

The Etruscans occupied the region to the north of Rome, between the Arno and Tiber Rivers to the west of the Apennine Mountains. 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. This question was subject to active speculation among the Greeks.

Some Greeks held that the Etruscans were a branch of the Pelasgians, aboriginal inhabitants of the Aegean region, others such as Virgil thought they came from Lydia, a kingdom of western Anatolia. The Greek master historian Herodotus also ascribes the origin of the Etruscans to Lydia. Herodotus says the ancestors of the Etruscans were forced to emigrate from Lydia because of 18 years of hard times. The Lydians built ships and half of the population left under the leadership of Tyrrhenus, the son of the king of Lydia.

The Pelasgians may have been the Sea People who around 1200 B.C. invaded the Egyptian Empire. The Greek historian, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his *Early History of Rome* dismissed these theory and argued that the Etruscan were the aboriginal inhabitants of their area.

The question became more intriguing when, in the nineteenth century, 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.

Although the early history of the Etruscans is uncertain the later history is well known. By about 700 B.C. the major Etruscan cities had been founded. The Etruscan culture was flourishing during the sixth century B.C. As the Etruscan culture burgeoned it ran into constraint on its expansion due to strong cultures and geographic confinements bordering its home region. This led to an expansion into the Po River Valley to the northeast. Commercial rivalry of the Etruscans and Greeks led to military confrontation which, on balance, the Etruscans lost. By about 500 B.C. the Etruscans were losing not only to the Greeks but also to former tributary peoples such as the Romans. By 400 B.C. the Etruscans were being politically subordinated to the Romans. The Romans adopted numerous elements of Etruscan culture, including the Etruscan alphabet which the Etruscans had adopted from the Greeks.

ETRUSCAN TEMPLE

Etruscan temples were the same as Greek temples in some ways, but in other ways they were different. Like Greek temples, Etruscan temples had a stone room, the *cella*, on the inside, and they were on a platform that raised them above the ground. And, like Greek temples, they had peaked roofs and columns. But in Etruscan temples, the columns were only across the front, not all the way around. And the platforms of Etruscan temples were much higher, sometimes two meters high (about six feet) or even more, and they only had steps in the front, not all the way around like Greek temples. Etruscan temples

were usually built out of the local tufa and travertine, instead of marble. Also, Etruscan temples often had clay statues on the roof.

The Portonaccio Temple is the first Tuscan -type temple erected in Etruria (about 510 BC) and codified in the Augustan age by Vitruvio, the Tuscan-type temple, in other words Etruscan, was constituted by three cells sided by a double row of columns on the facade. This is an original set up with respect to the other types of constructions found in Etruria and the Tyrrhenian side of Italy, which have one cell with or without columns, seen in Greece and the Orient. The reconstruction proposed for the Portonaccio Temple presents a square 60 feet construction on a low podium (about 18 metres) and divided into a pronapse with two columns making up the facade between entrances, 24 feet deep and a group in the back made up of three 30 feet deep adjacent cells. The 21 foot columns were made of stuccoed tufa as were the walls, which inside the pronapse were decorated with various paintings on clay panels. The roof was in wood covered with polychrome terracotta. The terracotta was placed through a refined system of syllabic abbreviations and they were integrated with bronze inserts and a generous profusion of plastic inserts, mostly modelled by hand, among which a splendid series of grand antefixes (joint coverings) with the heads of Gorgone, Acheloo, Menade and Satyr.

ETRUSCAN TOMBS

The Etruscans attributed great importance to the cult of the dead, because it was also a means of asserting the prestige and power of a family. We can distinguish different periods in this cult and its development is also reflected in the typologies of the necropolises. In the earliest times, the Etruscans were closely attached to the conception of the continuation of a vital activity by the deceased after death.

The tomb was thus built like a house and given furnishings and decorations, both real and reproduced in miniature. Sometimes the walls were frescoed with scenes from daily life or the most important, serene and pleasant moments in the deceased's life. In the same way, cornices, beams, ceilings and frontons, intended to reconstruct the home environment, were painted or sculpted in the rock.

The most ancient examples of monumental tombs were built on the model of the dwelling then in use: a hut with a round or oblong floor-plan. These circular tombs were built using large blocks of stone and covered with a false dome obtained from the progressive inward projection of the rows of blocks until a last slab closed the roof. Access to the sepulchral chamber was through a short corridor where offerings of food or furnishings were often placed. When this type of tomb was abandoned, tombs excavated underground, first of all with a single room and then with several chambers, were used.

The tombs excavated completely underground, generally in hillsides, are defined as "hypogeal" tombs, while those excavated in flat land and covered by soil and gravel are known as "tumuli". This new type was characterized by a central chamber accessible from a long passage beyond which there were other chambers. The floor-plan could be very

complex with a passageway, lateral chambers and a central hall with columns and benches.

At times, the tumuli assumed monumental dimensions, with a diameter of over 90 feet and they contained various tombs of members of the same family. Examples of the first period can be seen in Cerveteri and can be linked to the evolution of the dwelling typologies contemporary with the necropolis (second half of the 7th century BC) when houses were divided into two or three rooms flanked and preceded by a sort of vestibule or built around a central courtyard.

From the mid 6th century BC and throughout the 5th century BC, there was another change in the plans of the necropolises. The new tombs were called "cubes" and were built side by side in rows, forming real cities of the dead with streets and squares. Inside the tombs there were only two chambers, and outside there were lateral steps leading to the top of the cube where there were altars for worship. This change reflects a profound modification in the social structure, with the establishment of a non-aristocratic class encouraging less ostentatious houses. Furthermore, due to the influence of the Greek world, the basic conceptions regarding the destiny of the dead had also undergone a change. The primitive faith in the "survival" of the deceased in their tombs had been replaced by the idea of a "kingdom of the dead", imagined along the model of the Greek Avernus.