

# Etruscans and Greeks in Pre-Roman Italy, 8th- 5th centuries BCE

A lecture on Rome's relationship with the Etruscans and the Greeks in the Italian Peninsula in the 8th-5th centuries BC.

## Etruscans and Greeks in Pre-Roman Italy, 8th- 5th centuries BCE

- Italy was a relative upstart in the context of developing civilizations in the mediterranean, but ripe for colonization by immigrants.
- Rome would have to overcome a diverse multi-cultural, Italy, which was a big step that gave her confidence to excel in her larger empire.

### Questions to Consider

1. How should we explain the prominences and declines of Etruscan and Greek civilizations in Italy?
2. What were their influences on early Rome?
3. Why did Romans, instead of Etruscans or Greeks, become masters of Italy?

### Sources for Pre-Roman Italy

1. Archaeological evidence
2. Greek and Roman writers

## Pre-Roman Italy

- Italy had been inhabited since 1200 BCE.
- In the bronze age and iron ages nothing spectacular occurred in Italy.
- Italy was quite culturally diverse- a stopping point for different migrations.
- The mountain ranges were not high enough to prevent travel through the peninsula, but were conducive to Italian unity.

### Origin Theories of Etruscans

- **Herodotus:** peoples migrated from Asia Minor.
- **Dionysius:** they are indigenous Italian people.
- **19th century Germans:** They migrated from central Europe.
- **Current theory:** They are descendants of earlier Villanovans; influenced by contacts with Easterners.
  - **Villanovans-** Iron Age people, (10th c. BCE), inhabited from Po River Valley to Latium. They cremated their dead and were a war-like people skilled in metallurgy.

### Etruria and the Po Valley



This map was prepared to accompany the book *The Romans from Village to Empire* by Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel Gargola and Richard J.A. Talbert, Oxford University Press, 2004.

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## Etruscan Government

1. *Lucumon* and council of advisors for each city
  - a. Roman tradition counted 12 cities
  - b. *Lucumon*- combined military, religious and judicial power
2. Symbols of power: lictors with *fascēs* (though officials did not always have these symbols)
3. Power was reflected in the people around them and focused on the influence over the people.

## Etruscan Family Structure / Status of Women

1. Evidence from Archaeology
  - a. Tomb paintings show husbands and wives together
  - b. Epitaphs have father's and mother's names
2. Evidence from literature
  1. Livy portrays Tanaquil, the wife of Tarquinius Priscus, king of Rome, as extremely influential in court politics

## Etruscan Tombs

### The Tombs of Cerveteri



Photo courtesy of Mike Wilson

### Etruscan Sarcophagus - Husband and Wife

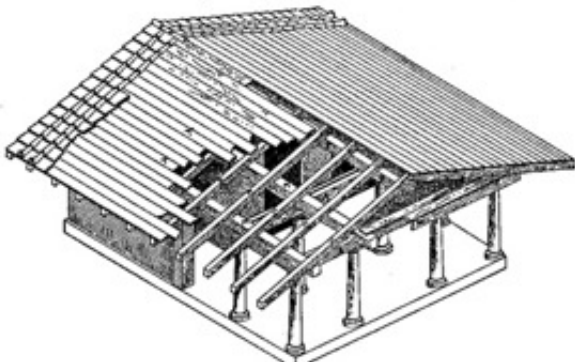


Photo by Sue Olsen. Image courtesy of the VROMA project at <http://www.vroma.org>

## Etruscan Religion

1. Polytheistic - Trinity of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva
2. *Disciplina*- knowing complex rules of ritual practice
  1. Priests have knowledge through knowledge of rituals
3. Divination - reading signs in nature, e.g. flight of birds or the weather.

## Etruscan temple design according to Vitruvius



Reconstruction of the Etruscan temple as described by Vitruvius;  
Wiegand in *La Glyptothèque Ny-Carlsberg*, München 1896-1912

- Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus
- Temple sits on large podium

## Etruscan Culture

1. Athletics as ritual and entertainment
  - a. cf. roughly contemporaneous *Iliad* - the funeral games of Patroclus
  - b. The source of gladiatorial combat
  - c. Sports played a large role in Etruscan society
2. Fine Arts
  - a. metallurgy; jewelry
  - b. sculpture
  - c. wall paintings
3. Architecture
  1. The development/perfection of the arch

## Etruscan Decline 6th-5th centuries BCE

1. No unifying political organization among cities
  1. Etruscans have a clan mentality, unlike Greek civic mentality
2. New wave of Greek immigration
3. Rise of Carthage
4. Pushed out of Campania by Samnites, Italian people living across the Apennines
5. The decline is gradual, not a catastrophic event

## Magna Graecia - by mid 8th c. colonies well established

1. Bay of Naples - Cumae
2. Gulf of Tarentum - Tarentum
3. Greek influences on Roman Culture
  - a. Fine Arts
  - b. Religion
  - c. Writing; alphabet
  - d. Literature

## Southern Italy and Sicily



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## Greek Decline in Italy

### 1. No unification of Greek colonies

1. Example of Thurii and Tarentum: The people of Thurii, shortly after being founded (circa 440 BCE) were already embroiled in a war with the people of Tarentum. Later the Thurii became completely dependent on Rome during Rome's conflicts with Carthage.

2. Conflict with Carthaginians in Sicily destabilized Greek influence.

## Questions

1. Why is Rome left in control?
2. Her political policies and military?
3. The Roman character?
4. Disorganization of her Italian neighbors compared to her own organization?
  1. *Romans'* thesis: Roman military organization was more communal and therefore more effective.

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