Discovering Etruscan and Greek Influences on Roman Civilization

Assignment to hand in: Notecards for Aspects of Culture

Step 1: Introduction - Look at the pictures below and read the following text:

Ancient Etruria was located in the region occupied by present-day Tuscany, at the top of the boot-shape of Italy. It was bounded by the Arno River in the north, and the Tiber River in the south. The volcanic landscape of Etruria rendered the geography dramatic, with steep gorges and rough cliff faces overlooking rushing streams. Etruscans, the forebears of the Romans, made their home there for over 900 years, from 1200 B.C.E. to the beginning of the Roman conquest in 300 B.C.E.

By the sixth century B.C.E., Etruscan civilization had reached its height of industry and luxury. Considered outstanding seafarers and harsh military opponents at this time, the Etruscans were also known for their enterprising trade relationships. Their favorite trading partner was Greece, and the two cultures influenced one another markedly, from architectural styles to sporting events. Etruscan merchants and their customers were particularly fond of Grecian pottery, and modern excavations of Etruscan tombs have yielded more examples of Greek vases than are contained in Greece itself. In return, Etruscan wine and olive oil trade to Greece and elsewhere flourished.

Legend states that at the beginning of the Etruscan Iron Age, circa 753 B.C.E., the city of Rome was founded by twin sons of the war God Mars, Romulus and Remus. The boys had been abandoned by their divine father and Etruscan mother at birth and were raised by a female wolf, who had taken pity on the crying babies left in a forest near her den. When they grew up, the brothers became involved in a bitter quarrel about which was destined to greatness and the rulership of kingdom. Romulus killed Remus and founded his city in the region of Latium, on seven hills along the Tiber River, 16 miles from the Tyrrhenian Sea. Romulus decided that the city's first emblem would be the image of the she-wolf that had raised him and his brother. He became Rome's first king, and began a line of Etruscan rulers of Rome.

Scholars have yet to determine if historical figures similar to Romulus and Remus ever lived. However, they have determined that Rome was first settled by a people called the Latins. The Latins settled on several hills near the Tiber River between 1000 B.C.E. and 800 B.C.E. Over time, other tribes from central Italy joined the Latins. Around 500 B.C.E., the Etruscans united these groups and formed the city-state of Rome.

Step 2: Examining Aspects of Culture: Complete the Notecards for Aspects of Culture by looking at the pictures below and reading the corresponding text.
Etruscan Architecture

The arch was one of the main features of Etruscan architecture. Early examples of Etruscan arches, dating from the fourth century B.C.E., are still standing. They consist of two pillar-like bases called piers, which supported a series of wedge-shaped stones called voussoirs (pronounced voo-SWARZ). The voussoirs are arranged in a semicircle, and are held in place by a central stone, or keystone, that carries the weight of the entire curving structure. Some scholars believe that the arch was adapted from the shape of the openings to caves, which housed the first Etruscan shrines. Centuries later, stately stone arches were still put to public use. They formed the ceremonial entryways to religious and other civic structures, and were set in high walls to mark the entryway to prosperous Etruscan towns.

Most of what scholars have discovered about Etruscan domestic architecture comes from the structure of funeral objects and temples. Cinerary urns from the Early Iron Age (circa 1000-750 B.C.E.), which held the ashes of cremated Etruscans, were shaped to look like round hut structures with conical thatched roofs and arching doors. The huts had windows - some fixed with shutters - and round chimney pipes poking up through the roofs and connected to a central hearth within. Tombs of wealthy Etruscans from the sixth century B.C.E. suggest more extensive dwelling-places. They had a formal arched entryway with large cylindrical columns, and a series of rooms arranged around a large central room - perhaps representing a courtyard where the family gathered. The exteriors of Etruscan homes may have resembled Etruscan temples. These temples were always elevated and had to be entered by climbing steps. Temples were square and had a top-heavy appearance, with a large, triangular tiled roof decorated with friezes painted in many colors. Three unfired brick and plaster walls formed the back of the temple, and the front plaster wall contained several arched doorways in a row.

Etruscan Engineering

Etruscans were highly skilled engineers who managed a diverse territory that included mountainous, dry, rocky, and swampy terrain. They used their expertise to build a complex system of roads, many of which are still in existence. They also built elaborate wide-span bridges from interlocking wooden planks reinforced at both ends with rock pillars. The most remarkable engineering feat of the Etruscans was the cuniculus (pronounced kew-NIK-yoo-uss), a multi-use irrigation trench. The cuniculus consisted of an underground trench cut at a slight incline into the earth, with a
series of vertical shafts cut downward to join the trench and spaced roughly 30 yards apart. As the Etruscans population increased and farming became sophisticated, the cuniculus was used as an irrigation device. A cuniculus would be cut perpendicular to a flowing stream, bisecting it. The water from the stream would be diverted into the inclined trench through an inlet, would rise to the openings of the vertical shafts, and then overflow, watering the fry land marked out for agriculture. The last shaft in the row was connected to an outlet, leading to a dry valley. The outlet allowed the water to continue flowing into the dry valley, creating a new stream. Cuniculi were also used to drain waterlogged soil, and as conduits to carry water to larger Etruscan cities. Cuniculi were the forerunners of the Roman aqueducts and sewage systems.

Etruscan Government

In the eighth century B.C.E., Etruria was made up of individualized city-states, each under the rule of a king. The kings acted as high priests during religious festivals as well as commanders-in-chiefs in battle. All Etruscan kings dressed in similar official garments. Each wore a flowing purple robe and carried a bronze scepter topped by a carved eagle. Each sat on an ivory throne that folded and was portable. During royal processions, the king was preceded by a official, who carried the emblem of royal power, the fasces (pronounced FASS-eez): a bundle of sticks with the blade of an ax protruding from its center. The sticks in the fasces symbolized the king's power to destroy and rebuild his city-state if necessary; the ax symbolized his right to punish and execute wayward subjects. The fasces also signified that the king was the ultimate judge in any matters of civil justice within his territory. There is evidence that heated rivalries may have existed between neighboring city-states. Early Etruscan kings were the first to organize their soldiers into the tightly-knit and heavily armed military formation known as the phalanx (pronounced FAL-anx). The Roman historian Livy has written about an elite Etruscan military and political organization known as the League of Twelve Cities whose members participated in annual religious festivals, athletic games, and national elections. The names of the Twelve Cities are unknown, but scholars believe them to be the most prosperous and heavily populated of Etruria's many towns.
Etruscan Metalworking

The Etruscans were talented artisans, who were particularly respected for their metalwork. **Etruscan metalworkers used raw copper, lead, iron, tin, silver, gold, and alloys such as bronze.** They fashioned these metals into a variety of objects using the sophisticated techniques of granulation, incision, and stamped decoration. **Among the prized Etruscan metal objects were utilitarian household goods, such as bronze agricultural tools, drinking and storage vessels made of lead, and iron cauldons.** Metal religious objects included bronze ceremonial urns and devotional statues. Luxury items such as bronze mirrors and candlesticks, gold clothing-fasteners, or fibulae (pronounced FIB-yoo-lee), and elaborate gold jewelry set with gemstones have been found in the tombs of wealthy Etruscans. Gold was also used by Etruscan dentists to construct dental bridges, crowns, and false teeth - which were considered very fashionable by wealthy Etruscan women.

Perhaps the most sought-after metalwork were Etruscan-designed armor and weaponry. Tough leather sandals reinforced with strips of lead or silver gave Etruscan foot soldiers and gladiators an advantage when stepping on rough terrain. **Protective bronze helmets adapted from Greek design had added neck and throat guards.** Etruscans also wore heavy leather vests for combat with special plates of bronze over their hearts. They carried sturdy bronze daggers, clubs, shields, and spears. Military horses wore bronze plates across their chests and had silver and bronze bits and bridles. Musicians accompanied solders and gladiators into combat playing rousing marches on trumpets made of bronze and copper.

Etruscan Mysticism

The Etruscans believed the Gods gave them signs embedded in nature and that they needed to appease the Gods to prevent calamity. Diviners interpreted these signs using an extensive collection of religious treatises, collectively called the Etrusca Disciplina. This reference work outlined the three major areas of divination: interpreting lightning and the flight of birds, assessing the stars to lay out a new town, and reading the entrails of sacrificed animals. All three areas of divination relied heavily on the study of the sky. Unpredictable weather
conditions such as hail, rain, wind, and thunder were considered evidence of the supreme power of the Sky Gods. Etruscan diviner drew maps of the sky, apportioning certain regions to certain Gods. Lightning was believed to be the most revealing of the Sky Gods' communications. The frequency of lightning flashes, the area of the sky from which it originated, and the length of its crooked streaks could foretell victory or defeat in battle. Likewise, seasonal migrations of bird flocks could indicate a poor harvest or a diminished water supply. At night, the position of the stars could indicate an advantageous layout of towns.

Before practicing burial rituals and other major religious events, the Etruscans carefully studied the internal organs of sacrificed animals, such as goats and sheep. Etruscans considered the liver the seat of life, because it was the largest organ and contained the most blood. The extracted animal liver was checked for defects and signs of illness. Diviners then mapped out its surface as if it were the sky, marking the regions overseen by the Sky Gods. Reading entrails was considered so precise an art that models of sheep livers with their regions mapped and labeled were made from bronze. These models were used to train apprentice diviners and to provide a dictionary-like reference guide for them.

**Etruscan Sculpture**

Etruscan artists paid close attention to nature and proportion, so they have been credited with a unique sense of realism. Unlike most other artwork of the time, these Etruscan sculptures did not attempt to glorify or enhance the human subjects, but portrayed physical appearance, age, and infirmity with a careful, objective eye. Some of the earliest examples of realistic Etruscan artwork are small, three-dimensional terra cotta figurines from the Early Iron Age (circa 1000-750 B.C.E.). The figurines represent Gods, Goddesses, youths, and maidens with perky facial expressions and dramatic postures of power, prayer, or supplication. Small metal objects - such as household utensils and tools - were also decorated with images of expressive humans or animals.

During the Archaic Period (circa 575-490 B.C.E.) Etruria expanded and had more contact with other cultures and styles of art through trade. Artists began to create larger-scale sculpture, particularly three-quarter to life-size stone figures, for adornment on sarcophagi in tombs. Tombs of the wealthy also featured stone figures and objects crafted to recreate all aspects of funeral rituals. Realistic figures of the Gods, the recently deceased, mourners from the community, and surviving family members were carved as if they were seated around a large banquet table, symbolizing the continued relationship that the living, the deceased, and the divine shared after death. Tombs shared by elderly husbands and wives often included sculptures of them embracing, dining, or engaged in discussion, their aged faces etched with lines.
Etruscan Social Organization

Social organization in Etruria seems to have been determined by wealth and political power. **The large city-states were controlled by Etruscan kings** and a handful of aristocratic families, whose fathers, sons, and husbands held high political offices. **Wealthy men and women owned male and female slaves, and lived on large estates that relied on income from agricultural produce and ores drawn out of the mines and quarries on their property. Slaves worked in mines, quarries, and domestic situations.** There is some evidence that freed slaves acquired small landholdings and lived well enough to have received proper burials. **Wealthy men and women also seem to have experienced fairly equal rights and responsibilities in Etruscan society. Both were literate and enjoyed Greek mythology and poetry.** Women had the option of keeping their maiden names when they were married, and could own property. Although they were not heavily involved in government or warfare, women participated with men in some political elections and may have been trained in some military defense tactics. Both men and women exercised regularly, attended spectator sports, and shared the tasks of fishing and preparing food. **The two sexes also dressed alike, in long togas and mantles, with shoes curved up in points at the toes.** Both wore gilded and bejeweled bracelets, armbands, necklaces, and tiaras. Women alone wore earrings. **Banquets and Greek-style symposia were the most popular social gatherings attended by both sexes together.** Tomb paintings and sculpted sarcophagi suggest that couples enjoyed the entertainment of musicians, tumblers, jugglers, and dancers while they reclined on couches together, sharing sumptuous meals. Funeral inscriptions record extreme longevity and contentment: the ages of 70 or 80 years are not uncommon, and many tell of happy lives of soldiers or merchants lasting 106 years and longer.

Etruscan Sporting Events

**Etruscan spectator sports developed from an unlikely combination of funeral practices and large-game hunting.** There was usually an explicit connection between death and sports in Etruria, with extreme violence and bloodshed at the finish of each "game." Etruscan tomb painting depict a variety of spectator sports including wrestling, boxing, tugs-of-war, gruesome blindfolded man and dog fights, discus-throwing, and climbing greased poles. Most of these sports developed from Etruscan funeral rituals. Elaborate games lasting many days were held in honor of the recently deceased because the shedding of blood was thought to appease the Gods and nourish the dead. **One funeral ritual gave rise to the practice of gladiator combat. It was common practice for mourners to gather and watch two male slaves of the deceased - armed with small shields and swords -**
fight to the death at the site of the funeral pyre. The victor was congratulated and then ritually executed, and both bodies were then cremated alongside their master's body. Large-game hunting also gave rise to popular athletics. Hunting for sport was a popular pastime of rich Etruscan males. Donned in full military dress, a pack of hunters would proceed at breakneck speed on horseback, corner their quarry, and attack. Eventually, the hunt evolved into the spectator sport of horse racing. Races were held during seasonal festivals honoring the Gods, during election years, and during royal processions. Without the prey, the chase itself became murderously violent, and equestrians and their steeds met their death in brutal collisions. After their request to join the equestrian games at the Greek Olympics was refused because of their violent reputation, the Etruscans added the Greek idea of the chariot to their horseracing. Unlike their Greek counterparts, Etruscan charioteers were strapped to their chariots with strong leather belts, and the reins were tied behind their backs, making them virtually imprisoned in their vehicles. Controlling the teams of horses was a challenge, and negotiating the hills and turns of the track was exceptionally difficult. Their fierce competitions often resulted in serious injury or agonizing death.

Greek Coinage

Coinage came to ancient Greece from Asia Minor, where coins were invented. In an effort to make trade more efficient, the Greeks began using coins in the 600's B.C.E. Each city-state had different coins, and at first, all of them were made of electrum, a mixture of gold and silver. As coins became popular, and more were minted, the Greeks began to use silver and bronze, with the occasional special coin in gold. Initially, coins were stamped on one side, with simple symbols or words printed on them. Eventually, the designs became more sophisticated. Later coins were imprinted on both sides with images of Greek Gods and Goddesses and their symbols, scenes from myths, or detailed scenes from sporting events, such as foot races and chariot races.

Greek Monumental Building

Ancient Greek architecture is credited with some of the world's most beautiful monumental structures. Constructed on an immense scale in elegant style, these buildings were often made of marble and exclusively designed as religious temples. Greek artifacts sought to glorify and honor Gods and Goddesses by building temples embodying the classical Greek values of harmony and proportion. The lofty height of these structures was designed to represent Mount Olympus, the dwelling
place of the Gods, and to inspire the people inside with awe.
The Parthenon - a temple in honor of the Goddess Athena - is considered the most
glorious building of the ancient world, fully embodying the values of harmony and
proportion. It stands on top of the Acropolis of Athens in a place of prominence,
overlooking the city. Constructed almost entirely from marble, the Parthenon is 237 feet
long, 110 feet wide, and 60 feet high. It features eight Doric columns in front and back,
and 17 columns along each side. A popular tourist attraction in ancient times as well as
today, it has survived 2,500 years because of its superior workmanship.

Greek Mythology

Ancient Greeks considered the stories of the Gods and Goddesses
spiritually instructive, and these myths functioned as their religion. Each story
provided important lessons to be learned and applied to everyday living. All aspects of
Greek life - such as founding cities, marriage, curing the sick, experiencing
successful harvests, winning victory in battle - were under the jurisdiction of Greek
Gods, and the Greek people conducted rituals and sacrifices to ensure their favor.
There were literally hundreds of Gods and attendant spirits, sprites, and other
supernatural powers. The most influential of these Gods were the Olympians: 12 deities
from a large and complex divine family headed by Zeus, the King of the Gods, and his
wife Hera. Zeus' daughter Athena - Goddess of Wisdom, War, and the Arts - was the
patron of Athens. Her divine female strength, wisdom, and military prowess were
incorporated into female divinities from several other ancient cultures, including the
Etruscan Menrva (pronounced MEN-er-vah) and the Roman Minerva (pronounced meh-
NER-vah.)

Greek Philosophy

Ancient Greek scholars invented the concept of philosophy, or "love
of wisdom." It was a practice of discussion and reflection that allowed them to seek the
truth of the world through knowledge, instead of relying on the beliefs of traditional
mythology. Philosophy was at first an oral tradition. Tutors and students would gather
together outdoors in symposia, or discussion groups, and delve into a variety of
topics relating to the processes of the natural world.
Philosophy began as a branch of science and sought to explain physical changes of
the earth. It was Socrates (469-439 B.C.E.) who redirected the practice to examine ethical and moral truths, or changes in the human psyche. Socrates' pupil Plato (427 - 347 B.C.E.) carried this idea further by teaching that true reality lies not in the physical world, but in an abstract world of pre-existing ideas. Plato's pupil Aristotle (384 - 322 B.C.E.) developed his own system of philosophy based on logic, a system of orderly, consistent reasoning.

Greek Pottery

Greek pottery was valued throughout the ancient world for its extreme beauty and utility. Greek artists created large ceramic storage jars, drinking vessels, mixing bowls, and plates for both functional and decorative purposes. Examples of these and other styles have been found at many archeological sites throughout Europe and Asia, indicating that Greek pottery was widely traded. In the eighth century B.C.E., Greek potters began creating vases with realistic black figures painted upon the red clay of the pottery. They depicted mythical scenes as well as images from daily life, such as farming, household chores, and festive dances and theatrical performances. The style of pottery is often referred to as the Black-Figure style. By the sixth century B.C.E., Greek artists were using new production methods to create red figures on black backgrounds - a style that became known as the Red-Figure style of pottery. The human and animal figures were left in the original red color of the clay, while the background was painted and fired. Using this method, the artist was able to create more realistic figures, showing a variety of poses, human musculature, facial expression, and details of clothing.

Greek Science

Ancient Greek science included the study of the stars, music, and math. Pythagoras (circa 580-500 B.C.E.) was a religious scientist and mathematician from the Greek island of Samos. He believed that numbers and mathematical formulas had mystical powers and controlled the functioning of the universe. He developed a series of scientific theories, the most famous of which was the Pythagorean Theorem, a system for the accurate measurement of triangles. His followers believed that the Theorem - as well as Pythagoras's discovery of the mathematical progression of musical notes - proved Pythagoras's beliefs that the heavens generated celestial music. Although no writings of Pythagoras exist, he is
considered one of the fathers of science, and his work in geometric theory, music, and even mysticism still influences studies in science today.

Greek Theater

Although the exact origins of ancient Greek theater are unknown to us, many scholars believe that the art from developed from primitive religious rites honoring the Gods and appealing to them for successful harvests. This practice evolved into the creation of festivals of song and dance that honored the Gods each spring. In the sixth century B.C.E., spoken performances were enacted for entertainment at these festivals. Soon after this, dramatists competed for annual prizes awarded to the play that best honored the Gods, and ancient Greek theater was born.

The ancient Greek dramatic performance took place in an outdoor marble theater in the center of the city. Theaters held audiences of 14,000 to 24,000, and spectators were from all classes of society. Actors wore large expressive masks, and there were musical accompaniments on stage, as well as changes of costumes and scenery. Theater was such a popular form of entertainment that scenes from well-known plays were often painted on pottery or sculpted on the friezes adorning public buildings.

Greek Writing

Ancient Greek prose was written in all capital letters, with no small case and no indentation. Inscriptions, laws, treaties, and other important documents were usually carved in stone or chiseled into plaques made from metals such as bronze, and posted in public squares. Private correspondence, poetry, philosophical writings, and other educational texts were usually written on papyrus (pronounced puh-PY-russ), the fine plant-fiber paper from Egypt. Writing was also used on ancient Greek voting tokens, or ostraka (pronounced oss-TRAH-kah), which were used in all court cases requiring the confidential casting of "guilty" or "not guilty" votes.