

Mauro Cristofani. *The Etruscans: A New Investigation*. New York: 1979. Galahad Books. 128pp

Much of the ancient culture of the Etruscans has been lost to history. With his work, *The Etruscans: A New Investigation*, Mauro Cristofani explores what has been discovered and evaluates what is known about this contemporary of the early Roman republic. Written three decades ago, the text still conveys insight into the topic and provides numerous pictures and maps to support the work. In fact, the work is very picture heavy with the text itself more of a very long essay than a traditional book. The work exists in a duality where the photos and maps could be viewed as not only supporting the themes of the text but also stand alone to tell the story of the culture's rise and demise. Cristofani bemoans the lack of investigation put towards excavating Etruscan sites. He illustrates the connection to the Greek and Latin world throughout the text, especially in the chapter regarding language. His work shows the uniqueness of the Etruscans while elaborating on the influences it received from the Near East and the world of Greek colonists and Phoenician traders.

The work delivers in an interesting format. The introduction is followed by five unnumbered chapters. The work closes with a brief epilogue, in which he finally addresses the topic of origin, and the standard chronology, bibliography, and index. As previously stated, photos and maps populate the work and their captions support the narrative while their visual presence gives voice to the ancient civilization. Cristofani, in a manner, tells the story almost backwards. He begins the main body of the work with a discussion of everyday city and country life. While one would expect him to begin with migrations and language similarities, the approach works in providing a glimpse of the world in which they lived before discussing where they might have come from.

In the introduction, Cristofani introduces his goals for the work. He discusses his intent to provide an account of the Etruscans for the general reader. The work relies heavily on archeological data as well as both Etruscan writing, or what remains of them, and the writings of the Greeks and Romans. He explores the relationship between Latium, Rome, the Greek cities, and the Etruscans. Differences as well as similarities are alluded to and explored in greater detail as the work progresses. The photo of a terracotta sarcophagus lid hints at the connection to the Greeks as it shows a semi-nude youth reclining as if at a symposium. (6-7)

The chapter called Town and Country begins with a discussion of Etruscan geography, flora, and fauna. Throughout the chapter are photos of landscapes and maps to support the geography of the region. Photos of cities, excavated tombs, and funerary artifacts provide support for the text as well. It is important to review the visual aspect of the work as it comprises so much of the overall and allows the reader an insight on the research that Cristofani put into the narrative. Interaction with Greek colonies affected the settlements and altered their social and economic conditions. The Etruscans valued defense when deciding upon a location for settlements. Their cities were walled and contained citadels to house that city's gods. The cities were centers for trade including Greek settlers whom contemporary sources claim permanently settled within for the purpose of maintaining trade. The ancients also claim that the cities sprang from a desire to protect against wild animals. This was a realistic fear even until the dawn of the modern age.

Cities were not haphazardly designed. The division of land was wrought with ritual, "the divisions of the heavens used in the art of divination are applied to the earth." (19) Cristofani argues that there may also be Greek influence to the layout of the cities and the purpose behind the locations of the various subdivisions. The Etruscans were quite skilled in hydraulics and were

able to reclaim marsh lands for the purpose of cultivation. The Etruscan defeat at the naval Battle of Cumae (474 BCE) caused a decline in Greek trading when the Etruscans lost control of the shipping lanes. As a result, the coastal cities of Etruria also declined. The connection between Etruscan cities was mostly religious and did not always extend to political or military aid. He ends the chapter with a discussion of commercial crops, such as grapes and olives, and how they influenced a shift in prominence in Etruscan cities. Cristofani successfully captured the essence of the Etruscan cities based on the knowledge available at the time of his work.

The next chapter, *The Family and Social Organization*, supports the premise that Etruscan society was based on the traditional family. Archeological evidence supports a rural life concerned with farming and warfare. The family was built around the father and Etruscans were known by an individual name and a family name, which, like the Latin, was formed by adding a suffix to a personal name, usually the founder of the family. As always life was dependent upon the social class, but Etruscan women enjoyed more freedom than their Greek and Roman counterparts. The chapter is heavily supported with photos of funeral art depicting family life as well as artifacts of daily use and funerary adornment. Diagrams and excavations of houses also support the narrative.

It is within this chapter that Cristofani presents his argument for the social structure within Etruscan daily life. Interaction with foreign traders created the social classes within the Etruscan society as some members gained more wealth than others. Initially powerful men were looked to as 'leaders' but that evolved into kingship. Etruscans modeled many aspects of city life and religious ideology on the Greeks. The influence of Etruscan dynastic rule in early Rome emphasizes the impact Etruscan society had in shaping Rome. Spurred by an economic crisis in the fifth century BCE, Etruscan urban aristocracy looked to agriculture in order to rebound.

Cristofani portrays the archeological evidence of land reclamation and irrigation projects of this period as the sources for his theory. Etruscan society was no stranger to the other cultures which resided on the Italian peninsula.

Two classes emerged in Etruria; nobility and a subservient class. Single magistrates remained in power in Etruscan cities. The slave class revolted on many occasions, notably in Arezzo in the mid-fourth century BCE. This revolt consisted mostly of urban, well-educated slaves looking to improve their position. It would not be until the second century BCE when literate farmers moved to the countryside that substantial results occurred to improve the position of slaves. (41) Slaves were considered part of the family unit and upon being freed often took the family name. A class of freemen with no family name enjoyed no political rights in Etruria. This changed in 196 BCE, when civil rights were granted and family names were chosen.

Magistrates were an integral part of Etruscan society. They were called *zilath* or *zilach* and there existed possibly different magistrates for different functions. A federal magistrate was elected by a federal assembly. There existed similarities in political life with Rome before 367 BCE, when the Roman *plebs* gained political sway. Etruria avoided that situation for a few more centuries and was controlled by magistrates of various levels. The aristocracy of Etruria was able to maintain its hold on society. Yet, progress would come with the rise of the class of unnamed freemen. And as with all of Etruscan society, religion and trade were at the forefront of change.

After exploring the communities and society of Etruria, Cristofani next explains the nature of the Etruscan economy. Again the heavy use of photos and maps support the narrative with scenes of trade and artifacts of agriculture. These provide a glimpse into the life of Etruscan traders, pirates, and farmers. Cristofani delves deeper in his discussion of the rise of the aristocracy from the previous chapter and attributes specialization of labor, itself influenced by

Greek colonists, as a source. This created a shift in authority from father of family to a person outside the family. He would expand upon the theory later in the chapter but first he explores Etruscan agriculture.

He argues that Etruscans saw farming as the activity that brought men together. They saw land divisions as set forth from the gods and any disruption to that balance would undermine the balance of all aspects of society. Evidence of boundary stones is plentiful in Etruria. Contact with the Greeks, Cristofani argues, supplied the bulk of the knowledge for successful farming techniques. Etruria was blessed with a fertile countryside. Grapes were introduced into Italy by the Greeks and the Greeks referred to the Etruscans as heavy drinkers. Etruscan wine was at such a surplus that it was exported throughout the Mediterranean. The Greeks also introduced the olive to Italy and it was considered a luxury food. Pork was both a basic food and a source of sacrifice at noble weddings in Etruria. He argues that it was the division of farmland that would lead to divisions in society. Cristofani's approach in describing society before trade allows the reader the ability to understand the society before learning how it potential became structured.

The Etruscans were adept metal workers and craftsmen. Influenced heavily by the Greeks in pottery, by the fourth century BCE, local Etruscan pottery flourished; pottery of high quality was often personalized or signed by the artist. Specialization of crafts created a division amongst craftsmen with the bulk of the specialties sorted by type of craft; Goldsmith, mason, etc. Etruscan trade originated as exchanges between 'chiefs' but evolved into formal trade between cultures. "The predominate form of trade, however, must have been piracy, and the ancient sources which refer to Etruscan 'pirates' are confirmed by archeological evidence." (64) The Etruscans used piracy as a form of commerce. In the sixth century BCE, the Etruscans organized a navy in an effort to protect commercial interests. But, with their defeat at Cumae, commercial

decline on the seas began. Etruscan economy, he argues, remained sound enough for Etruria, in 205 BCE, to offer significant support to Scipio in his struggle against Hannibal during the Second Punic War.

The Etruscan Language is the title of what Cristofani refers to as the most important chapter in the work. The ancients attributed the Greeks in the introduction of alphabetic writing to the Etruscans. Etruscan language from the seventh century to the first century BCE was not an Indo-European language. He argues that linguistically there may be a shred of truth in the famous origin theory involving a migration from the east. Writing was initially only in the higher social classes, but as trade grew so did literacy. Most Etruscan writing is lost to the modern world, but Latin writers referred to many texts, especially those on religious divination, *haruspicy*. The chapter goes into great detail of word origins and similarities of words with other cultures.

Religion and spirituality played an important role in Etruscan life and is the subject of the next chapter of the work. Etruscans were renowned soothsayers. Theirs was a revealed religion handed down in sacred books. *Haruspicy* was taught to them by Tages, who had the appearance of a child but the wisdom of an old man. (92) They saw every natural event as having a deeper meaning and being caused by the gods. They divided what they saw into four sectors and placed gods in each sector. Favorable gods were located in the east, the direction of sunrise, and the west housed unfavorable gods. The north was most important as that was the home of Tinia, their chief god. (95) He covers much discussion on the importance of lightening; what type, where it strikes, and the deaths of those struck by it. He examines the importance of multiples of three, the examination of livers in divination, and the interpretation of the flight of birds by augers. The

Romans differed from the Etruscans as they believed the liver should not be removed before examination.

Etruscan deities provide much debate for modern scholarship. One topic is the division of deities into groups of three, the origin of that practice, and whether it is independent or influenced by Latins. (104) Cities were laid out according to religious specifications and the placement of buildings and temples were in accordance with Etruscan religion as well. Cristofani goes into a discussion of the evolution of funeral rites and the cult of the dead. Ancestors even became household deities and protectors provided the proper sacrifices were made. As in previous chapters, photos of artifacts and sites support the narrative.

The final chapter, Epilogue: The Problem of Origins provides the discussion on how the Etruscans came to be. He argues the origin of the Etruscan is not of great importance. Herodotus claims they emigrated from Lydia shortly after the Trojan War. Hellanicus claimed they were Pelasgians, a mythical tribe a nomads from Thessaly. Dionysius of Halicarnassus claims they are indigenous to Italy. Archeology spawned a theory of migration form lands to the north. Massimo Pallottino argues that ‘origins’ must be viewed in terms of their cultural development. (122) He then closes the work with a chronology, bibliography, and index.

Cristofani captures the essence of the Etruscans. In a case in which judging a book by its cover proves incorrect, to glance only at the outside one might think it grade school book. Yet, without the base knowledge of the era and the language he uses to support his theory, the reader can become lost quickly. The use of art and archeology to support the narrative only made it stronger. Cristofani did provide a new investigation of the Etruscans.