped textile border. Reading the letter sequence from right to left and restoring vowels and agglutinative boundaries produces a proposed terminology centered on kuleš/kiluš, interpreted as a decorative edging or flared garment element. Comparisons are drawn with Azerbaijani and Anatolian Turkic lexemes and, more cautiously, with Russian клѣш and French cloche. The study combines epigraphic segmentation, lexical comparison, iconographic observation, and ethnographic analogy. It does not claim that resemblance alone proves genetic relationship; rather, it presents a testable alternative reading whose strength must be assessed against object provenance, letter-by-letter autopsy, established Etruscan morphology, and competing interpretations. Together, the two cases suggest that domestic instruction, women's experience, clothing manufacture, and textile vocabulary deserve a larger place in debates about the semantic range of Etruscan inscriptions.

KEYWORDS: Etruscan language; bronze mirrors; childbirth; colostrum; women's history; Etruscan dress; textile terminology; kuleš; Turkic linguistic comparison; Azerturk Linguistic Remodeling Method

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Etruscan written record consists predominantly of inscriptions rather than extended literary texts. Its alphabet can generally be read, but interpretation remains difficult because many texts are brief, formulaic, damaged, or written without consistent word division. Directionality is also central: Etruscan was commonly written from right to left, although other arrangements occur. Inscriptions on mirrors and other figured objects are especially valuable because image and text can constrain one another, even when the relationship between them is disputed (Huntsman, 2013; Wallace, 2008).

The present article brings together two newly developed interpretations concerning family life and clothing. They are united not merely by the presence of women in the imagery, but by a methodological question: can an inscription that has been treated primarily as a series of names or opaque lexical units be resegmented as connected speech when read through an agglutinative linguistic framework? The first case concerns childbirth and intergenerational maternal instruction; the second concerns a textile pattern, a garment border, and the technical vocabulary of dressmaking.

Both proposals are advanced as hypotheses. The conventional identifications, especially those supplied by museum catalogues, remain indispensable controls. The aim is not to replace object history with free association, but to determine whether the reconstructed syntax, lexicon, and iconography form a coherent explanatory ensemble and whether that ensemble can be tested by specialists.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

2.1. Corpus and visual evidence

Case Study I concerns British Museum object 1868,0606.1, a bronze mirror dated approximately 330–300 BCE. The museum describes the principal group as Menrva holding the child Maris Husrnana, with Turan and Laran nearby. Additional figures and infants appear in the composition, while a quadriga occupies the upper register. The corroded original and a modern line drawing are used together because the drawing makes the peripheral inscription and iconographic details more legible.

Case Study II is based on an image preserved in the author's research archive showing an infinity-like ornamental band and two lines of Etruscan letters. Its original archaeological publication, museum inventory number, findspot, date, and object type have not yet been recovered. This limitation is material: the reading offered below should be treated as provisional until the object's provenance and an authoritative epigraphic transcription are established. Two additional images—an Etruscan dancer from the Tomb of the Triclinium and a decorated garment on a figured vessel—are used only as comparative iconographic evidence for contrasting borders and flared or pendant elements; they do not establish the meaning of a word by themselves.

2.2. Azerturk Linguistic Remodeling Method

The method used here proceeds through five operations: (1) determination of the most plausible reading direction; (2) transcription of the visible consonantal sequence without assuming inherited word divisions; (3) alternative segmentation based on agglutinative morphology; (4) cautious restoration of vowels or short grammatical elements where the script may not represent them transparently; and (5) comparison of the resulting reading with Azerbaijani and other Turkic lexemes, followed by an iconographic coherence test. Restored letters are shown in square brackets. A proposed equivalence is not treated as demonstrated merely because it is phonetically similar.

This last restriction is essential. Sound resemblance may generate a hypothesis, but chronology, regular sound correspondence, morphology, syntax, semantics, and object context must support it. Where the present study goes beyond currently accepted Etruscan lexicography, the wording “proposed reading,” “reconstruction,” or “alternative interpretation” is used deliberately.

3. CASE STUDY I: A BRONZE MIRROR AND A PROPOSED CHILDBIRTH SCENE



Figure 1. British Museum bronze mirror 1868,0606.1: (a) corroded original; (b) line drawing used for the present epigraphic and iconographic discussion. Date: ca. 330–300 BCE. Object identification and dating: British Museum.

3.1. Conventional identification

In the British Museum catalogue, the engraved and inscribed composition is mythological: Menrva (Athena) holds the child Maris Husrnana, and Turan (Aphrodite) and Laran stand nearby. This interpretation belongs to a broader scholarly practice in which inscriptions beside Etruscan mirror figures identify deities and mythic personages. Any alternative reading must therefore explain why the inscription might contain more than labels and why the visual arrangement could also support a domestic discourse.

The present study disputes the automatic treatment of MENRVA and neighboring sequences as divine names in this particular inscription. Under the proposed resegmentation, MEN RVA is not a theonym but the connected expression mən rəva, “I consider [it] proper,” “I deem [it] appropriate,” or, idiomatically, “I approve.” It introduces the mother-in-law's practical recommendation to the new mother: the infant should be given the first milk, or colostrum. The methodological issue is therefore whether MENRVA

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functions as an isolated label or whether MEN RVA belongs syntactically to the words that follow. In the present reconstruction, the complete unit—*mən rəva: mayanı əmirə*—means, “I consider it proper that the baby suck the colostrum.” The continuity of sense between this expression, the feeding instruction, and the visible newborn supports its interpretation as connected discourse.

3.2. Transcription and proposed segmentation

The continuous sequence used by the author is transcribed as follows:

SHADIMTHULNA NSH URUXNUM NDAN NGARIMTHLSRANA MENRVAMIANIMIRING OTHINS GU DINGR

Applying the remodeling procedure, the sequence is divided and vocalized as:

Šadım thuluna. Nəşən ruh ünümə. Nədən kurena šadım, hulusun, ürən Ana? Mən rəva: mayanı əmirə, oyansa, qoy. Dinc ir.

Inscribed segment	Proposed remodeled form	Proposed English value	Comment
SHADIM	šadım / şadam	I am glad; I rejoice	First-person expression of joy.
THULNA	thuluna / tuluna	at your delivery; at the birth	Compared with Turkic <i>tul-/doğ-</i> notions of emergence or birth; vowel restoration is proposed.
NSH	nəşə(n)	joy, delight	Compared with Azerbaijani <i>nəşə</i> “joy, elevated mood.”
URUX	ruh	spirit, soul	Metathesis/phonetic remodeling is proposed; the equation is not conventional Etruscan.
NUM	ünüm(ə)	to my renown / to my voice	Compared with <i>ün</i> “voice; fame, renown.”
NDAN	nədən	why; for what reason	Interrogative interpretation.
NGARIM / KURENA	kurena	to the lineage / household group	Interpreted in relation to persons close to a ruling household; provisional.
THLS	hulusun	wholeheartedly, sincerely	Compared with Turkic <i>ulu/holistic</i> semantic field; highly reconstructive.
RANA	ürən Ana	mother who gives offspring	Segmentation into “offspring/lineage” + “mother.”
MEN RVA	mən rəva	I consider it proper / I approve	Proposed first-person pronoun plus predicate.
MIANI MIR	mayanı əmirə	if [the baby] sucks the colostrum	<i>maya</i> interpreted as first milk/colostrum; verbal restoration proposed.
ING OTHINS	oyansa	if/when [the baby] wakes	Substantial phonological remodeling; tested against scene context.
GU	qu[y] / qoy	let [the baby]	Imperative or permissive.
DINGR	dinc ir	keep [the baby] calm; give rest	Segmented as <i>dinc</i> + imperative element.

3.3. Reconstructed translation

A close English rendering of the proposed reconstruction is:

"I rejoice at your delivery. Your joy gives radiance to my spirit. Why am I so wholeheartedly glad, O mother who has given an offspring to our lineage? I consider it proper that the baby suck the colostrum. If the baby wakes, let it wake; keep the baby calm."

A more idiomatic version would read:

"I am happy at the birth of your child. Your happiness brings honor and light to my soul. I rejoice because you have given our family a new descendant, dear mother. Let the newborn take the first milk. If the baby wakes, allow it to do so, and then keep it peaceful."

3.4. Iconographic coherence and social interpretation

The alternative reading treats the scene as a visit following childbirth. The crowned or elaborately adorned woman on the left is interpreted as a high-status older woman who has arrived with her husband, two young sons, and a female attendant or nurse. The quadriga above is read as a status marker and as an indication of arrival rather than as an isolated decorative element. The woman holding the infant is understood as a new mother—possibly the older woman's daughter-in-law—and the infant as the newest continuation of an elite lineage.

Within this reconstruction, the speech performs two social functions. First, the older woman congratulates the new mother and welcomes the child as a continuation of the family line. Second, she transfers practical maternal knowledge: the importance of the first milk, careful waking and feeding, and rest. Such a reading makes women's experience and intergenerational instruction central rather than incidental.

The iconographic argument is suggestive but not conclusive. The same figures can be, and conventionally are, read as deities. The proposed domestic interpretation is strongest where reconstructed linguistic units correspond to visible motifs—infants, multiple generations, an attendant, and a prestigious vehicle. It is weakest where the linguistic remodeling requires extensive vowel restoration or semantic expansion. These uneven evidentiary levels should remain visible to the reader.

4. CASE STUDY II: KULEŠ/KILUŠ AND AN ETRUSCAN GARMENT BORDER



Figure 2. Archival image of an ornamental band with a two-line inscription (author's research archive). Original archaeological source, object type, inventory number, provenance, and date remain to be confirmed before publication.

4.1. Directionality and transcription

The ornament resembles a sequence of linked or infinity-shaped loops with short radiating strokes. In the source image, the inscription appears beneath or within the ornamental field. A left-to-right transcription produces the following two lines:

Line 1: SHULEK : ONRA : SANINA

Line 2: XXXIXSLIKS : LAITA : SULIKÇNRO

The colon-like signs are treated as word dividers. When the letter order is reversed in accordance with common Etruscan right-to-left practice, the author obtains:

Line 1: ANINAS : ARNO : KULESH

Line 2: ORNCKILUS : ATIAL : ACILSXXXIX

A further agglutinative resegmentation and vowel restoration yields:

1. ENİN[A] AS, ARNO, KULEŠ.

2. ÖRN[E]K KİLUŠ ATILA, AÇILIŞ XXXIX [39].

Inscribed segment	Proposed remodeled form	Proposed English value	Comment
ANINAS	enin[a] as	fit it to the width / place it according to its breadth	Proposed imperative/technical instruction; segmentation remains provisional.
ARNO	arno	there / to it / according to the arrangement	Function inferred from reconstructed sentence; requires comparison with attested Etruscan morphology.
KULESH	kuleš	handsome; well-shaped; ornamental border	Compared with Azerbaijani/Turkic keleş “handsome, fine,” and interpreted technically from the ornament.
ORNCKILUS	örn[e]k kiluš	the sample/pattern, the decorative flared element	Compared with örnək “model, sample, pattern.”
ATIAL	ətəkli / atıla	for a skirt / attach or cast onto it	Proposed relation to ətək “hem, skirt” and an instruction of placement.
ACILS	açılış	opening, spread, flare	Compared with açıl- “to open/spread.”
XXXIX	39	thirty-nine units or panels	Numerical reading; the unit and referent are uncertain.

4.2. Proposed technical translation

The two lines are reconstructed as a short instruction for producing or applying a decorative element:

“Fit it to the width, Arno; the kuleš is handsome. As a model, attach the kiluš to the skirt; when spread/opened, thirty-nine [panels or units] will suffice.”

An alternative nuance for the first sentence is possible if kuleš is understood not as “handsome” but as a technical judgment about the sparseness or exposed quality of the pattern: “Fit it to the width, Arno; the pattern is too open/sparse.” The damaged or decontextualized state of the evidence prevents a definitive choice.

4.3. Ethnographic analogy: the “taxta” panels of Nüvədi

The proposed reference to thirty-nine units is illuminated through an ethnographic analogy from Nüvədi, the author’s birthplace. In local women’s terminology, a very wide skirt or tuman could require eight, nine, eleven, or more meters of cloth, depending on the wearer’s size. The cloth was measured from the waist to the ankle and divided lengthwise into narrow panels. Because each panel resembled a plank, it was called a taxta (“board” or “plank”). The panels were sewn together; the hem was then decorated with a contrasting ribbon or border, while the upper edge was folded to form a casing for the woven tumanbağı, or skirt cord.

This analogy does not demonstrate that the Etruscan numeral must count taxta-like panels. It does, however, show how a large number at the end of a tailoring instruction might refer to repeated cloth units rather than to an abstract number. The comparison generates a concrete, experimentally testable question: could thirty-nine narrow components, loops, repeats, or measured units produce the visible border or the circumference of a flared garment?

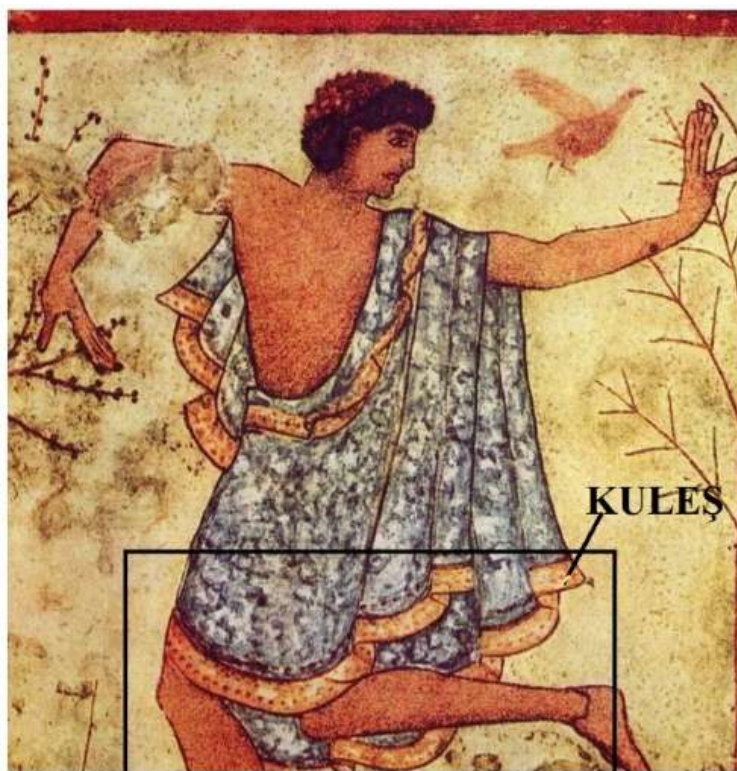


Figure 3. Male dancer from the Tomb of the Triclinium, Monterozzi Necropolis, Tarquinia, with the garment's contrasting lower border indicated. The tomb is dated between ca. 470 and 440 BCE. Image supplied by the author; contextual identification after Tarquinia Turismo.



Figure 4. Decorated garment border on an Etruscan figured vessel. Image supplied by the author. Museum, vessel attribution, date, and image source require confirmation before submission.

4.4. Lexical comparison and the limits of etymology

The reconstructed kuleš/kiluš is compared with Azerbaijani and Anatolian Turkic keleş, commonly associated with beauty, comeliness, or a striking appearance, and with modern Russian клёш, denoting a flared cut or bell-bottom form. Russian lexicography generally treats клёш as a borrowing from French cloche “bell.” French cloche is conventionally derived from Medieval Latin clocca. Consequently, the proposal that the modern European fashion term descends directly from Etruscan cannot be presented as established etymology.

The phonetic resemblance nevertheless remains worthy of controlled investigation, especially if the Etruscan archival object can be securely identified and if its inscription demonstrably includes a form transcribed as kuleš or kiluš in a garment-related context. A credible historical argument would require an attested transmission chain, chronological continuity, regular sound developments, and independent occurrences of the term. Until those conditions are met, the safest conclusion is that the resemblance supports a comparative hypothesis, not a proven derivation.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. From labels to connected discourse

The two case studies share a movement from isolated letter groups toward connected discourse. In the mirror inscription, the proposed discourse is a congratulatory and advisory speech. In the textile inscription, it is a short production instruction. Both readings depend on reassessing inherited segmentation and reading direction. Their attraction lies in the semantic coherence that emerges: words relating to birth cluster around an infant scene, while proposed terms for pattern, hem, opening, and numerical measurement cluster around an ornamental textile image.

5.2. Women’s knowledge and material practice

If the reconstructions are accepted, the inscriptions preserve domains often underrepresented in surviving ancient texts: the speech of an older woman to a new mother and the technical language of garment construction. The first records emotional and practical knowledge surrounding childbirth; the second records design, measurement, and textile finishing. The combined reading therefore moves Etruscan women from the status of depicted figures to that of participants in knowledge transmission, household continuity, and skilled production.

5.3. Evidentiary hierarchy

The evidence is not equally secure. The British Museum mirror has a stable inventory number, date, object description, and established iconographic interpretation. The alternative translation can therefore be compared against a well-defined object. By contrast, the ornamental inscription lacks a recovered provenance. Its present value is exploratory, and its publication should be accompanied by an explicit request for identification by epigraphists and textile historians. This hierarchy is not a weakness to conceal; it is part of responsible hypothesis building.

5.4. Tests for future research

1. Conduct a high-resolution autopsy of the mirror rim and compare every letter with the museum’s or corpus transcription.
2. Identify the archival source of Figure 2 and establish object type, findspot, chronology, inventory number, and prior readings.
3. Compare each proposed morpheme with the Etruscan corpus, not only with modern Turkic vocabulary, and search for repeated syntactic environments.
4. Test the numerical interpretation experimentally by reconstructing looped borders or garment panels in plausible ancient textile dimensions.
5. Distinguish systematically among genetic relationship, borrowing, typological similarity, and accidental resemblance.

6. CONCLUSION

This article has presented two interrelated alternative readings of Etruscan material. The first interprets the British Museum mirror inscription as a mother-in-law’s congratulation and practical advice to a woman who has just given birth. The second interprets a decontextualized two-line inscription as a technical statement concerning a kuleš/kiluš ornamental or flared garment element and a count of thirty-nine units. In both cases, the Azerturk Linguistic Remodeling Method combines right-to-left reading, resegmentation, vowel restoration, Turkic lexical comparison, and iconographic control.

The reconstructions produce coherent narratives, but coherence is the beginning of verification rather than its end. The mirror reading must be tested against authoritative epigraphic transcription and established Etruscan morphology; the textile reading first requires recovery of the object’s provenance. The proposed links with Turkic vocabulary and modern fashion terminology should therefore be treated as research hypotheses. Their scholarly value lies in making explicit predictions: where particular meanings are proposed, additional occurrences, morphological parallels, material correspondences, and historical transmission evidence should

be discoverable. Such tests can determine whether these readings reveal previously unrecognized domestic and technical language or whether alternative explanations remain stronger.

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