7.1: Early Etruscan Art

The Etruscan Culture

Etruscan society developed in central Italy. The Orientalizing period connected Etruscan arts with eastern Mediterranean culture.

Learning Objectives

Discuss the Orientalizing period of Etruscan culture and their use of gold and ivory

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- Etruscan civilization flourished in central Italy and expanded as far north as the Po River and as far south as the Tiber River and northern Campania.

- Despite having a distinct artistic style, due to Greek influence, Etruscan art follows the artistic and stylistic developments of the Greeks, and is divided into similar artistic periods, including the Orientalizing (700–600 BCE), Archaic (600–480 BCE), and Classical (480–200 BCE) periods.

- Etruscan art during the Orientalizing period demonstrates oriental influences, similar to those seen in Greek art, including the use of intricate designs, patterning, and the depiction of animals—including lions, leopards, and composite animals like sphinxes and griffins.

- The Etruscans are known for their metalwork, and especially for their skill in crafting gold. Gold jewelry was popular among the Etruscans and often buried with its owners. The fibulas, earrings, bracelets, and other pieces of jewelry and decoration demonstrate Etruscan skill with repoussé and granulation.
Key Terms

- **pyxis**: A shape of vessel from the classical world, usually a cylindrical box with a separate lid.
- **granulation**: The attachment of granules of precious metal to the underlying metal of jewelry.
- **repoussé**: A metalworking technique in which a thin sheet of malleable metal is shaped by hammering from the reverse side to create a design in low relief.

Etruscan Civilization

The Etruscan civilization thrived in central Italy during the first millennium BCE. Occupying the approximate area of present-day Tuscany, the region derives its name from the word Etruscan.

During the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, the Etruscans became sea traders and actively participated in Mediterranean trade. The civilization also began to expand, and the Etruscans eventually settled as far north as the Po River and as far south as the Tiber River and the northern parts of Campania.

Aside from trade, a large part of Etruscan wealth came from the rich natural resources of the territories they lived in. The soil was fertile for agriculture and the land was rich with minerals and metals, which were mined. Etruscan cities and regions appear to have been ruled over by a king, and Etruscan kings are accounted for as the early rulers of Rome. While the Romans proudly remember overthrowing their Etruscan rulers, many aspects of Etruscan society were adopted by the Romans.
Map of the Etruscan civilization, 750–500 BCE: The Etruscans eventually settled as far north as the Po River and as far south as the Tiber River and the northern parts of Campania.

Very little is known about the Etruscans through written records. The Etruscans did not leave any written historical accounts, and what is known today about their culture and history is from written records by the Greeks and Romans that have survived.

These records, while providing information, view Etruscan culture from an outside, foreign eye and so can be deceptive in their accounts of Etruscan society. Because of this, most of what is known about the Etruscans comes from archaeological records.

Since many Etruscan cities have been continually occupied since their foundation—first by the Etruscans, then the Romans, up to today—a majority of Etruscan archaeological sites are tombs and necropoleis. Archaeologists and historians rely on Etruscan funerary culture to derive ideas about the society’s culture, customs, and history.

Orientalizing Art

Despite the distinctive character of Etruscan art, the history and stylistic divisions generally follows the divisions seen within Greek art history and stylistic developments. The Etruscans established contact with Eastern cultures, including Greeks, Phoenicians, and Egyptians, around 700 BCE, and this marks the beginning of the Orientalizing period of their culture.

As is similar with the Greek Orientalizing period, the art of this period in Etruria reflects Eastern themes and motifs. The patterning and depictions of animals were common—especially lions, leopards, and mythological composite creatures such as sphinxes and griffins.

Gold and Ivory

The Etruscans were master metal smiths and mined various ores including iron, tin, copper, silver, and gold; they even smelted bronze to work with. Artists who worked with metal were extremely talented and developed unique skills and specialized techniques, including granulation and repoussé.

Gold ornaments and jewelry depict both of these techniques, demonstrating the Etruscans’ precision when working with gold to create intricate designs and patterns in incredibly fine detail. The gold jewelry that came from a wealthy Etruscan family’s tomb (the Regolini-Galassi tomb), including an enormous gold fibula and golden bracelets that date from 650–600 BCE, displays these techniques.

The elaborate and intricate metal work was not isolated to the Orientalizing period but continued to be created by the Etruscans through the next several centuries. A gold reel, possibly an earring stud, from the early fourth century BCE represents the combination of both the hammered relief of repoussé as well as the careful and precise fusing of tiny gold granules.

The work also shows lingering, oriental-inspired designs that depict repetitive images of Pegasus and the chimera. Another earring from the Archaic period combines repoussé and granulation with glass beads and intricate, patterned...
designs.

**Gold Earring Stud**: This earring from the Archaic period combines repoussé and granulation with glass beads and intricate, patterned designs, c. 530–480 BCE.

**Gold Stud with Pegasus and Chimera**: Earring stud with Pegasus and Chimera. Gold. c. 4th century BCE.

Other objects besides the gold jewelry found in the Regolini-Galassi tomb demonstrate the Orientalizing influences on
Etruscan art. An ivory pyxis, which appears to imitate a Phoenician style, has a clearly Etruscan origin.

The ivory was imported into the region, likely from an Eastern source. The reliefs are carved in an Etruscan style, with egg-shaped human heads and distinctly thin, straight noses and oval eyes. The sphinxes on the lid and on the bottom register, as well as the frieze of animals at the op, reflect the Eastern theme. The middle register depicts a procession of horses and chariots.

Pyxis with a sphinx-shaped handle lid: Note the sphinx-shaped handle lid. This piece is made of ivory, c. 650–625 BCE. It is from the Regolini-Galassi tomb, Cerveteri, Italy.

Etruscan Ceramics

The Etruscans are known for their impasto and bucchero pottery, as well as local versions of black- and red-figure vase painting.
Learning Objectives

Evaluate the ceramic works of the Etruscan culture

Key Takeaways

Key Points

• The Etruscans are known for their impasto and bucchero pottery. Their contact with Greek settlements also influenced their production of black- and red-figure vase painting.

• Impasto is a coarse, unrefined clay used in the production of funerary vases and storage vessels. Its popularity spread beyond the Etruscan civilization, becoming a major exported good to Greek colonies in southern Italy.

• Bucchero is a fine, often thin, black pottery that is fired and burnished to create a rich, lustrous shine. It was developed to imitate metal and became a luxury good in its own right.

• Etruscan black-figure painting initially imitated the Corinthian and Attic styles before adopting a manneristic silhouette technique towards the end of its existence.

• Etruscan red-figure painting began as pseudo-red-figure, involving lighter figures painted on a black slip. Subject matter grew increasingly minimalistic during the second half of the fourth century BCE.

Key Terms

• hydria: A three-handled ceramic vessel used for carrying water.

• symposium: In ancient Graeco-Roman culture, a drinking party.

• bucchero: A type of dark grey Etruscan terra cotta pottery.

The Etruscans were well known for their pottery, which was typically made from two materials: impasto and bucchero.

Impasto

Impasto is a coarse form of pottery made from a clay that contains chips of mica, a silicate, or stone. In its soft form, impasto clay can range from red to brown. After it is fired, its surface becomes black and glossy.

It was first used by the Villanovan civilization, which preceded the Etruscans, around the tenth century BCE. Between the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, the Greek colonies to the south of Etruria began importing impasto vessels, a testament to their intercultural popularity.

The Etruscans used impasto for basic, utilitarian pottery, such as storage jars and cooking pots, as well as for funerary urns during the Orientalizing period. Artists incised the vessels with geometric designs, as well as stylized images of humans and animals.

The amphora in the image below depicts a spiral and a stylized bird, among other designs. Spiral motifs appear frequently in the art of numerous European cultures beginning in the Neolithic era. While their meanings are still a matter of debate, scholars hypothesize that spirals could symbolize astronomical phenomena or specific religious references.
The bird, on the other hand, could be a reference to love or fertility. Turan (the Etruscan goddess of love, fertility, and vitality) was commonly associated with a variety of avian species. Similarly the lynx, a bird-like creature in Etruscan mythology, also symbolizes love.

**Etruscan impasto amphora:** Spiral motifs appear frequently in the art of numerous European cultures beginning in the Neolithic era. This amphora is c. 700–680 BCE.

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**Bucchero**

Bucchero pottery, developed around 675 BCE, was an Etruscan invention. It was created from a fine clay fired to produce a glossy black surface and burnished to shine. A finished bucchero surface imitated the appearance of metal.

The Etruscans produced a variety of objects—such as plates, chalices, vases, and pitchers—from bucchero, demonstrating the versatility of the material. While less expensive than metal, it was still considered a luxury item and was exported around the Mediterranean. Bucchero goods have been found as far east as Egypt and Syria.

During the Orientalizing period, objects could be as little as less than two millimeters. This is type of bucchero ware is known today as bucchero sottile, or delicate bucchero, and the thin delicate walls further reinforced the material’s imitation of metal.

Decoration on bucchero was often limited to abstract designs and did not usually include figures. Bucchero was often simply decorated with incised lines that formed geometric and abstract patterns. Some patterns were incised with a stylus and others with a toothed wheel or comb-like instruments to create consistent rows of dots or patterns of dots in the shape of fans.

While bucchero thrived during the Orientalizing and Archaic periods, its production began to decline during the Classical...
period as painted Greek pottery became more available and popular in Etruscan culture, and as goods for funerary deposits.

**Bucchero Etruscan plate**: Decoration on bucchero was often limited to abstract designs and did not usually include figures. This plate is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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**Vase Painting**

Vase painting in the Etruscan culture thrived from the seventh to the fourth century BCE. It was strongly influenced by Greek vase painting and followed the main trends in style over the period. Besides being producers in their own right, the Etruscans were the main export market for Greek pottery outside Greece. Among the Etruscans, richly decorated vases were often interred with the dead.

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**Black-Figure Painting**

Initially, Etruscan vases followed the examples of black-figure vase painting from Corinth and East Greece. It is assumed that in the earliest phase, vases were produced mainly by immigrants from Greece.

They mainly produced amphorae, hydriae and jugs. Depictions included revelers, symposia, and animal friezes. Mythological motifs occur more rarely, but are already created with great care.

By this time, Etruscan vase painting began to take its main influence from Attic vase painting. The black-figure style ended about 480 BCE. In its final phase, it developed a tendency toward a manneristic style of silhouette drawing.
Etruscan hydria with black-figure painting: The black-figure style ended about 480 BCE. In its final phase, it developed a tendency toward a manneristic style of silhouette drawing.

Pseudo-Red-Figure Painting

The Etruscans developed an imitative adoption of the red-figure technique (known as pseudo-red-figure) around 490 BCE, nearly half a century after that style had been invented in Greece. As on some early Attic vases, this was achieved by covering the whole vase body in black shiny slip, then adding figures on top, using paints that would oxidize into red or white during firing.

In true red-figure painting, the red areas were left free of slip. In pseudo-red-figure painting, internal details were marked by incisions, similar to the usual practice in black-figure vase painting, rather than painted on, as is true in red-figure painting. Even after true red-figure painting became the dominant style, some workshops continued to specialize in pseudo-red-figure painting into the fourth century BCE.
Athena and Poseidon: A pseudo-red-figure krater by the Nazzano Painters, c. 360 BCE.

Red-Figure Painting

Only by the end of the fifth century BCE was the true red-figure technique introduced to Etruria. In the second half of the fourth century BCE, mythological themes disappeared from the repertoire of the Etruscan vase painters.

Instead, the vase bodies were mostly covered with ornamental and floral motifs, and larger compositions only occurred in exceptional cases.
Etruscan red-figure stamnos: In the second half of the fourth century BCE, mythological themes disappeared and the vase bodies were mostly covered with ornamental and floral motifs. This stamnos is c. 360–340 BCE.

Etruscan Sculpture

Archaic Etruscan art often includes terra cotta statues that are stylistically and aesthetically Etruscan but influenced by Greek art.

Learning Objectives

Describe the stylistic influences on Etruscan sculpture during the Archaic period

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- During the Archaic period (600–480 BCE), the Etruscans began to build large wood and terra cotta temples, create underground burial chambers, and produce large-scale stone and terra cotta sculptures.

- The stylistic influences from the Greeks on Etruscan Archaic sculpture include the Archaic smile and the stylized patterning of hair and clothing. However, Etruscan sculpture was distinct. The figures had egg-shaped heads and almond eyes, were clothed, and their bodies had a higher degree of plasticity.

- The Centaur of Vulci is a subtractive sculpture straddling the Orientalizing and Archaic periods. It uses some Greek attributes but modifies them in a way to make the object uniquely Etruscan. The Apulu of Veii is an example of Etruscan Archaic sculpture. The figure, believed to have been made by the Etruscan artist Vulca from Veii, depicts Apulu in mid-stride, with an outstretched arm. The figure is more dynamic than Greek Archaic examples.

- The Sarcophagus of the Spouses depicts a couple reclining together on a dining couch. The figures are distinctly Etruscan, animated through their gestures, with faces made from the same mold and distinguished by feminine or
masculine characteristics.

Key Terms

- **Archaic smile**: A technique used by Greek Archaic sculptors, especially in the second quarter of the 6th century BCE, possibly to suggest that their subject was alive and infused with a sense of well-being.
- **subtractive**: A sculptural process in which the artist begins with more material than he or she needs and gradually takes away material until the desired form is achieved.
- **terra cotta**: Earthenware clay after it has been fired in a kiln.
- **akroteria**: Architectural ornaments placed on a flat base and mounted at the apex of the pediment of a building in the classical style.
- **additive**: A sculptural process in which the artist begins with little to no material and gradually attaches more material until the desired form is achieved.
- **sarcophagus**: A stone coffin, often inscribed or decorated with sculpture.

Etruscan Sculpture

During the Archaic period (600–480 BCE), the Etruscan culture flourished. The Etruscans began building stone and wood temples and creating subterranean tombs. Etruscan trade flourished, and the civilization expanded to its furthest boundaries.

The period and style of art is named for its Greek counterpart. Although there are similarities between Etruscan and Greek Archaic art, significant differences mark specific sculptures as uniquely Etruscan.

The Centaur of Vulci

The area of Italy that was home to the etruscan civilization is rich in volcanic rocks such as tufa and nenfro. Such materials provide ample media for sculptures that are made through subtractive processes like carving and chiseling.

The Centaur of Vulci (c. 590–580 BCE), a nenfro statue discovered in a tomb in the necropolis of Poggio Maremma in Vulci Archaeological Park, appears to mark a transition between the Orientalizing and Archaic styles. Similar to Greek centaur sculptures of this period, the body appears to depict a standing human with a stylized cylindrical equine body emerging from the back.

Unlike the Greek Orientalizing and Archaic centaurs, this sculpture was produced without a tail. Its arms and legs below the knees are missing. Its hands are visible on the hips, suggesting a stiff pose like early Greek kouroi. Its eyes are large and almond-shaped, and it might have worn an Archaic smile before it was damaged.

The centaur’s hair falls in stylized plaits like its Greek counterparts. The style of braids, however, appears less like beads, as seen in the Greek kouros, and more like twisted plies of a rope. On the back of the centaur’s head, three braids and several ringlets run in a horizontal pattern to connect with the braids on the left and right. Evidence of drill work can be seen in the curls that fall across the centaur’s forehead.
Centaur of Vulci: A nenfro statue discovered in a tomb in the necropolis of Poggio Maremma in Vulci Archaeological Park.

Terra Cotta

Few examples of large-scale or monumental Etruscan sculptures survive. Very few Etruscan bronzes escaped being melted down for reuse, and the Etruscans did not often work in marble or other hard stones. Instead, many surviving examples of Etruscan sculpture are in terra cotta, or earthenware clay that has been fired in a kiln.

Working with terra cotta was a means for additive sculpture. Unlike the subtractive sculptural techniques employed in the carving of rock or stone, this allowed for subtle modeling and more expressive and dynamic features.

A pair of winged horses from the Altar of the Queen, an Etruscan sanctuary located in Tarquinia, are examples of the Etruscans’ skill and modeling with terra cotta. The horses are muscular, with strong chests, fine legs, and elongated bodies. They appear to prance as they wait to pull a chariot. Their necks arch, with manes blowing in the wind, and their heads are drawn in, as if pulled back by a pair of unseen reins.
Winged Horses: Working with terra cotta lets the artist create subtle modeling and more expressive and dynamic features, as seen in these horses.

Apulu of Veii

The Apulu of Veii is a prime example of Etruscan sculpture during the Archaic period. Apulu, the Etruscan equivalent of Apollo, is a slightly larger than life-size terra cotta akroteria figure in the Portonaccio Temple at Veii, an Etruscan city just north of Rome.

The figure was part of a group of akroteria that stood on the ridgepole of the temple and depicted the myth of Heracles and the Ceryneiaian hind. The figure of Apulu confronts the hero, Heracles, who is attempting to capture a deer sacred to Apulu’s sister, Artumes (Artemis). Apulu is the most intact surviving statue of the akroteria figures from this temple.

The figure of Apulu has several Greek characteristics. The face is similar to the faces of Archaic Greek kouroi figures. The face is simply carved and an archaic smile provides a notion of emotion and realism. The hair of Apulu is stylized and falls across his shoulders and down his neck and back in stylized, geometric twists that seem to represent braids. The figure, like Greek figures, was painted in bright colors, and the edge of his toga appears to be lined in blue.
Apulu of Veii: This painted terra cotta statue is a slightly larger than life-size terra cotta akroteria figure in the Portonaccio Temple at Veii, Italy.

Unlike Archaic Greek statues and kouroi, the figure of Apulu is full of movement and presents the viewer with an entirely different aesthetic from the Greek style. The figure of Apulu is dynamic and flexible. He strides forward with an arm stretched out. He leans on his front foot, and his back foot is slightly raised.

The body is more faithfully modeled (comparable to later Greek kouroi), and instead of being nude, he wears a toga that is draped over one shoulder. The garment’s folds are patterned and stylized but cling to the body, allowing the viewer to clearly distinguish the god’s chest and thigh muscles. While the Etruscan artist applied an Archaic smile to Apulu, the figure’s lips are full and his head is more egg-shaped than round—both characteristics of Etruscan art and sculpture.

The Apulu of Veii is believed to have been made by the Etruscan artist Vulca of Veii. Besides this sculpture, Vulca is credited by Roman historians with the creation of the cult statue for the Temple of Jupiter Optimumus Maximus, the most important temple in Rome. Vulca created this statue when the last Etruscan king Tarquinius Superbus ruled Rome.

The Sarcophagus of the Spouses

A late sixth century sarcophagus excavated from a tomb in Cerveteri is a terra cotta sarcophagus that depicts a couple reclining together on a dining couch. The sarcophagus displays not only the Etruscan Archaic style but also Etruscan skill in working with terra cotta.

The figures' torsos are modeled, and their heads are in a typical Etruscan egg-shape with almond shaped eyes, long noses, and full lips. Their hair is stylized, and their gestures are animated. The use of gesture is seen throughout Etruscan art, both in sculpture and painting. The woman might have originally held a small vessel, and the couple appears to be intimate and loving due to the fact that man has his arm around the woman.
Sarcophagus of the Spouses: The sarcophagus displays not only the Etruscan Archaic style but also Etruscan skill in working with painted terra cotta. C. 520 BCE. Found in the Banditaccia Necropolis, Cerveteri, Italy.

A close look at the figures reveals some peculiarities. First, their faces are the same and in fact were most likely created from the same mold, a technique common in Etruscan terra cotta sculpture. The identical faces are differentiated by the addition of female and male hairstyles, including the man’s beard. Furthermore, despite the modeling of their upper bodies, the legs of the figures are flat and rather lifeless, an odd comparison to the liveliness of the figures’ upper halves.

Etruscan Temples

Etruscan temples derive from Greek models but are distinguished by a high podium, deep porch, prostyle columns, and frontality.

Learning Objectives

Compare and contrast Etruscan temples with their Greek counterparts

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- The superstructures of Etruscan temples were built from wood and mud brick that was often covered in stucco, plaster, or painted for decoration. The temple had a stone or tufa foundation, and the roof was covered in protective terra cotta tiles.
- Despite their Greek origins, Etruscan temples are unique. They are frontal and axial and often have more than one cella. Etruscan temples stand on high podium with a single central staircase located at the front. Prostyle Tuscan columns stand on a deep porch and support the roof.
- The temple’s wide eaves, low pitch roof, and terra cotta tiles protect the building’s organic materials. Antefixes
further protect the building from the elements and animals by concealing the wood beams.

- Akroteria, life-sized terra cotta sculptures, were placed along the ridgepole and on the cornice and peaks to decorate the temple. These figures were often tied together thematically or through myths.

**Key Terms**

- **antefix**: The vertical blocks that terminate the covering tiles of the roof of a Roman, Etruscan, or Greek temple.
- **hind**: A female deer, especially a red deer at least two years old.
- **cella**: The inner chamber of a temple where the cult image or statue is kept.

**Etruscan Temples**

Etruscan temples were adapted from Greek-style temples to create a new Etruscan style, which, in turn would later influence Roman temple design. The temple was only one part of the templum, the defined sacred space that includes the building, altar and other sacred ground, springs, and buildings. As in Greece and Rome, the altar used for sacrifice and ritual ceremonies was located outside the temple.

Today only the foundations and terra cotta decorations of Etruscan temples remain, since the temples themselves were primarily built of wood and mud brick that eroded and degraded over time. The Etruscans used stone or tufa as the foundation of their temples.

Tufa is a local volcanic stone that is soft, easy to carve, and hardens when exposed to air. The superstructure of the temple was built from wood and mud brick. Stucco or plaster covered the walls and was either burnished to a shine or painted. Terra cotta roof tiles protected the organic material and increased the longevity and integrity of the building.

**The foundation of an Etruscan temple at Orvieto**: The central stairway highlights the frontality of the temple that once stood at this site.

**The Basic Temple Structure**

Archaeology and a written account by the Roman architect Vitruvius during the late first century BCE allow us to reconstruct a basic model of a typical Etruscan temple. Etruscan temples were usually frontal, axial, and built on a high podium with a single central staircase that allowed access to the cella (or cellas).
Two rows of prostyle columns stood on the front of the temple’s portico. The columns were of the Tuscan order, a derivative of the Doric order consisting of a simple shaft on a base with a simple capital. A scale model of the Portonaccio Sanctuary of Minerva suggests that the bases and capitals of its columns were painted with alternating dark- and light-valued hues.

While most portico columns were made of wood, there is evidence that some were made of stone, as at Veii. They were tall and widely spaced across a deep porch, aligning with the walls of the cellas.

A model of Portonaccio Sanctuary of Minerva: C. 510 BCE, in Veii, Italy.

Etruscans often, although not always, worshiped multiple gods in a single temple. In such cases, each god received its own cella that housed its cult statue. Often the three-cell temple would be dedicated to the principal gods of the Etruscan pantheon—Tinia, Uni, and Mennva (comparable to the Roman gods Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva).

The wooden roof had a low pitch and was covered by a protective layer of terra cotta tiles. Eaves with wide overhangs helped to protect the organic material from rain.
**Ground plan of an Etruscan temple:** Etruscan temples were usually frontal, axial, and built on a high podium with a single central staircase that allowed access to the cella (or cellas).

Many aspects of Vitruvius’ description fit what archaeologists can demonstrate. However deviations did exist. It is clear that Etruscan temples could take a number of forms and also varied over the 400-year period during which they were being made. Nevertheless, Vitruvius remains the inevitable starting point for a description and a contrast of Etruscan temples with their Greek and Roman equivalents.

**Antefix**

To further protect the roof beams from rain, insects, and birds, the end of each row of roof tiles was capped by an ornament known as an antefix. Antefixes also lined the area of the façade that corresponds to the top of the frieze and bottom of the pediment on a Greek temple.

These flat ornaments were usually made of terra cotta from a mold, and were sometimes made of stone. The antefixes were brightly painted and often depicted images female and male faces or simple geometric designs. The male faces were often representations of the Etruscan equivalent to Dionysus or his followers, including Silenus or fauns.

Although some antefixes depicted women, many of the female figures were representations of Gorgons, such as Medusa. The Gorgon-faced antefixes often showed a wide-eyed, circular face surrounded by either wings or snakes. The Gorgon and Dionysiac antefixes served apotropaic functions, intended to ward off evil and protect the temple site.
Antefix with the head of a Gorgon: The Gorgon and Dionysiac antefixes served apotropaic functions, intended to ward off evil and protect the temple site. This one is made of terra cotta, c. 6th–5th century BCE.

Antefix with a Silenus face: The male faces were often representations of the Etruscan equivalent to
Dionysus or his followers, including Silenus or fauns.

**Akroteria**

For much of their history, the Etruscans did not decorate their temples in the Greek manner with friezes or pedimental sculptures. Instead, they placed terra cotta statues called akroteria along the roof’s ridge pool and on the peaks and edges of the pediment.

These akroteria figures were generally built slightly larger than life-sized and were connected thematically. The Apulu of Veii is one example of an akroteria and is part of a sculptural group that depicts the story of Herakles and the Ceryneian Hind.

**Etruscan Tombs**

Etruscan tombs, grave goods, and necropoleis provide invaluable evidence for the study of Etruscan society and culture.

**Learning Objectives**

Discuss the tombs, funerary practices, and grave goods of the early Etruscans

**Key Takeaways**

**Key Points**

- Etruscan burial methods include both cremation and inhumation. The funerary practices of the Etruscans changed from their use of cinerary urns in the shape of huts in the 9th and 8th century to subterranean tombs carved from tufa and living rock that was richly decorated.
- The Banditaccia Necropolis at Cervetri is known for its tufa tombs craved into tumuli. These tombs often took the shape of Etruscan homes and included roof beams and thatching carved into the ceilings. The tombs hold beds or niches or sarcophagi for the remains of the deceased.
- The Tomb of the Reliefs is a richly decorated, multi-generation tomb. The walls and pillars of the tomb are carved with a variety of objects that would be used by the dead in the afterlife, from everyday to specialty objects, including dining utensils, helmets, and swords.
- The Monterozzi Necropolis outside of Tarquinia was used from the 9th century to the 2nd century BCE. It is most well known for its frescoed tombs that include painted scenes of symposia, dancing, hunting, fishing, and ritual. The so-called Tomb of the Augurs was the first tomb in Tarquinia to depict Etruscan funerary customs in addition to the already established mythological scenes. The Tomb of Hunting and Fishing and the Tomb of the Leopards depict typical Etruscan funerary imagery in a common Etruscan painting style. The scenes relate to Etruscan culture and society, and show the inclusion of women in a symposium and a close connection to nature.

**Key Terms**

- **cippus**: A low, round, or rectangular pedestal used as a funerary boundary post by the Etruscans. The Romans would later use it for military purposes.
- **dromos**: A long, narrow passage to a tomb.
• necropolis: A large cemetery, especially one of elaborate construction in an ancient city.
• augur: A seer who bases his or her prophecies on interpretations derived from the behavior of birds.
• tumulus: A mound of earth, especially one placed over a prehistoric tomb; a barrow.
• apotropaic: Intended to ward off evil.

Etruscan Tombs

Tombs and necropoleis are among the most excavated and studied parts of Etruscan culture. Scholars learn about Etruscan society and culture from the study of Etruscan funerary practice. Burial urns and sarcophagi, both large and small, were used to hold the cremated remains of the dead.

Early forms of burial include the burial of ashes with grave goods in funerary urns and small ceramic huts. Later, in the seventh century BCE, the Etruscans began burying their dead in subterranean family tombs. The necropoleis at Cerveteri and Tarquinia are the most well known for their tumuli and frescoed tombs.

Hut urn: Etruscan cinerary hut urn with a door, made of impasto, 8th century BCE.

The grave goods found in these tombs point to the Etruscan belief in an afterlife that required the same types of goods and materials as in the world of the living. Many examples of Greek pottery have been recovered from Etruscan tombs. These vessels, along with other foreign goods, demonstrate the extent of the Etruscan trade network.

Painted scenes of frivolity, celebration, hunting, and religious practice tell the viewer about Etruscan daily life, rituals, their belief about the afterlife, and their social norms. The imagery and grave goods found in Etruscan tombs help inform the modern-day viewer about the nature of Etruscan society.
Banditaccia Necropolis at Cerveteri

The tombs of the Banditaccia Necropolis outside Cerveteri were carved into large, circular mounds known as tumuli. Each tumulus was the burial site for a single family, and one to four underground tombs were cut into the round tumulus.

Each tomb often represented a separate generation. The tombs were carved with a long, narrow entranceway known as a dromos that opened into a single or multi-room chamber. The decorative style of each chamber and tomb varied with the period and the family’s wealth—the wealthier the family, the more intricately carved and decorated the tomb.

Banditaccia Necropolis: This is current-day photo of the Banditaccia Necropolis, c. 7th–2nd BCE, in Cerveteri, Italy.

Most tombs assumed the shape and style of Etruscan homes. The ceilings were often carved to represent wood roof beams. Thatching and decorative columns were often added to a room. The entrances and the individual rooms inside were often framed by doorways carved in a typical design.

Piers are topped with capitals carved in a stylized motif that resembles those from Corinthian columns. Each room contained beds or niches, sometimes with a carved tufa pillow, for the deposition of the body.

The most recent tombs in Banditaccia date from the third century BCE. Some of are marked by external boundary posts called cippi (singular cippus). Cylindrical cippi outside a tomb indicate that its occupants are male, while those in the form of small houses indicate female occupants.
Cippi outside a tomb in the Banditaccia necropolis: The phallic shape of these cippi indicates that men are interred in the tomb.

The Tomb of the Reliefs

The Tomb of the Reliefs is one of the most well known, largest, and richly decorated tombs from the Banditaccia Necropolis. This tomb is named for the numerous tufa reliefs of everyday objects inside.

The walls and piers are covered in carved and painted reliefs of everyday objects including rope, drinking cups, pitches, mirrors, knives, helmets, and shields. Not even companion animals were forgotten in the afterlife. A stretching cat adorns the base of the column on the left, while one in mid-motion (stalking prey?) adorns the base of the column on the right.

Elsewhere in the tomb, mythological subject matter appears. In the center is a depiction of the three-headed dog, Cerberus, the guardian to the underworld.
**Tomb of the Reliefs:** This is the interior of the Tomb of the Reliefs. It is composed of carved tufa and paint from the 3rd century BCE.

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**Monterozzi Necropolis at Tarquinia**

The tombs of the Monterozzi Necropolis outside of Tarquinia are also subterranean burial chambers. The graves from the necropolis date from the seventh century BCE until the first century BCE. The tombs here are similar to the underground, tufa cut tombs of Cerveteri that were accessed through a dromos.

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**The Tomb of the Augurs**

The Tomb of the Augurs (530–520 BCE) was one of the first in Tarquinia to have figurative decorations on all four walls of its main or only chamber. Its name derives from a possible misinterpretation of two figures on the rear wall.

This tomb is also the first to depict Etruscan funerary rites and funerary games in addition to mythological scenes, which were already established in traditional funerary art.

A fresco depicting a door flanked by two men appears on the rear wall of the Tomb of the Augurs. Scholars have come to different conclusions as to the significance of the door. Some interpret it as a representational illustration of the door to the tomb. Others argue that it is a symbolic door or portal to the underworld that acts as a barrier between the kingdom of the living and the kingdom of the dead.

The two men each extend one arm toward the door and places the other hand against his forehead in a gesture of salutation and mourning. Past interpretations identify the men as augurs. However, the word Apastanasar, which appears on the wall next to the man on the right, contains the root of apa, which means father. This leads scholars to conclude that they two men are more likely relatives of the deceased.

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**Augurs:** A fresco on the interior rear wall of the Tomb of the Augurs, c. 530 BCE.

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**The Tomb of the Leopards**

The Tomb of the Leopards (early fifth century BCE) consists of a single room and is one of the best-known tombs of Tarquinia. The Banqueting Scene, the most famous mural in the tomb, is divided into two panels: the pediment and the
frieze.

The pediment depicts two white leopards in a heraldic composition. This depiction is reminiscent of the leopards from the pediment of the Temple of Artemis at Corfu. The felines are used for their protective features.

Below the pediment is the main scene depicted on a central frieze that wraps around the room. This image depicts men and women with servants at a symposium. The scenes are festive and joyous. The men and women are distinguished respectively with dark and light skin tones.

The mere presence of women in the Banqueting Scene is unique for its time, suggesting a gender-inclusive culture. However, the women’s assumption of the same positions as their male counterparts and their apparently active participation in the festivities suggest a level of gender equality unseen among the Greeks or, later, the Romans.

The Banqueting Scene: A fresco on the interior back wall of the Tomb of the Leopards, c. 480–470 BCE.

The Tomb of Hunting and Fishing

The Tomb of Hunting and Fishing consists of two rooms. The frescos in the first room are badly damaged but appear to depict Etruscans dancing outside. Two trees frame the doorway into the second room. This room gives the tomb its name, as it depicts a scene of men hunting and fishing.

Men in boats are fishing in a sea populated by fish and dolphins. On a rock outcropping in the water, one man prepares to dive, while another climbs to the top. Meanwhile, another man aims a slingshot at the birds that flock overhead. This scene depicts the Etruscans’ relationship with nature and the importance of hunting and fishing in Etruscan society.
Tomb of Hunting and Fishing: This is a fresco on the interior back wall from the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, c. 530–520 BCE.

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