The Etruscans

Interior of the Tomb of the Triclinium, from the Monterozzi necropolis, Tarquinia, Italy, ca. 480–470 BCE

*Triclinium* – formal dining room
Italy in Etruscan times

Important sites:
Tarquinia
Cerveteri
Vulci
Villanova
Brief History

• The Etruscans occupied the region to the north of Rome, in what is today known as Tuscany (Central).
• The Romans were first a subject people of the Etruscans and later their conquerors.
• The Etruscan culture was well-developed and advanced but distinctively different from the cultures of the other peoples in the region. This distinctive difference immediately led to the question of “where did the Etruscans originate?”
Where did the Etruscans originate?

- Some Greeks held that the Etruscans were a branch of the Pelasgians, indigenous inhabitants of the Aegean region.
- Others (such as Virgil & Herodotus) thought they came from Lydia, a kingdom of western Anatolia.
- In the 19th c, it was discovered that most of the languages of Europe belonged to one big language family called Indo-European but Etruscan was not one of them.
  - Through their maritime trade, the Phoenicians (modern Lebanon) spread the use of the alphabet to North Africa and Europe, where it was adopted by the Greeks, who (possibly) later passed it on to the Etruscans, who in turn transmitted it to the Romans who in turn transmitted it to us today.
Science vs. Art

• The April 2007 issue of *The American Journal of Human Genetics* reports finding eleven lineages of mitochondrial DNA in Tuscany that have not been found elsewhere in Europe but do occur in the Near East.

• Taken one step further, the mitochondrial DNA of cattle in Tuscany were tested and results show some breeds were genetically related to breeds of cattle in the Near East. The other breeds were European in origin.

• *What these two studies indicate is that there were some Near Eastern sources for the Etruscans.*

• Villanovan Culture: 900-700 BC. A culture of Northern Italy, they were first identified by their cemeteries. They practiced cremation and buried the ashes of their dead in pottery urns of distinctive double-cone shape.

• These funerary practices appear to be a part of the Urnfield culture (1350-750 BC) of central-eastern Europe which arrived in Northern Italy at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.

• The Villanovan Culture was influenced and displaced by the cultures of the Greeks and later the Etruscans.
Early Etruscan Art

Fibula with Orientalizing lions, from the Regolini-Galassi Tomb, Cerveteri, Italy, ca. 650–640 BCE

Double-flute player, detail of a mural painting in the Tomb of the Leopards, Tarquinia, Italy, ca. 480-470 BCE
How does this temple differ from Greek temples?
Sculpture

Sarcophagus with reclining couple, from Cerveteri, Italy, ca. 520 BCE.
Sarcophagus of Lars Pulena, from Tarquinia, Italy, early second century BCE.

Sarcophagus lid with portraits of Ramtha Visnai and Arnth Tetnies, from the Ponte Rotto necropolis, Vulci, Italy, ca. 350–300 BCE
In both Greece and Republican Rome, respectable women were confined to the house and mixed-sex socializing did not occur.

The freedom of women within Etruscan society could have been misunderstood by Greeks & Romans as implying their sexual availability.

Also worth noting is that a number of Etruscan tombs carry funerary inscriptions in the form "X son of (father) and (mother)", indicating the importance of the mother's side of the family, unlike the Hegoso Stele.

520 BCE vs. 400 BCE
Necropolis

• Modern knowledge of Etruscan daily life is largely dependent on the numerous decorative details and finds from tombs. The painted tombs of the aristocracy, as well as more simple ones, are extraordinary evidence of what objects cannot show: daily life, ceremonies and mythology as well as artistic abilities.

• Two main sites: Cerveteri & Tarquinia
Tumuli (burial mound) in the Banditaccia necropolis, Cerveteri, Italy, seventh to second centuries BCE
The plans of these tombs typically resembled wealthy houses of the time, which were not different for Romans than Etruscans. Here is another contrast with the Greeks who built stone temples but not tombs. The Etruscans built temples from wood and brick and tombs from stone.
Objects include: weapons and domestic and religious items. Stools, mirrors, drinking cups, pitchers, and knives effectively suggest a domestic context. The tomb was a symbolic home for the afterlife...
Interior of the Tomb of the Leopards, Tarquinia, Italy, ca. 480–470 BCE
Diving and fishing, detail of a mural painting in the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, Tarquinia, Italy, ca. 530–520 BCE.
Classical and *Roman* Etruscan Art

*Capitoline Wolf*, from Rome, Italy, ca. 500–480 BCE

Traditionally regarded as a symbol of Rome from ancient times
Chimera of Arezzo, from Arezzo, Italy, first half of fourth century BCE. Inscribed on its right foreleg is an inscription believed to read TINSCVIL, showing that the bronze was a votive object dedicated to the supreme Etruscan god of day, Tin or Tinia.
Porta Marzia (Gate of Mars), Perugia, Italy, second century BCE
Aule Metele (*Arringatore*), from Cortona, near Lake Trasimeno, Italy, early first century BCE

Portrait of an orator.

Aule Metele wears the toga and boots of a Roman magistrate, but his name is Etruscan, as are those of his father and mother, included in inscriptions on his hem.

Most likely produced at about the time that Roman power and dominance over the Etruscans became total.....