



Long before the days of Rome's greatness, Italy was the home of a people far advanced in civilization—the Etruscans, or Tyrrhenians. These people rose to prosperity and power, then almost vanished from recorded history, leaving unsolved many questions about their origin and culture.

Scholars think that the Etruscans were a seafaring people from Asia Minor. As early as 1000 **BC** they were living in Italy in an area that was roughly equivalent to modern Tuscany, from the Tiber River north almost to the Arno River. Later their rule embraced a large part of western Italy, including Rome. When the Tarquin Dynasty was expelled from Rome about 500 **BC**, Lars Porsena, king of Etruria and Clusium, sought to reestablish his influence over Rome.

The Etruscans already controlled the commerce of the Tyrrhenian Sea on their western border. After losing control of Rome, they strengthened their naval power through an alliance with Carthage against Greece. In 474 **BC** their fleet was destroyed by the Greeks of Syracuse. From that time their power rapidly declined. The Gauls overran the country from the north, and the Etruscans' strong southern fortress of Veii fell to Rome after a ten-year siege (396 **BC**). The Etruscans were absorbed by the Romans, who adopted many of their advanced arts, their customs, and their institutions.

Because little Etruscan literature remains and the language of inscriptions on their monuments has been only partially deciphered, scholars have gained most of their knowledge of the Etruscans from studying the remains of their city walls, houses, monuments, and tombs. Weapons and other implements, exquisite jewelry, coins, statues of stone, bronze, and terra-cotta, and black pottery (called bucchero) have been found. Grecian and Oriental influences are seen in this art.

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