Etruscans and Greeks in Pre-Roman Italy

Most peoples of prehistoric Italy in the early centuries of the first millennium B.C. re-
mainned relatively primitive and underdevel-
oped. Two groups, however, began to exert a
profound influence on the growth of complex civilisation in Italy. These influences were
especially important in Latium, particularly at
Rome—the city that eventually united all of
the peoples of Italy under its control. One
group was the Etruscans, who inhabited
Etruria across the Tiber from Latium; the
other was the Greek colonists who began to set-
tle south of Latium by the middle of the eighth
century B.C. in Campania and along the rest of
the southern Italian coast around Tarentum.
In fact, so many Greeks settled in southern Italy that they came to be
known as Magna Graecia (Great Greece).

Etruria Etruria is bounded by the
Arno River on the north, the Tiber River to the
east and south, and the Tyrrhenian Sea on
the west. Geographically it falls roughly into
northern and southern halves. In the north
there are fertile river valleys, plains, and
rolling sandstone or limestone hills. The
southern part is wilder and rougher, shaped by the ac-
tions of volcanoes, wind, and water. The soft,
voleanic stone called tufa has been carved into
deep valleys or gullies surrounded by peaks or
small mounds on which many of the earliest
Etruscan cities are found.

At a time when village life predominated in
the largest part of Italy, except in Magna Graecia,
the centers of Etruria had already become towns, and some of the towns were be-
coming cities. These cities were often built on
Villanovan sites, sometimes on the coast or a
river near it—Caere (Cerveteri), Tuscania,
Volsini, and Populonia—and sometimes inland—
Volsini, Orvieto, Chiusi (Chintu), Peru-
gia, Arezzo, and Faesulae. Ancient sources
say that at their height the Etruscan people
were leagued in a federation of twelve city-
states, but to list their twelve cities is not easy
since the various sources do not agree on the
names. In addition to the towns just men-
tioned (which found a place in written history
by fighting against the Romans), archaeology is
constantly finding others.

Sources for Etruscan History Most
modern knowledge of the Etruscans is derived
from the ruins of their cities and, more par-
ticularly, their tombs. Tombs of all sizes,
designs, and types—the well and trench tombs
of Villanovan times, the tumuli, those great
mound-shaped graves covered with beds of
boulder stone, the circular stone vaults built into
hillsides, and the corridor tombs cut out of rock—all these, whether con-
taining pottery, metal wares, furniture, jew-
ely, or wall paintings, help to reveal the
cultural life of the Etruscan people.

Roman writers from the first century
B.C. and the first century A.D. preserve impor-
tant information on late Etruscan religion, but
there are none for earlier periods. Nearly ten
thousand Etruscan inscriptions (some dating
back to the seventh century B.C., others as late
as the age of Augustus) have been found.
Many can be translated with a fair degree of
confidence, although the Etruscan language is
not fully understood. They have not yet shed
much light on early Etruscan political history
because only about a dozen contain more than
thirty words, and nearly all contain only long
lists of proper names, religious formulae, dedi-
cations, and epitaphs. Nevertheless, useful
social, religious, and cultural inferences can be
made from their stylistic and statistical pat-
trons.
The sounds of Etruscan words are known because they are written in a Greek alphabet apparently borrowed from the Greek colony of Cumae near Naples. Not enough different words and sentences occur, however, to link Etruscan positively with any other language. Most scholars agree that it is neither Indo-European nor Semitic, but no one knows what it is.

Little can be learned from ancient Greek and Latin sources either. The Greeks have little to say, other than to accuse the Etruscans of being scandalmongers and fond of luxury. Cicero made some comments on their religious life, and Livy concentrated only on their wars with Rome.

Etruscan Origins The question of where the Etruscans originated has been generating speculation and controversy for at least twenty-five hundred years. According to the Greek historian Herodotus (ca. 460 B.C.), the earliest Etruscans were immigrants—Lydians from the west coast of Asia Minor—who sailed west to find a new homeland when their own...
was suffering from famine (Book 1.94). About 450 years later, another Greek historian, the Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Herodotus' birthplace), took the opposite view in his Roman Antiquities (Book 1.35–39) and claimed that the Etruscans were native to Italy.

Some modern historians have argued that the Etruscans migrated from central Europe before 1000 B.C. and settled in the Po valley and later in Etruria. This view has been largely rejected. On the other hand, there is much support both those who favor Dionysius and those who think the Villanovans developed into the Etruscans after contact with outsiders, and those who favor Herodotus and say that a small but significant number of advanced immigrants from the eastern Mediterranean led or drove the development of Etruscan civilization.

The archaeological record shows no abrupt invasion of any large group to account for Etruscan origins. Most Etruscan towns appear on or near earlier Villanovian sites without a radical break in the archaeological record that would indicate an invasion of new people. For example, at Tarquinii (Tarquinia), one of the earliest Etruscan cities, different styles of burial and the kinds of objects found in graves appear as a progressive development from early Villanovian cremation and burial in simple urns to either cremation or burial and inhumation (burial of the whole body) in trench graves, with more luxurious grave goods in each case, and finally to the general practice of inhumation in elaborately decorated and furnished rock-cut chamber tombs, which are an outstanding feature of high Etruscan civilization.

On the other hand, the development of the urban culture that produced these rock-cut chamber tombs occurred so rapidly in southern Etruria that many think it not likely to have been brought about by the Villanovans alone. Contemporary Villanovian sites elsewhere in Italy show no such development. Therefore, it is entirely possible that about 750 B.C., a small but significant number of immigrants from the more culturally advanced eastern Mediterranean arrived in Etruria. Then, through their possession of advanced weapons, superior administrative and military technology, they could have quickly achieved power and leadership among the local Villanovans, who would have sought to identify with their own silver, bronze, and gold coins.

Etruscan foreign trade was mainly in luxury goods and high-priced wares. It enriched the trading and industrial classes and stimulated among the upper class a taste for elegance and splendor. Accordingly, the Etruscans earned a reputation for excessive luxury among contemporaneous Greeks.

Etruscan Cities and Sociopolitical Organization

The Etruscans developed several strong states, each centered on a rich and powerful city. For economic reasons, they built cities in fertile valleys or near navigable streams; for military reasons, they built on hilltops whose cliffs made them easily defensible. At first they fortified their cities by wooden palisades or earthen ramparts and then with walls of marble, often banked with earth.

Inside the walls, the Etruscans seem to have laid out some of their cities on a regular grid plan, as the Greeks had begun to do. In some cases they appear to have centered the plan on a main streets intersecting at right angles like the cardo and decumanus of the later Roman military camp. The streets made to go up were temples for the gods and palaces for the king. Then, as the population increased, side streets were paved with flagstone, and placed built for public entertainment. These cities, as in Greece, were the political, military, religious, economic, and cultural centers of the various states that sprang up between the Tiber and the Arno before the seventh century B.C. Along the coast were Tarquinii, Tarquinia (Tarquinia), Volsinii (Veii), Vetulonia (Vetulonia), Roselle, and Populonia (Populonia); there were the oldest. With the possible exception of Veii to the south, such inland cities as Velours and Chiusi, Perusia (Perugia), Cortona, and Arezzo (Arezzo) were founded later and illustrate the growth and expansion of Etruscan civilization.

A dual function of religion member cities were sovereign as a union of cities to unite. During the wars of the leaders of aristocratic leagues. The commander of the state religious wore purple crown, and ivory. As he the fasces of justice were beheaded, as in Italy. The times of the owning family seated large to arcos to Aregos of a war. In some cities the government officials were standing by the commerce. This was of small traders, artisans or slaves.

Etrusca
The Etruscan Economy

The ultimate answer to the question of Etruscan origins may be: Etruscan civilization could not have existed without the natural wealth of Etruria itself. The fertility of the soil and the mineral resources of the region were sources of great wealth. The Etruscans exploited their natural wealth through extensive trade and commerce, resulting in a large scale agriculture, art, culture, mining, manufacturing, lumbering, and commerce.

In the Tiber river valleys produced grain for domestic use and export and flax for linen cloth and sail. Less fertile soils provided pasture for cattle, sheep, and horses, which in turn provided meat and hides for export. The expansion of agriculture and trade brought the Etruscans into contact with the peoples of the region, who traded with them, and the Etruscans traded with people of the Greek culture. As the Tiber river valleys were navigable, the Etruscans developed a strong river system that allowed them to trade with the Greeks and other nations.

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Etruscan Family Life

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in the ancient world and almost unsurpassed in Europe till the twentieth century. It was more condescendingly and integrated than the Greek, less patriarchal and authoritarian than the Roman, and not so inhibiting and ascetic as the early Christian. It was based on greater legal and social equality of father and mother, on consensual marriage and mutual respect between husband and wife.

The Etruscan woman was not a chattel or household drudge confined to her part of the house or denied her husband's company or respect. Nor were the idealized or placed on a pedestal, as in the romantic tradition of medieval chivalry or the cavalier tradition of the aristocracy of England and the Virginia Tidewater. The Etruscan wife, on the contrary, was accepted as a person in her own right. She held her husband's equal, his partner and companion. Children bore the names of both parents. The wife's tomb was often more splendid than the husband's; on covers of sarcophagi (coffins) her portrait was sculptured beside his, the one not inferior to the other in dignity and self-respect.

The Etruscan woman often appeared in public with her husband. She went to religious festivals with him; unlike her Greek counterpart, she reclined beside him at public banquets. The common practice of decorating women's hands mirrors with words indicates a high degree of literacy among those who could afford these expensive items. Many Etruscan women also took a keen interest in sports, either as active participants or as spectators. Their presence at public games, where male athletes sometimes contended in the nude, made them appear worse than inmodern to the Greeks, who usually forbade their women to witness such exhibitions. The Greeks probably also disapproved of the wearing of elaborate dresses by Etruscan women in public and their use of cosmetics, fine clothes, and jewelry to make themselves more alluring.

This respect and freedom accorded to Etruscan women may have had an impact on the development of the Roman family, where women also had a much higher standing than among many of the ancient Greeks.

Etruscan Culture and Religion

Although Etruscan as a spoken language persisted as late as the second century B.C. and enough written materials survived till the first century to enable the Emperor Claudius I (41-54 A.D.) to write twenty books on Etruscan history, all the Etruscan literary works are lost. There probably were many works on religion and the science of divination and, perhaps, annals of families and cities. There were also some rustic songs and religious chants. If the Etruscans composed dramas or works on philosophy or science, no trace of them has been preserved or recovered.

If there was an intellectual vacuum in their society, the Etruscans redeemed themselves partially by their passion for music. They had a predilection for the flute, whose shrill strains accompanied all the activities of life—banquets, hunting expeditions, athletic events, sacrifices, funerals, and even the flogging of slaves. As flutists, trumpeters, and lyre players, they were renowned in Rome and throughout Greece. Dancing also was a major element of their culture. They danced at banquets, at religious festivals, and funerals. No matter what the occasion, they danced with ecstasy and abandon and with an almost orgiastic physical exuberance.

Sports

The tomb paintings show that outdoor sports assumed an important place in Etruscan life. Because of their association with religion and rites for the dead, sports were serious affairs, and to neglect them was considered sacrilege. There were also sociological reasons for the popularity of games. The growth of cities, the expansion of industry and commerce, and the rise of a wealthy leisure class gave the time, opportunity, and money for indulgence in sports of all kinds. Hunting and fishing, which for prehistoric people had been a labor of necessity, became a form of recreation for the Etruscan rich. Next to hunting, riding, and chariot racing were favorite sports. Organized athletic competitions, such as were common in Greece, were especially popular. They gave the upper-class youth a chance to display their skill and prowess, they served also as a source of entertainment for the masses. Most illuminating in this regard is the great frieze in the Tomb of the Cards at Tarquinia, which shows number of sports and the boxers, the wreath paintings reveal either of the Roman deadly sport, the form of the primitive formed part of if ally was intended spirit of the dece

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Etruscan Art and Architecture. The art of the Etruscans was their most remarkable and enduring achievement. Religion gave it occasion and impulve. As in Greece, Etruscan temples and precincts were lavishly decorated with ornamental reliefs and paintings. Believing, like the Egyptians, in the survival of life after death, the Etruscans provided elaborate tombs for the dead, some of gigantic size, such as the tumulus of Regolini-Galassi (about 138 feet in diameter) at Caere (Cerveteri), and they spared no expense in their construction and decoration. In his grave the Etruscan noble or merchant prince had his chariot and hunting gear, his jewels and favorite Greek vases, his wines, his wife decked out in her costly robes and jewelry, and beautiful pictures that magically brought to life pleasant hours at home, in the country, and at the seaside.

In these tombs are preserved many masterpieces of both Greek and Etruscan art—black-figure vases imported from Athens, sarcophagi (coffins) with sculptured lids, statues, silver goblets, gold and silver jewelry, engraved gems, and wall paintings. The desire to perpetuate the personality of the dead gave rise to the tradition of the sculptured portrait (later to develop among the Romans into the portrait busts that have preserved for us the likenesses of many illustrious Romans).

Origin, Development, and General Features. Three currents swelled the mainstream of Etruscan art. The first was the native Villanovan, whose simple geometric designs persisted, especially at Chiusi (Chiusi) and other inland centers. Second was the eastern Mediterranean. Contacts with eastern Mediterranean culture brought an influx of what historians of this subject call Oriental motifs—Aegean, Hittite, Persian, and Egyptian. Of these the earliest and most notable were Assyrians hunting scenes, stylized horses, double-headed birds, long-necked water fowls, sphinxes, lions, and bulls. Even before this Orientalizing trend had reached its height (near 650 to 600 B.C.), there began to flow from Greece the (third great current of influence upon Etruscan art, first from Corinth, then from Ionia, and later from Athens. Throughout the sixth century B.C., Greece exerted a powerful influence on Etruria and the Attic black-figure, imported in a much admired manner. Numerous Greek vases were found in the Etruscan tombs. But somewhat different schools and conservatively during the 5th century worked with creative freed.

The next was both a and a doctrine—trust. The political, social, and religious reaction against the concrete ideal. They appreciated the concrete and austere b of Pericles, as the styles and ing period.

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