

CHAPTER 9- *ITALY BEFORE THE ROMANS*

The Art of Etruscans

SUMMARY:

- Introduces the student to the work of a group of people inhabiting the central area of Italy known as *Etruria* (today Tuscany). (Perhaps they came from East to North) Today known as the Etruscans (Gr. Tyrrhenians).
- Many of their works reflective of Greek Archaic motifs yet following the traditions of great cultures
- The Etruscans influenced Roman architecture especially in temple construction.
- Romans followed the design the Etruscans by setting their temples on podiums and focusing to a front entrance. The structure was meant to be approached from the front and to function as a structure not a sculptural mass as in the Greek tradition.
- The Etruscans were well traveled and traded throughout the Ancient World. The area Etruria was rich in mineral wealth; iron, tin, copper and silver. These natural resources became the source of export wealth, which allowed the Etruscans to become major importers of luxury goods. (Basis of info comes from the tomb excavations.)
- The dead were buried with items, which reflected their economic circumstance as in the tradition of the Ancient world. Similar to Ancient Egypt, Etruscan tombs were painted with scenes taken from life; banquets, recreational activities, generally scenes that expressed joie de vivre or lively and joyful times.
- Also, Etruscans constructed and used sarcophagi for burials again similar to the ancient Egyptians. However the sarcophagus would have a portrait of either the single occupant or the husband and wife, in a relaxed and joyous pose, unlike their Egyptian counterparts, which were stiff and formal. And equally important difference was tombs depicted women attending the banquets, reveling in the occasion. This was the antithesis of the Greek tradition. Only female servants or prostitutes could attend these events.
- The last Etruscan city fell to the Romans in 273 BCE and Roman citizenship was granted to the Etruscans in 89 BCE.

LECTURE:

Among the tomb treasures excavated were gold jewels. The gold fibula (pin) from Regolini-Galassi Tomb is an example of this type of luxury item and one of the hallmarks of Etruscan Society.

- Illustrates the benefits of import goods



9-01 Fibula with Orientalizing lions, from the Regolini-Galassi Tomb, Cerveteri, Italy, ca. 650–640 BCE. Gold, approx. 1' 1/2" high. Vatican Museums, Rome.

- **And how these motifs are re-designed to fit the aesthetic definitions of the society importing them (shows the influences coming from the East. The stalking lions and the rosettes, which form a double circle, one ringing the lions and the other circling the smaller interior, bringing us back to the Achaemenid Empire. The use of the lion as a decorative device was common in the Orient. The lion-headed bracelets are illustrative of just such influences.**
- **In the East, the lion was a symbol of power and might, we have many objects, which show the leader or king in the act of killing lions.**



2.24 Assyrian Hunting Lions

This was to illustrate a two-fold point, the power and might of the king; Ashurbanipal fearlessly hunting the lions and the second portion of the two-fold was to illustrate the power of “man over beast”. This created the king (Ashurbanipal) an almost divine status and emphasized his invincibility either at war or at play.

- **The Etruscan did not use the lion motif as a representation of kingly power, but rather as an adornment to be used by both men and women.**
- **This fibula (brooch or pin attaches to the garment at the shoulder and is a fine example of Etruscan metalwork. This ornament was worn and used by a woman.**
- **The quality of the craftsmanship and gold are the indicators for both social status and wealth.**
- **The redesign of the lion motif into a gentler and softer design demonstrates the re-use of design elements.**
- **The Etruscan artist redefines the motif to fit into the cultural context of the patron and the cultural group itself.**



9.1

- **Great diversity of the Ancient World and the effectiveness of trade as a tool for cultural dissemination of ideas as artistic motifs both griffin motif (Greeks dated c. 650 BCE.**

- Achaeminid, Greek and Etruscan share the motif, griffin but each group has fashioned the motif to fit into its own particular cultural context.

PAINTING INTERIORS

Etruscan Tombs

- Witness moment in time and events that were considered popular or important to Etruscan society.
- Same concept with the Egyptian and the great tombs.
- Etruscan society the tombs were important as well.

Certain similarities or commonalities between Egypt and Etruria:

- Both tombs have walls that painted.

Compare: Tomb of Nebamun



3.31



9.8

Leopards,

banqueters, and musicians, detail of mural paintings in the Tomb of the Leopards, Tarquinia, Italy, ca. 480–470 BCE.

- Group of musicians and dancers in both same theme
- Difference is in depiction and the representation of the themes.
- Both tombs served a purpose, houses for the dead.
- Both give us a view into aristocratic life styles, but the flexibility of the Etruscan musicians is in direct opposition to the rigid and formalized presentation of the Egyptian musicians.
- And even more dramatic difference is the depiction of the dancers from both tombs. The girls from Nebamun's tomb are posed and rigid. The Etruscan dancer presents vitality and dynamic movement, which is not present in its Egyptian counterpart.
- We see the dancer striding across the space with open animated arm movements and gestures.

ETRUSCAN SCULPTURE



9.4

Sarcophagus with reclining couple, from Cerveteri, Italy, ca. 520 BCE.

- Etruscan sculpture demonstrated an innovative vision when creating sarcophagi. Unlike the Greeks the Etruscan sarcophagus could show a “loving couple” engaged in a common activity such as this couple reclining on a banqueting couch. The

cover of the sarcophagus forms the bed of the couch and the four legs supporting the sarcophagus become the couch legs as well.

- The artist has even gone so far as to curve the sarcophagus to form a pillow. This sarcophagus continues the joy of the banquet or dinner even into the afterlife.
- Cultural identity was augmented by the presentation of the couple in a clearly identified daily activity.
- The position of women in Etruscan society was articulated by the sarcophagus, which presents women as wives attending banquets with their husbands, an unheard of concept in Greece. This type of presentation showing women in loving conjugal relationships was not unusual.



9.14 Sarcophagus of Lars Pulena, from Tarquinia, Italy, early second century BCE.

- At the end of Etruscan sovereignty, they continued the tradition of creating a monument to contain the deceased that highlight a particular emotion moment.
- Lars Pulena's facial expression is more somber, perhaps not thinking seriously of death but rather meditating on the state of his city's circumstances.
- Etruria was in a constant state of siege and eventually Rome annexed Tarquinia in the early 2nd C. BCE. These developments dealt a deathblow to the independence of Etruria. These political events continued to be reflective in the works produced during this late period.