

CHAPTER 2

66 HERODOTUS AND DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS

MIGRATION, MYSTERY, AND MASTERY

WHO WERE THE ETRUSCANS?

paene + insula = "almost" + "island"
A peninsula like Italy is "almost an island" because it is surrounded on three sides by water.



The founders of Rome were not the first people to arrive on the Italian peninsula. For thousands of years before the city was born, settlers had been immigrating from all directions. Some came to escape war, as legend says the Trojans did. Others came seeking land and wealth. Some of the earliest settlers sailed from North Africa. Other tribes crossed the Alps to settle in Italy and its islands.

About 1000 BCE, Italic peoples arrived from across the Adriatic Sea. These immigrants brought new languages, one of which was Latin. The shepherds who first settled the Palatine Hill in the 8th century BCE spoke Latin, which became the official language of business and government in Rome. Latin gradually spread throughout the peninsula and eventually became the accepted language of the Roman empire.

The peninsula soon became home to other peoples as well: the Etruscans and the Greeks. Around 750 BCE, some cities in Greece set up colonies in southern Italy, especially on the island of Sicily. The cities wanted trading partners in other places so that they could buy and sell each other's goods. The Greek colonists who came to Italy were looking for land and the chance to make money through trade. They founded great cities like Naples, which has survived for 2,700 years and is still thriving today. The Greek colonists brought their art, architecture, literature, alphabet, and gods—all of which became a part of Roman culture.

The Etruscans settled north of Rome, at about the same time. We don't know where they came from, or why. Herodotus, a Greek historian of the fifth century BCE, believed that the Etruscans came from Lydia, part of the country we now call Turkey. He writes: "There was great



A young Etruscan musician, dressed in sandals and a knee-length robe, plays a double flute, joining other performers in an outdoor ceremony or festival.

poverty through the whole land of Lydia. . . . The king decided to divide the nation. . . . Half of the people would stay; the other half would leave. He would reign over those who stayed behind." The people who had to leave sailed to Umbria in northern Italy and built cities there. "They gave up their former name of Lydians and called themselves after the . . . king's son, who led the colony: Tyrrhenians.

Other ancient writers disagreed with Herodotus. Dionysius, a Greek who lived in Rome, writes in his history: "I do not believe . . . that the Tyrrhenians were a colony of Lydians; for they do not use the same language. . . . They don't worship the same gods as the Lydians or use of the same laws and institutions."

Until recently, most historians thought that Herodotus was right. They believed that the Etruscans came as a united people from the east, bringing their language, religion, music, and dance. These scholars based their ideas on the evidence of Etruscan paintings. Images of music and dance in Etruscan artwork look a lot like images in Greek art. This led scholars to reason that the Etruscans must have come from a part of the Greek world or somewhere nearby.

But recent discoveries have begun to change their minds. Archaeologists have compared street patterns in

66 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities, 8 BCE

66 Herodotus, Histories, 425 BCE

many northern Italian towns and cities. They've studied how people in that region laid out their towns and cities and built their houses. Archaeologists realized that the Etruscan cities followed the same patterns as the earlier, much older towns further north. Because of these similarities, **most historians now believe that the Etruscans, like Americans, didn't come as a group from any one place.** Most now believe that the Etruscan culture **took shape in northern Italy.** The region was a melting pot where customs, skills, and beliefs of many different cultures combined to form the Etruscan civilization.

So what do we know for sure about the **Etruscans?** Archaeology tells us that these seafarers were already living **in Italy by 900 BCE.** They were **brilliant architects**—they invented the **arch** and the **vault**, which the Romans later used to build their enormous arenas. Etruscan **artists** and **metalworkers** made everything from iron plows to polished bronze mirrors, silver bowls, and elegant gold jewelry. They even made braces for teeth! And their sculptors created masterpieces in bronze and clay.

When most Italic peoples were still living in villages, the **Etruscans had cities surrounded by strong, defensive walls**, with **elaborate temples** inside. Each city elected its own officials, but when foreign armies



These necklaces, earrings, pins, and rings—crafted from gold, glass, and precious stones—once belonged to a very wealthy woman. An Etruscan artist created this jewelry in about 500 BCE.

threatened, the cities often joined forces and obeyed a single commander.

The **Etruscans understood city planning, engineering, and waterworks** much better than most other ancient peoples. And the **Romans learned from them.** The Etruscans' building skills helped Rome when it later laid out its own system of roads and waterways throughout its huge empire.

Imagine a marshy place where it's too wet to farm or graze sheep. How would you make a living there? Etruscan engineers solved this problem. They **figured out how to drain land and make it useful.** They dug interconnecting **canals** and built **drains** to carry extra water into the river or into reservoirs that held the city's water supply. When Etruscan kings ruled Rome, they drained a broad, marshy area and channeled the water into a huge drain called the Cloaca Maxima.

Once the land was drained, the Etruscans **paved over it and built the Forum, Rome's marketplace and political center.** This became **the focus of community life in Rome.** There, a person could buy bread or fish for dinner, hear a speech, meet friends, sell a slave, and check the sundial to find the time of day.

Most of our knowledge of the Etruscans' religious beliefs and daily life comes from their tombs. Some were large underground caverns the size of a room or even a house. Inside them, archaeologists have found pottery, furniture, small statues, and elaborate jewelry. The **Etruscans believed in an afterlife** and thought that after death people would still need clothes to wear and couches to rest on. They thought that the dead would still want wine served in painted pottery cups. When an Etruscan nobleman died, he might be buried with his hunting gear, his favorite vases and statues, even his chariot. His wife would be buried in the same tomb, dressed in her finest clothes and jewels so that the two could enjoy the afterlife together.

Perhaps the most **useful discoveries** in the tombs are the **wall paintings.** Through these paintings, the graves "talk" to us and give us a picture of everyday life. The paintings show men and women lounging side-by-side at a banquet.

ETRUSCAN
RISE AND
FALL

1000 BCE
Italic immigrants
arrive in Italy

900 BCE
Etruscans appear in
central Italy

750 BCE
Greeks establish
colonies in
southern Italy

616 BCE
Etruscans rule in Rome

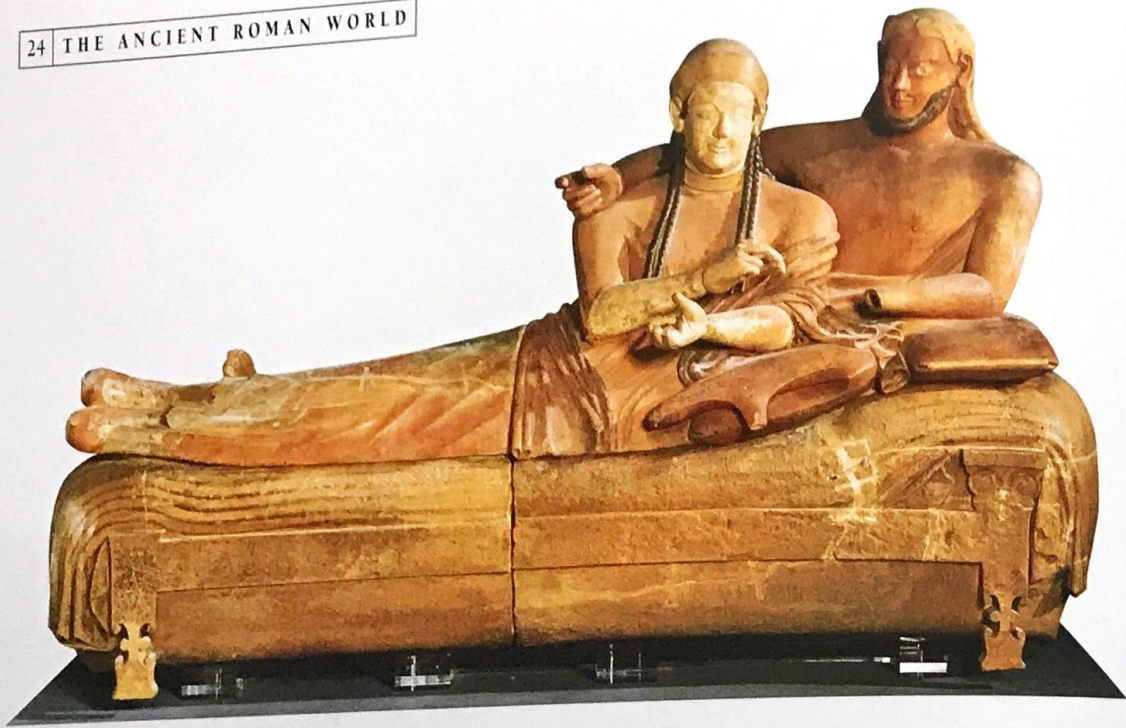
509 BCE
Roman army defeats
last Etruscan king

About 500 BCE
Greek cities defeat
Etruscan army in south

266 BCE
Rome controls all Italy

afterlife
(tombs / paintings)

Etruscans
settled in Italy 900 BCE
- architects (arch-vault)
- engineers (canals-
drainage)
- artists



An Etruscan husband and wife, sculpted in clay in the sixth century BCE, rest atop their own coffin, called a sarcophagus, from the Greek words meaning "flesh eater."

By comparing these paintings with those in Greek art, we can see that **women went out more in Etruscan society than they did in ancient Greece**. Etruscan paintings even show wives with their husbands at sporting events where male athletes competed in the nude. If you go to the Etruscan city of Tarquinia, north of Rome, you can climb down into more than a dozen Etruscan graves and see the brightly colored wall paintings still in place. They show men hunting, fishing, and wrestling. They show banquets, funerals, and religious rituals, all accompanied by music and dancing. The **Etruscans loved the trumpet, the lyre, and especially the flute**, which they played during hunting expeditions and athletic events, and even when they beat a disobedient slave.

Like most ancient peoples, the Etruscans believed that many gods and demons ruled the world. The gods showed their power in nature—in people, rivers, mountains, and trees. The **Etruscans also adopted the characteristics of many Greek gods** for their own gods. Like Zeus of the Greeks, their chief god Tinia spoke in the roar of thunder as

rituals on wall paintings

polytheists

Etruscans adopted characteristics of Greek gods → so did Romans

he flung his lightning bolts across the sky. Next in power were two goddesses, Uni and Menrva. Every **Etruscan city had temples to these three gods**. The **Romans later took over Tinia, Uni, and Menrva and called them Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva**.

The Etruscans believed that their **gods controlled human destiny**, and **priests looked to nature for omens**—signs of what might happen in the future. They sought clues in lightning or the flight of certain birds. Their priests also studied the bloody livers of sacrificed sheep to learn the gods' plans for the future. They read good news or bad in the spots and discolorations they saw there.

★ **By 600 BCE, the Etruscans were the most powerful people on the Italian peninsula**. Rome's last three kings were Etruscan, and Etruscan power stretched all the way into southern Italy. But about **500 BCE, the Roman army drove out the last Etruscan king**. Around the same time, a group of Greek cities banded together to defeat the Etruscan army in southern Italy. With these losses, Etruscan civilization began a slow, but sure, decline.

KEEPING THE GODS HAPPY

Many ancient peoples—Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Greeks, Hebrews, Chinese, Indians, as well as Etruscans and Romans—sacrificed animals as part of their religions. "Sacrifice" comes from two Latin words: *sacer* (holy) and *facere* (to make), so a sacrifice makes something holy, by giving it up or even killing it. A priest would kill an animal and then burn it on an altar. This was done in order to please their gods or to convince them not to be angry. When Romans sacrificed bulls, pigs, and sheep to the gods, they were trying to make a deal: "Do ut des," they said, which means: "I give this to you, so that you will give something to me."



A worshiper kneels next to the Temple of Mars the Avenger to sacrifice a bull.