Italy Before the Romans
The Art of the Etruscans
Nearly the whole of Italy was once under Etruscan Rule
- Cato 2nd Century BCE
Who were the Etruscans?

- The Etruscans inhabited part of western central Italy, roughly the area of modern Tuscany.
- Before the Romans the Etruscans dominated central Italy.
- Not clear about the origins of the Etruscans.
- They learned much from the Greeks, but had their own distinctive character, which influenced the neighboring Italian peoples, including the Romans.
- Most of our information about them comes from Roman writers
- **Ancient Etruria** was rich in mineral ores, agricultural resources and valuable timber from the forests.
• Etruscan civilization developed out of the early Iron Age culture of Etruria.

• The people are usually called 'Etruscans' only after 700 BCE, when their language was first written.

• Their language is one of the mysteries about them. It is not Indo-European like other Mediterranean languages. It is difficult to translate.

• Twelve city-states were established, which were loosely allied in a league and bonded by language and religion.

• In early times, the cities were ruled by kings, but by about 500 BCE power was generally held by magistrates from the aristocratic class.
Gold lamina tablets
inscriptions in Punic and Etruscan
• The Etruscans grew rich from trade based on the mineral resources of copper and iron.

• They reached the height of their power during the sixth century BCE.

• Mainly as the result of assaults from Greeks, Gauls and Romans, by the 3rd century BCE, the Etruscan civilization began to decline.

• From their city-states, the Etruscans continued to fight with the Romans until, about 280 BCE.

• However, by the first century BCE, the Etruscans had been assimilated into the Roman world.
How do we know about the Etruscans?

• Unfortunately, unlike Greek and Roman literature, Etruscan literature has not survived.
• We can learn about the Etruscans in two ways:
  – archaeological evidence gathered through the centuries.
  – together with the writings of Greek and Roman authors.
  – These two sources provide the most information about the history and development of ancient Etruria.
The Etruscan City

• Was laid out on a grid plan, like the Greeks.
• Had two main streets, one running north to south and one running east to west, dividing the cities into quadrants.
• At the intersection of these two streets was the city’s center of business.
• Beyond the business district in these quadrants Etruscan houses were built.
The Etruscan Home

- Because Etruscans created house shaped funerary urns, and decorated the interior of their tombs to look like houses, we know much about the layout of their homes.
- Houses were often built around a central courtyard, or atrium, which was open to the sky.
- In the center of the atrium was a shallow pool to collect water.
- We will see very similarly styled homes in the Roman Era.
Walls with protective gates and towers surrounded Etruscan cities.
Porta Augusta

- Fortified city gate in Perugia 2nd century BCE.
- Tunnel like passage way between two enormous towers.
- One of only a few examples of monumental Etruscan architecture to have survived.
- Not much left to see because Etruscan towns lie below present day cities making excavation by archeologists difficult.
• Significant precursor to the Roman use of the **round arch**.

• Here the arch extends into the tunnel creating a **barrel vault**.

• Masterful use of the arch and masonry work.

• The arch was not a Roman or Etruscan invention, there is evidence that Near Eastern, Egyptian and Greek architects were aware of it.

• However the Etruscans and the Romans were the first to use the arch widely in a variety of structures.
Detail of inner and outer façade of Porta Augusta
Architecture

• Even though very little Etruscan architecture remains today, the Etruscans were master builders and city planners.

• How do we know?

• The Romans wrote about them.

• The Romans, known for their expertise as builders and engineers, learned a great deal about architecture, urban planning and water delivery from the Etruscans.
New Column Types: Composite and Tuscan
Etruscan Beliefs
Temples and Decoration
• Overall we know little about the religious beliefs of the Etruscans.

• We do know that:
  – From early on, the Etruscans incorporated Greek gods into their **pantheon**
  – They may also have borrowed ideas about **divination** from the ancient Mesopotamians

• We have learned from their burial practices, revealed in their tombs, about their belief in an after life.

• No actual temples survived and only a few temple foundations remain.
  – What we know about temple design has been learned from small ceramic votive temple models.
  – From the writings of the Roman architect, Vitruvius, who sometime between 46-39 BCE compiled descriptions of Roman and Etruscan architecture.
Etruscan Temple Plan

- According to Vitruvius, Etruscan temples were built on a platform called a podium.
- Had a single flight of steps leading to a front porch.
- Columns supported the roof above the porch.
- The floor plan was almost square, and was equally divided between porch and interior space.
- Interior space was separated into three rooms, each probably housed its own votive statue.
Etruscan temples were made with mud brick walls. The columns and other architectural details were made of wood or volcanic stone, called tufa. Although simple in form, the temples were brightly painted and embellished with large terra cotta statues on the roof.
• Etruscans excelled in creating large scale ceramic figures like this 5’10” figure of Apollo.
• Ceramic is fired clay.
Apollo from Veii
c. 500 BCE

- Painted terra-cotta.
- This statue was placed on the roof of a temple in Veii.
- Originally part of a four figure group depicting one of the labors of Hercules.
- These figures, probably appearing to chase each other, were mounted along the ridgepole or peak of the roof.
- It would be hard to imagine sculpture used in that way on a Greek temple. Why?
- The Etruscans were willing to sacrifice structural logic for vitality in their art.
- Note the archaic smile but with a massive body, quick stride and expressive power not seen in Archaic Greek art.
Terra Cotta Winged Horses
c. 250 BCE, from the pediment of the temple Ara Regina.
Cross Cultural Comparison

Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE)

- In 221 BCE, the Warring States of China were, for the first time, united as one empire
- First Emperor of China = Shi Huang Di
- Qin Dynasty was short lived but very important
- Shi Huang Di abolished the feudal system
- He established centralized bureaucracy
- Country divided into prefectures and provinces
- Writing system and coinage standardized
Shi Huang Di was a ruthless leader; he based his laws on a totalitarian philosophy called Legalism

- Made up of politicians; did not believe in natural goodness of people
- Believed in government with iron fist; power in a single ruler
- Rewarded those who supported government
- War should be used to strengthen rulers
- Rejected looking back at the past
- Was strict and authoritarian

All other schools of thought were banned during Qin; books were burned; he tried to eradicate Confucianism
Shi Huang Di is today best known for his tomb, where the first of thousands of terra cotta soldiers were found in 1974.

He came to the throne at the age of 13 in 246 BCE and immediately began constructing this mausoleum. It took 36 years to complete.

During his later years, Shi Huang Di became obsessed with immortality; he became interested in alchemy and magic.

Army of the First Emperor of Qin in pits next to his burial mound, Lintong, China, Qin dynasty, ca. 210 BCE. Painted terracotta, Average figure 5’ 10” high.
• The terracotta figures were found in three separate pits, with an empty fourth pit also discovered.

• It is believed that the largest pit, holding over 6,000 figures of infantrymen, chariots and horses, was representative of the First Emperor’s main army.

• The second pit contains about 1,400 figures of cavalry and infantry along with chariots. This segment is thought to represent a military guard since it is much smaller than the first.

• The third pit contains the command unit, comprised of high ranking officers, lesser officers, and a war chariot drawn by four horses. It is the smallest of the four and contains 68 figures.
New excavations have illuminated naturalism employed on certain figures - previously thought lacking in ancient Chinese art. Both of these figures were entertainers; the figure at left holds a pole that may have been used for acrobatics. Shi Huang Di was provided with statues of entertainers to perform in the afterlife.

Photographs: National Geographic, O. Louis Mazzatenta
Qin Dynasty
221-206 BCE

Etruscan
500 BCE

Both
Terracotta
Etruscan Tombs

Etruscan beliefs about the afterlife may have been similar to those of the Egyptians.
The Mysterious Etruscans

• In recent years two Etruscan burial sites have been discovered northwest of Rome at Cerveteri and Tarquinia.
• Many of the tombs discovered contain beautifully preserved frescoed murals, which reveal a great deal about Etruscan society.
• Others are laid out like towns and reveal much about Etruscan city planning.
Cerveteri a city of tombs
Etruscan Necropolis at Cerveteri
• The necropolis near Cerveteri, contains thousands of tombs organized in a city-like plan, with streets, small squares and neighborhoods.

• The site contains very different types of tombs: trenches cut in rock; tumuli; and some, also carved in rock, in the shape of huts or houses with lots of structural details.

• These tombs provide the only surviving evidence of Etruscan residential architecture.
Figure 9-6  Plan of the Tomb of the Shields and Chairs, Cerveteri, Italy, second half of the sixth century BCE.
Before the 7th century BCE, the Etruscans cremated their dead. They buried the ashes in individual tombs or placed the ashes in cinerary urns.

During the 7th to the 4th century BCE they built tombs dug into the tufu, volcanic soil, landscape.
Etruscan Burial Sites

- The Etruscans believed in an afterlife that was closer to the Egyptians than the Greeks.
- We don’t know what their beliefs were, but we do know that they were materialistic like the Egyptians because items they used in real life (mirrors, jewelry, weapons) were placed in tombs.
- Tomb interiors were rich with carved decorations, such as stone beds with pillows, stone chairs and other furniture painted with tempera.
- Now many of the burial chambers in this necropolis are flooded with water. The ones open to tourists are very eerie.
- But in their day, the tombs would have been brightly painted and lit by candles.
- Only aristocrats could afford tombs.
Burial Chamber, Tomb of the Reliefs,
3rd century BCE
Tomb of the Reliefs

- The tomb consists of a single chamber, with shelves and niches in the walls.
- The ceiling is supported by two pillars, on which are reproduced objects from domestic and military use, as well as animals.
- The technique involved sketching the object on the wall, and then using terracotta clay to create the objects in relief with great detail.
- All of it was skillfully painted with vivid colors.
- All around the walls runs a frieze of helmets, spears, shields, perhaps emphasizing the participation of the deceased in military campaigns.
- Note that the tomb dates to the age of the wars with Rome, a little before end of the 4th Century BCE.
The beds reproduced in the niches around the walls were covered with cloths and pillows molded with remarkable realism.
Cerveteri Interior, carved directly into volcanic stone, tufa.
Sarcophagus from Cerveteri

c. 520 BCE Terra Cotta
• This is a masterpiece of Etruscan ceramic sculpture.

• While the man's squared shoulders and the woman's rounded face shows a Greek influence, the tender connubial theme is entirely Etruscan.

• **In Etruscan art and in life, women held a much higher role than in Greek culture.**

• In art, the wife of this nobleman was not only sculptured with her husband on the couch which is a lid to the sarcophagus, but always appeared with him in frescoes at banquets, public festivals and entertainments.

• The position of Etruscan women astonished the Greeks who relegated wives to a secondary position.
Etruscan Museum Volterra
Painted sarcophagus of Seianti Hanunia Tlesnasa
Etruscan, about 150-140 BCE
• 400 years after the terra cotta couple
• Much more Roman like
• She is depicted reclining upon a mattress and pillow, holding an open lidded-mirror in her left hand and raising her right hand to adjust her cloak.
• She wears a chiton or tunic with a high girdle, a purple-bordered cloak, and jewelry comprising a tiara, earrings, a necklace, bracelets and rings.

• Scientific testing of the woman's teeth indicates that she was probably about 50 to 55 years old at the time of her death..
• The rather youthful portrait is typical of the idealized representation found in the Hellenistic period of Etruscan art, when it was heavily influenced by the international culture of the Greek world.
Sarcophagus and lid with portraits of husband and wife

Etruscan, Late Classical or early Hellenistic Period,
Late 4th-early 3rd century BCE
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Tarquinia
• Tarquinia (c. 300- 400 BCE) is not as old as Cerveteri.
• But is a better known necropolis because of the painted burial chambers.
• More than 150 painted tombs have been discovered at Tarquinia. In all, more than 6,000 have been identified.
• However the site at Tarquinia is not as haunting as Cerveteri with tomb lined streets.
Tarquinia Tombs

- The necropolis of Tarquinia, also known as Monterozzi, contains 6,000 graves cut in the rock.
- It is famous for its 200 painted tombs, the earliest of which date from the 7th century BCE.
Tomb of the Leopards, c.470 BCE

- Leopard's tomb dates from about 470 BCE.
- On the pediment of the far wall is represented two leopards systemically placed, this gives the tomb its name.
- The roof is double sloping and decorated as a chessboard.
- On the walls is a funeral banquet in honor of the dead person.
• Tomb of the Leopards
• Men are usually painted red.
• Women are white.
• Etruscans were passionate about music which astounded the conservative early Romans.
• Greeks were scandalized by the way Etruscan women participated equally in banquets with men.
Etruscan Art was more similar to Minoan art than Greek or Egyptian.
Sculpture and Jewelry

Etruscans were VERY skilled in the areas of bronze sculpture and metal work.
After Etruria fell to the Romans, the metal work of the Etruscans continued to be held in high regard by both the Greeks and the Romans.

The Etruscans were highly skilled artisans not only in iron but also bronze, silver and copper, as well as elegant gold pieces.

Sadly, we have only a few examples of the Etruscan’s skill with bronze because after Rome occupied the area many of the bronze statues were sent to Rome to be melted down and made into bronze coins.

The statues like much of Etruscan art are characterized by their lively features.
Bronze chariot inlaid with ivory,
2nd quarter of the 6th century B.C.;

The Etruscans introduced that favorite vehicle of the Romans, the chariot. Bronze was made by mixing copper and tin and both of which the Etruscans possessed in abundance.
Statuette of a Rider 450-425 BCE

• Reflects an excellent understanding of human anatomy.
• Small solid statue
• Horse is missing.
• Probably a copy of a Greek original.
• Notice the short toga different from Greek style and soon adopted by the Romans.
She Wolf, c. 500 BCE
Bronze, glass paste eyes
The Legend

• According to the Roman mythology, the founders of Rome were **Romulus and Remus**.
• The twin-brothers were the supposed sons of the god Mars and the priestess Rhea Silvia.
• The story begins with their grandfather, Numitor, losing his throne to his brother, Amulius.
• After which, Numitor's daughter, Rhea Silvia, was made a Vestal Virgin by Amulius - which meant that she was made a priestess of the goddess Vesta and therefore forbidden to marry.
• However, the god Mars came to her in her temple and with him she conceived her twin sons, Romulus and Remus.
• As soon as they were born, Amulius fearing that the boys would grow up to overthrow him, had them placed in a bowl and thrown into the Tiber.
• **They were found by a she-wolf, who instead of killing them, looked after them and fed them with her milk, the she-wolf was helped by a woodpecker who brought them food too.**
• Interesting enough both these animals were sacred to Mars.
Sleep and Death

*Cista Handle*, 400-375 BCE
Chimera of Arezzo

- This statue of a Chimera is an excellent example of the Etruscan artistry.
- The Chimera is a Greek monster with a lion's head and body and a serpent's tail.
- A second head of a goat grows out of the left side of the body.
- This statue is made in the action of attack, the skin is stretched tightly over the muscles as it looks up into the face of an unseen adversary.
The Chimaera of Arezzo
Bronze statue found in Arezzo, Italy, in 1553.
Etruscan 5th century BCE
Ficoroni Cista
Palestrina, Italy, late 4th century BCE.

- The function and use of cistae are still unresolved questions.
- We can safely say that they were **used as funerary objects to accompany the deceased into the next world.**
- It has also been suggested that they were used as containers for toiletries, like a beauty case.
- Some recovered examples contained small objects such as tweezers, make-up boxes, and sponges.
Bronze model of the liver, used by the Etruscans to foretell the future.
• Bronze mirrors were very popular with the Etruscans.
• They were often engraved on the back like this one with a mythological scene.
• This scene depicts the Greek priest Calchas, who accompanied the Greek army and Agamemnon to Troy.
• The Greeks consulted him when they needed guidance from the gods.
• Calchas would then sacrifice an animal and read the signs from the gods in the liver.
• c.350 BCE
Etruscan Jewelry
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• “The Web Gallery of Art.” Available online at [http://www.wga.hu](http://www.wga.hu)