

CHAPTER 34 Mediterranean Ferment

The Mediterranean was in ferment in the seventh century BC. Shortly after 700 BC the Puni had spread westward to establish colonies along the coast of North Africa, at Carthage and Utica, and in Sicily. The Ionian Greeks of Chalcis and Eretria in Euboea had planted colonies on the island of Ischia in the bay of Naples, at Cumae on the opposite mainland, and on Sicily. Meanwhile other Greeks were moving farther north along the coast of Italy. About this time the Etruscans also first appeared in Italy between the Arno and the Tiber rivers. Over the next two centuries Puni, Greek and Etruscan colonies proliferated throughout the western Mediterranean, and beyond the straits of Gibraltar. Rome was not yet born.

The exact origin and ethnic identity of the Etruscans is shrouded in mystery. The Greeks called them the Tyrsenoi. Classical writers widely referred to them as the Tyrrhenians. They were masters of the sea; the Greeks feared them. Athenaeus states that they stole Hera's statue on the island of Samos. Plutarch, Eustathius and Philochorus described their conquest and sack of Athens. Palaephatus and Strabo tell of their control and unceasing threat in the Tyrrhenian and Ionian seas and on the coast of Sicily. Other ancient authors describe their colonization of Corsica, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and the Iberian coast of Spain. Archeology supports the historical traditions of the maritime power of the Etruscans. Vast numbers of objects of eastern, Sardinian, Punic and Hellenic origin were recovered from Etruscan tombs, denoting an intense maritime activity that cannot be ascribed merely to Punic and Greek shipping. Numerous archeological finds testify to the spread of Etruscan civilization along the shores of Greece, Italy, Sardinia, Corsica, North Africa, southern France, and Iberia. The Tyrrhenian and Adriatic Seas both received their names from these people; the Etruscan port of Adria was located at the mouth of the Po river in the upper Adriatic.

The Etruscans used a language which also has not been identified. It cannot be classified as Indo-European; neither was it Semitic. Like Basque, which has survived as an island in a sea of Indo-European languages, Etruscan apparently belongs to other linguistic origins. While thousands of funerary inscriptions exist hardly any texts of length have been discovered. One was written on the wrappings of a mummy found in Egypt and another exists on a stone slab from Kaminia on the Greek island of Lemnos. Besides proper names and funerary expressions few words are known. Neither is much known of the Etruscan grammar.

Some scholars believe the Tyrrhenians originated in the Balkans, others believe they came from areas farther east in Scythia, or from Asia Minor. Herodotus said they came from Lydia. The remarkable onomastic (proper name) similarities between Etruria and Asia Minor also suggests ties with those regions. If they migrated from regions

of the Black Sea, or if they came from Lydia, they could have left colonies scattered here and there in the Aegean, including Lemnos. They implanted themselves upon a native Urnfield culture in Italy where they made their home.

The practice of cremation with the use of burial urns suggested to some German scholars that the Etruscans migrated from northern European regions. Viewed from north of the Alps this seems an attractive solution to their origins, but few scholars accept it today. This view ignores the fact that they not only cremated -- they also buried the bodies of their dead. Both practices continued in different regions of Etruria down into Roman times. Their exquisite tombs provided much of the information we have on them. Dionysius of Halicarnassus assessed the writings of many ancient authors to claim that they were autochthonous. However, the presence of foreign cultural elements does not support this thesis that they developed from an indigenous population.

As stated by Pallottino^{TE}:

It is unnecessary . . . to postulate a deep ethnic transformation at the beginning of the "Villanovan" (Urnfield) period; but rather an impulse, a determining ferment which would have brought about the crystallization of "Tyrrhenian" ethnic elements into an Etruscan nation in those territories that lie north of the Tiber.

Pallottino ascribed this impulse, this determining ferment, to the natural environment of Italy and to a combination of diverse cultural elements. He did not believe the Etruscan civilization developed merely from a foreign people bringing their own culture with them. Too many native elements, such as cremation, were present to admit merely an invasion from a foreign culture. Also, too many other elements from the Greeks and the Puni were present to admit of an exclusive cultural source for what became the Etruscan nation.

The difficulty in attempting to understand the origins of the Etruscans derives from two factors: first, that they appeared so quickly without recognizable prehistory, and second, that their culture was highly advanced. The prehistory of the Canaanites is clearly evident fifteen hundred years prior to this time. The prehistory of the Greeks also goes back into Mycenaean and Minoan times. But the Etruscans appear as though from nowhere. The architectural designs of their buildings, the rectangular layout of their cities with paved streets fifty feet wide, and the complex water-supply and sewer systems rivaled anything built by the later Romans. These developments laid the groundwork for engineering techniques used throughout the life of the Roman empire, many of which have come down to modern times.

The impact of the highly advanced state of the Etruscan culture should not be minimized. They were building beautiful cities before Rome was conceived as a nation. Whoever these Tyrrhenians may have been they brought with them the knowledge of iron, a knowledge which also was to help transform the western world. Much of their iron was mined on the island of Elba off the Etruscan coast, while a major iron-working center was located in the city of Populonia.

Part of the argument for a foreign invasion is based on that strong *orientalizing influence* which appears in the seventh century, and which impacted so heavily on so many Mediterranean sites. Either the Etruscans were borrowing pottery, tool and decorative techniques from the Near East, or a separate culture brought those techniques with them. However, this orientalizing influence could not have been the base for the unique Etruscan developments. The presence in Greek sites, as well as in Iberia, shows that the influence spread across all cultures. Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Syriac, and other Asiatic motifs mingled in hybrid combinations. Its inspiration has been sought in the cities and ports of mixed cultures, such as those of Canaan and Cyprus, but its spread and elaboration is thought due largely to the Greeks.

Of course, another possibility not entertained by our modern scholarly world is the subtle migration and high cultural persuasion of groups of wandering Iberi whose origins were in the cities of the Medes.

Pallottino expressed the opinion that the impression gained from Etruscan tombs of this unique orientalizing period, with their sumptuous fittings and replicas of their houses, is that the architecture, and the forms of the culture they represent, were a development of local tendencies, while the spirit and characteristics of the decorative elements were external and acquired, and may be attributed to the oriental "fashion"^{TE}.

In other words, a persuasive and pervasive cultural force was at work which came from the eastern regions of the Mediterranean, but which has not been identified.

The social forces were ubiquitous. Not only were the Etruscans bringing their civilization to the shores of Greece -- the Greeks were establishing trading colonies in Etruscan ports in Italy. Although scholars would attempt to rigidly classify boundaries between Punic, Greek and Etruscan geographical areas, examination of a map of the Mediterranean shows how profusely they scattered their cities and colonies among one another. This was an era of great social interchange and interaction; local and temporary disputes did not detract from this tremendous cultural cross-sifting.

During the seventh and sixth centuries the Etruscans spread north and south to become masters of Italy from Naples to the Po valley across the Apennine mountains. As a result, Etruscan ethnic and political continuity was established from the Gulf of Salerno to the Tridentine Alps^{TE}.

In the folk traditions of Rome several Etruscan kings were counted among the first Roman rulers.

Roman Dynasty:

Romulus 753-716

Numa Pompilius 716-672

Tullus Hostilius 672-640

Ancus Marcius 640-616

Etruscan Dynasty

Tarquinius Priscus 616-578

Servius Tullius 578-534

Tarquinius Superbus 534-509

This list is not regarded as valid history. Roman rulers certainly did not come before the Etruscans. Romulus was a mythological character, not a real one. The form of the Roman names is artificial, and the length of the reigns also seem devised. Archeology does not support the city of Rome existing at such early dates. The Etruscan dynasties fit within the context of Etruscan power and control of Italy but those names also are subject to question. No written histories date from this period, including the establishment of the Roman republic in 509; the list is strictly traditional. Although the might of the Roman empire is well nigh supreme in the minds of those of us who are a part of that great legacy we must remember that Rome had her roots in the Etruscan civilization, and that her origins are shrouded in myth.

... A careful study of the archeological documents in our possession is sufficient to persuade us that both the predominant role and absolute chronological priority in the formation of the civilization of ancient Italy belong to Etruria. ... Latium and Campania revolved within the orbit of Etruria and Greece. ... (Originally) there mainly subsisted a rather archaic (Roman) village culture; its definite transformation into an urban culture, into a true and proper civilization, was at first due to the political predominance and cultural radiance of Etruria, and, later, to the unification of the peninsula achieved by Rome. ... Unity was mainly arrived at in Italy well before the unification achieved by Rome. This unity was mainly due to the political dominance and cultural prestige of the Etruscans^{TE}.

The Etruscans were highly religious, with a strong belief in an afterlife. Rich treasures accompanied the dead and detailed replicas of familiar everyday surroundings were created for the enjoyment of those who had passed on. There was great family love; many of the sarcophagi show husband and wife in sculpture, holding hands as they did in life. They observed many of the pagan practices of Asia Minor, Assyria and Mesopotamia, divining their fate from thunder and lightning, sheep's livers, and flights of birds. These were the practices so dearly beloved by the Hebrew tribes and so severely condemned by Yahweh. The Etruscans also greatly respected certain geographical features, trees and rocks, as did the Hebrews, illustrated by Shiloh and Bethel, the oaks of Mamree, and Jacob's pillar stone.

According to Dionysius the Etruscans called themselves the *Ratsenna*. This designation is confirmed by inscriptions which carry the words *rasna* and *rasnal* in contexts which show reference to themselves. Much scholarly speculation has revolved around this name. Some believe it might derive from Semitic *erets* = "earth." It also might be related to the Hebrew root *ratsah*⁷⁵²¹ "to delight in," "to be pleased with," or "to accept kindly." The female plural imperative in the Hebrew Pi'el form is *ratsenah*, literally "be satisfied," "by paying off a debt."

Of the few known Etruscan words a number find parallels in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and other languages^{TE}.

Etruscan Parallels With Latin

Etruscan *pui, puia* = **wife**. Compare Latin, apparently derived forms, as offspring of the wife, *puer* = **boy** and *puella* = **girl**.

Etruscan *suplu* = **piper**. Compare Latin *subulo*.

Etruscan Parallels With Indo-European

Etruscan *ais, eis* = **god**, *eiser* = **gods**, *aisna* = **divine or divine service**.

Greek *osios* = **pious, devout, sacred**.

A common I-E root inflection of the verb to be" = Sanskrit *as-*, Greek *es-*, Latin *es-*, Gothic *is-*, and modern English *is*. A god is one that *Is*.

Etruscan *sacni, sacniu* = **sacred place or action**, and *sacnisa* = **consecrate**.

Latin *sacer* = **holy** and *sacre* = **devout**; English *sacred*.

Etruscan *ama, ame, amce* = **to be**.

Common I-E root in Sanskrit *asmi*, Greek *eimi*, Gothic *im*, Irish *am* and English *am*, all from the first person singular, from the verb **to be**.

Etruscan *verse* = **fire** and *versie* = **concerning fire**.

Compare with Umbrian *pir*, Greek *pur*, Dutch and Flemish *vuur* and *vier*, Old Teutonic **fuir*, from which we get our English **fire**.

Etruscan *papa* = grandfather.

(This is a very common word found in most modern Indo-European languages.)

Etruscan *nefis, nefis* = **nephew**.

Latin *nepos* = **nephew, grandson, descendent**

Old English *nefa* = **nephew, stepson, grandson, second cousin**, from whence modern English *nephew*. Note the Latin "p" for "f" substitution.

Etruscan *thruna* = **power, sovereignty**.

Compare Hesychius with Greek *drouna*.

This word came into English via French, Latin *thronus*, and Greek *thronos* = **elevated seat**.

Etruscan *maru, marunu, marniu*, and so on = **magistrate**.

Umbrian *maro*.

Compare also with *mary* in Near Eastern texts = **noble or warrior**.

This is a clear Semitic source.

Etruscan *cerur* = **pottery** is found in English *ceramic*, (originally *keramic*), from Greek *keramicus* = **pottery** and *keramiki* = **potter's art**.

Other Etruscan and Indo-European Parallels

Etruscan	Latin	Greek	English
vinum	vinum		wine
leu	leo		lion
culixna		culixni	(cup)
cupe	cuppa		
cupa	cup		cask, tub
lextumuza	lexuthos		small pitcher
pruxis	proxous		pitcher
putere	potir		pottery
qutun	kuthu		name of vase
athre	atrium		part of a building

Etruscan and Hebrew Parallels

Etruscan *mula, muli, mulu, mulune, mulunice*, and so on = **to dedicate**.

Hebrew root *malak*⁴³⁹⁰ = **to fill, be full**; *mallu* = **consecration**, Exod 29:22, Lev 8:33.

Compare Hebrew *malak* = **king, angel**, an ambassador from God, a dedicated or consecrated one.

Etruscan *suth, sutanas, suthce* = **to place, to stand**.

Also *sathe, sathena, sathene, sathas, setirune* = **to establish**.

Hebrew *sheeth*⁷⁸⁹⁶ = **to settle down, and to abide**.

In the Pi'el it means **to settle down, to establish**, as in one's residence.

In the Hif'il it means **to place, to set in array**^{BDB}.

Refer Exod 23:31, I Sam 2:8, and so on.

Note the anglicized *Seth*, Adam's son, a name derived from this root.

In Arabic *sheth* means the **seat**, as the **buttocks**, and also **foundation**.

Etruscan *lauxume* = **king, prince**.

Compare with Latin *lucumo*.

Hebrew *lakham*³⁸⁹⁸ = **fight, engage in battle, wage war**. See Brown, Driver and Briggs^{BDB}.

Etruscan *murs* = **sarcophagus, urn**.

Compare with Latin *mors* = **death**,

Sanskrit *marā* = **death**,

Irish *marth* = **dead**,

Lithuanian *murti* = **to die**,

Greek and Latin *mort-* whence **mortal**

Old Teutonic and Gothic *murthro* = **to die**,

whence English *murder* and *mortify*.

Compare also Latin *mortuari* and English *mortuary*.

Also compare with Hebrew *mote*⁴¹³¹ = **to waver, slip, fail**, and *muth*⁴¹⁹¹ = **to die**.

Etruscan also has *mutna*, and *mutana*, again, from limited context, translated as sarcophagus.

Etruscan *caru, carsi, caresri, cerine*, = **to make, to build**.

Hebrew *kur*⁶⁹⁷⁹ = **to trench, throw forth, wall up, build**,

but found in biblical application in the sense of estop **from a wall**,

hence opposite in use: **break down, cast out, destroy**.

Inflected forms are *keer*⁷⁰²⁴, and *kerah*⁷⁰²³, and found in the Bible as **wall, town, and fortress**.

See Lev 14:37, Ps 62:3. See also the place name *Kir* and *Kir-Haresh* in Moab, and different inflections.

Many items of common and household use could have been borrowed from Greece through trade. But it is clear that Latin inherited words from Etruscan.

Strikingly, a considerable number show parallel phonetics and meaning with Hebrew or Puni words. These are in basic verb roots, which show they were more than borrowings of the names of objects from commerce and trade. The evidence suggests that a strong Semitic influence affected the Etruscan language.

This could come about only if foreign ethnic groups infiltrated and interbred with the Tyrrhenian population to leave an imprint on basic elements of the language. If the Puni were engaged merely in trade we would expect them to have no more influence than did the Greeks. The effect of the Puni language should be not more than on everyday objects and items of trade, or in technical practices. But the evidence indicates a mixing of languages; hence a mixing of people.

Because of the close, very nearly identical, affinities of the Phoenician language with Hebrew, we might assign this Semitic influence to the Puni. The Puni, if pushed out of their homes along the coast of Canaan, may have done more than create their own settlements in the western Mediterranean. They may have actually infiltrated among other people, including the Etruscans. Hebrew people did not engage in maritime activities, neither did they establish colonies that have been identified. Ancient historians do not describe the movement of Hebrew people, nor have they been identified through archeology.

Therefore, if a Semitic influence other than Puni existed, that influence cannot be connected directly to Hebrew tribes. However, if the Hebrew tribes had been resettled among the cities of the Medes, perhaps they were no longer recognized as Hebrew. They might now go by different names, most likely by *Ibri* or *Iberi*. We must examine ancient records according to the identifications used in those ancient times, not in the simplistic ideas of "Hebrews" somehow spreading from their familiar homeland in Palestine. If we could discover those ancient identities, and the locations of the people, we might acquire a better understanding of how they were sifted among the nations.

Furthermore, the close affinities between Puni and Hebrew would prevent us

from distinguishing different social influences strictly from language.

The profound nature of the Semitic influence may be inferred from the few Etruscan cognates identified in Hebrew. If the limited number of known Etruscan words show a percentage of parallel with Hebrew, how much more the entire language?

If a Semitic influence affected the Etruscan language, it should show not only in vocabulary, but also in morphology and syntax. Since we know very little of the Etruscan language this cannot be vigorously tested. On the other hand, depending upon the nature and degree of interbreeding, vocabulary, morphology and syntax may each have been affected differently. If the influence carried down into Latin it may have also left its imprint there. We shall examine this possibility shortly.

About the time the Tyrrhenians were grasping control of Italy other groups were moving into the Iberian peninsula, not only along the Iberian sea coast, but also up the Guadalquivir River valley from the Gulf of Cadiz. Ancient authors knew the latter as the Tartessians, named after Tartessos of biblical fame, Hebrew Tarshish. From this valley they spread into central Spain and southern Portugal. As far as is known from inscriptions, their language, like the Etruscan, was not Indo-European. The relationship among movements of people into the Iberian peninsula, whether Tartessian, Iberian, or other is not clear.

The use of the alphabet was different among the Etruscans, the Iberians, and the Tartessians, suggesting differences in phonetics among the various groups. The Etruscans did not use the voiced stops, the "b," "d," and "g" sounds, but used only the unvoiced "p," "t," and "k." They also confused the "o" and "u" vowels.

(The explosive sounds of b-p, d-t, and g-k are made with the lips, hard-front palate, and soft-back palate respectively: labial, palatal, and velar. The "b," "d" and "g" are called voiced stops because the air is held back to make an explosive sound when spoken.)

Curiously the Iberians not only used both the voiced and unvoiced stops -- they invented special symbols for the combinations of the vowels, a syllabic representation to ensure that they would not be misidentified in script. This strange emphasis on the stops leads one to speculate that there was a desire to show readers the exact form of the sound, necessary only if the vowels could be confused when used with the stops. Did this need arise because groups were mixing, some who used the stops, and some who did not? Was this also to ensure full recognition of all the vowels, again because of possible confusion, as shown by the Etruscan "o" and "u?" Once invented did these practices then continue after their need was forgotten? We simply do not know enough about the Iberian language to answer these questions, but it is obvious that invention was at work and that it was filling the needs of people who were in a state of social flux.

Connections among Etruscans, Lemnians and Iberians is noted by similarities in words found in each of the regions:

Etruscan *seruntho* -- Lemnian *zerona* -- Iberian *serona*;

Etruscan *vana* -- Lemnian *vana*;

Etruscan and Iberian *alisno/alsi/alsina* forms.

Unless we learn more about the respective languages we cannot say how they were related to one another.

The Mediterranean ferment of the seventh century BC could easily condition the views of Eberi/Ibri who had been transported to the cities of Assyria and Media. As they gazed westward they should have been able to recognize the amenable environment for migration which prevailed throughout all those lands, with intensive trade, commerce and interchange among Puni, Greeks, Etruscans, and natives. With their Puni brothers as active participants in that widespread ferment they could easily blend with the movements of people. It was an ideal opportunity for scattering in the farther shores of Spain, as well as into the hinterlands of Europe, and to Teutonic and Keltic tribes. It was this ferment which brought that great orientalizing influence, the use of iron, and cultural upheaval which forever changed the destiny of the western nations and the world.