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## **Etruscans in the Context of European Identity**

The so-called cultural factor has a decisive role in European identity. It is common knowledge that the legacy of Antiquity made a significant contribution to shape it.

Numerous fundamental studies have been devoted to the role of the ancient civilisation in the formation of European culture. However, the importance of the cultures, which made their contributions to the process of shaping European identity by making an impact on the ancient Greek and Roman world directly or *via Graeca* or *via Roma*, have not been given sufficient attention.

In this regard, the Etruscan legacy is one of the most noteworthy. Pierre Grimal wrote in this connection that the Etruscan civilisation “played the same role ... in the history of Italy as the Cretan civilisation played in shaping the Greek world.”<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the Etruscan civilisation proper emerged based on the archaic roots of Mediterranean cultures and, becoming, like the Greek civilisation, the direct heritor of the so-called Mediterranean substratum, which it elevated to new heights thanks to its own innovations and interpretations, it fulfilled an important function of a cultural mediator in the history of the nations of the new world.

This is precisely what Franz Altheim meant, noting that “the importance of the Etruscan civilisation lies first and foremost in its cultural mediation.”<sup>2</sup>

As noted above, in addition, Etruscans introduced a lot of innovations and it is noteworthy that they were made in numerous important spheres, which we are going to discuss in detail below.

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<sup>1</sup> Grimal P., *Auf der Suche nach dem antiken Italien*, Frankfurt am Main 1965, 61.

<sup>2</sup> Altheim F., *Römische Geschichte*, Frankfurt am Main 1953, 65.

As mentioned above, Etruscans influenced the cultures of European nations both directly and *via Roma*. Therefore, we are going to consider both direction one after the other.

### **I. Direct Influence**

Archaeological findings make it clear that there were active relations between Italy and Central Europe back in the Bronze Age - 13<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

Villanovan-Etruscan items that are original or, what is more noteworthy for us, imitated appear first in southern Italy, then in the area close to the Alps, and finally in the regions to the north of the Alps.

These items that are linked to the so-called "military ideology of Etruscans" - helmets, shields, horse bridles, crescent-shaped razors, and so forth - give rise to local versions found in the so-called Halstatt zone on Austrian territory, in west Ukraine, Zurich, Slovakia and Dalmatia.

The culture of feasts and wine expanded from Etruria together with material culture, as well as articles of luxury and the rules of their use, which become established in the life of European nations.

Back in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC Etruscan artefacts appear in a number of European countries - for example, France, Germany, and Renania - well ahead of Greek archaeological materials. Other nations gradually start imitating the Etruscan artistic style, which replaces ancient local traditions in this sphere.

The importance of Etruscan elements is particularly evident in the Celtic art<sup>3</sup> and in southern Gallic and Spanish artefacts.

Thus, the so-called "first Etruscan wave", which reached Europe in ancient times, played an important role in shaping local cultures.

The so-called "second wave" of direct Etruscan influence is linked to the era of Renaissance. It is in this era that the Etruscan culture was rediscovered and studied. Etruscan architecture and art attracted particular attention and became a source of imitation and inspiration.

It has been noted in numerous modern studies<sup>4</sup> that the traces of Etruscan architecture are obvious in the architecture of the Renaissance.

It is important that similar allusions were made in the Renaissance era proper. For example, Leone Battista Alberti (died in 1472) wrote about his

<sup>3</sup> Adam R., Briquel D., Gran-Aymerich J., Kidgway D., Strom I., von Nase F.-W., I rapporti transalpine, in: Gli Etruschi, Bompiani, Gaggiano, Milano 1998, 170 etc.; Bonloumié B., Il commercio marittimo nel sud della Francia, in: op. cit., 154-159; Almagro-Gorbea M., Gli Etruschi e la penisola Iberica, in: op. cit., 160-165.

<sup>4</sup> Thomson de Grummond N., Rediscovery, in: Etruscan Life and Afterlife, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1986, 27.

numerous observations on the Etruscan architectural style and proportions in his book *Ten Books on Architecture*. He designed Palazzo Rucellai in Florence inspired by the architecture of Etruscan burial grounds and the ornaments on the facade repeat the elements of art seen on Etruscan urns.

Etruscan influence is also visible in the architecture of the Poggio a Caiano villa in Florence belonging to Lorenzo dei Medici.

Giuliano di Sangallo, the renowned architect of this villa situated in the outskirts of Florence, used architectural elements of Etruscan temples, placing on the friso of the villa figures with snakes that are encountered in Etruscan burial places among gods of death Charun and Tuchulcha.

The interest in Etruscan architecture and art aroused by the Medicis continued into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Well-known Italian painter Pantormo depicts Etruscan god Vertumnus on the fresco in the hall of the same villa.

Together with architects, artists and sculptors of the Renaissance era and the period before it actively studied Etruscan art and found new sources of inspiration in the artistic creation of Tyrrhenians.

Their influence is obvious in the masterpieces by many renowned artists and sculptors; for example, the side face of Judas Iscariot by Giotto is unusually similar to that of Charun, Etruscan god of death; Benvenuto Cellini's well-known sculpture of Perseus with Gorgon Medusa's severed head is a precise copy of the posture of Uthste (Odysseus) seen on an Etruscan mirror; the Etruscan trace is visible in works by Nicola Pisano, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Masaccio, Donatello, Alberti, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Giorgio Vasari, and others.

I think it is needless to speak about the significant influence that the works by artists of the Renaissance had on the formation of the European artistic culture, which emphasises once more the importance of the Etruscan legacy.

## **II. Influence *via Roma***

Uncovering the role of the Etruscan legacy in the Roman culture is important both for studies in the formation of the Roman civilisation and in the context of the formation of European cultures *via Roma*, the latter being closer to the problems we are looking into.

Given the many-sided nature of the problem, we selected the so-called thematic principle as the starting point, which implies concentration of materials in specific thematic groups.

These thematic groups are as follows:

1. Political and social issues;
2. Military issues;

3. Religious issues;

4. Culture.

### 1. Political and Social Issues

#### a) Principles of State Structure

Romans used the experience of Etruscans in building their state on a lot of occasions. Romans borrowed the main features of monarchic principle of state management – as Cicero called in, *civitas regia*, from Etruscans, who were most experienced in the field among their neighbours.

Together with the monarchic principle, Romans also borrowed from them royal symbols such as royal throne made of ivory, royal clothing (*trabea*), and the institution of lictors accompanying kings and court nobility.<sup>5</sup>

Later, monarchy collapsed in some Etruscan cities and was replaced by oligarchy, which means that cities of Etruria were governed by so-called panels of noblemen led by two *zilachs/zilaths*, not kings (*lucumon*). Following Etruscans, the change was made in Rome, too. It is believed in modern Etruscology that *zilachs* are predecessors of Roman consuls and magistrates.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, as sources, archaeological data, linguistic materials, and modern etymological studies have shown, the so-called monarchic as well as republican governance systems were borrowed from Etruscans.

European nations that were part of the Roman Empire for centuries adopted all these institutional principles of Etruscans via Romans. They adopted them and later, used in the governance systems of their own countries.

### 2. Military Issues

According to sources, Romans borrowed the following items from Etruscans in the military field:

- 1) Military trumpet (Diodorus of Sicily, V, I);
- 2) Titles of military commanders (Diodorus of Sicily, V, I);
- 3) Triumphal marches and decorations (Strabo, *Geography*, V, II, 2).

It is noteworthy that like Etruscans, Romans divided their army into *centurias* and adopted the Etruscan military terminology.<sup>7</sup>

The military terminology, the principle of organising armies, and the ritual of triumphal marches became organic parts of European nations' traditions in the field *via Roma*.

<sup>5</sup> Livius, I, 38, 6-8; Diodorus Sicullus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, V, 40, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cristofani M., *Magistrature*, in: *Dizionario illustrato della civiltà etrusca*, Firenze 2000, 161.

<sup>7</sup> For the origin of Latin terminologies in military sphere cf. Gamkrelidze E., *Foreign Words in Latin*, Tbilisi 2002, 144-151 (in Georgian).

### 3. Religious Issues

This group comprises the following subgroups:

- a) Divination
- b) Gods
- c) Mythology
- d) Rituals and traditions

#### a) Divination

Numerous sources of Antiquity, about 30 authors, point to the Etruscan art of prophesy. For example, Cicero (*De Divin.*, I, 92) wrote: "The Etruscans are very skilful in observing thunderbolts, in interpreting their meaning and that of every sign and portent. That is why, in the days of our forefathers, it was wisely decreed by the Senate, when its power was in full vigour, that, of the sons of the chief men, six should be handed over to each of the Etruscan tribes for the study of divination, in order that so important a profession should not, on account of the poverty of its members, be withdrawn from the influence of religion, and converted into a means of mercenary gain."

Etruscan prophets retained the authority even in Late Antiquity, which is reflected in works by Ammianus Marcellinus and Procopius of Caesarea. Elements of Etruscan prophesy can clearly be seen in magic teachings of Medieval Europe and components of Tyrrhenian haruspicy and auspice are visible in magic cult rituals.

#### b) Gods

In the book *Etruscan Terminology of Cult*,<sup>8</sup> which aimed at restoring and studying the Etruscan pantheon, we identified a group of deities that had an influence of the names and cults of Roman gods. Here are most noteworthy examples:

- 1) Etr. Ani – Rom. Janus;
- 2) Etr. Maris – Rom. Mars;
- 3) Etr. Uni – Rom. Juno;
- 4) Etr. Nethuns – Rom. Neptune;
- 5) Etr. Velchans – Rom. Vulcanus;
- 6) Etr. Satres – Rom. Saturnus;
- 7) Etr. Selvans – Rom. Silvanus;
- 8) Etr. Menrva – Rom. Minerva;
- 9) Etr. Lasas – Rom. Lares;

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<sup>8</sup> Kobakhidze E., *Etruscan Terminology of Cult (Meaning and Genesis)*, Tbilisi 1994 (in Georgian).

### c) Mythology

There are a lot of examples of Etruscan legends and heroes being copied and "inserted" in Roman mythology. The myth about Romulus and Remus is a good example in this regard.

According to most researchers, the myth about Romulus and Remus is of Etruscan origin from the beginning to the end. The Etruscan etymology of Romulus and Remus as well as the name of the city (Roma) is indicative of this. All these names come from the name of an Etruscan clan, Ruma (Cf. also the old name of the Tiber – Rumon; Servius, *Ad Aen.*, 8, 63, 8). The etymologies of some names mentioned in the myth – Mars, Lupus, and Acca Larentia – are also linked to Etruscans.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, if we assume that representatives of the Ruma clan – Romulus and Remus – founded a city (which is been done, as confirmed by numerous sources, in full accordance with concrete instructions of Etruscan prophets) and Romulus became its first ruler, it is natural to regard him as the first lucumon of Rome. Professor R. Gordeziani expressed the same opinion, when considering the reasons for the unproductive nature of the Etruscan stem *lauchme*: “The origin of *lucumones* is linked to the first lucumon or lucumons – Romulus and Remus, who received this nickname as those suckled by a she-wolf, i. e. her whelps.”<sup>10</sup>

The Etruscan world is depicted in quite an expressive manner in Virgil's *Aeneid*. We have looked into this issue in detail in a separate study.<sup>11</sup>

In *Aeneid*, Virgil presents Tarchon, Aeneas' Etruscan ally (VII, 505), as one of the main heroes. He is the king of Agylla (Caere) fighting against tyrant Mezentius and Rutulians.

Another Etruscan hero in *Aeneid* is the king of Caere, Mezentius, who kept proud Etruscan enslaved for a long time. He was notorious for his particular cruelty, condemnation of gods, and terrible methods of execution.

Yet another hero in Etruscan mythology linked to Tarchon, Tages, was very popular in ancient literature (Cicero, *De Divin.*, II, 23, 50; *Festus*, 492, 6; Ovid., *Met.*, XV, 552; Arnob., *Adv., Nat.*, II, 69; *Censor., De Die Nat.*, IV, 13).

These and other heroes well established in Roman literature can be also encountered later, in European literature.

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<sup>9</sup> In this connection, cf. Gamkrelidze E., 2002, 135.

<sup>10</sup> Gordeziani R., *Mediterranean-Georgian Relations*, III, Etruscan, Final Commentaries, Tbilisi 2007, 324 (in Georgian).

<sup>11</sup> Kobakhidze E., *Etruscans in Aeneid*, in: *Phasis. Greek and Roman Studies*, 5-6, Tbilisi 2003, 141-150.

#### d) Rituals and Traditions

According to available sources, Romans borrowed the following important rituals and traditions from Etruscans:

1. The ritual of founding a city;
2. Concepts and rules for selecting locations for temples and holy places.

##### **1. The Ritual of Founding a City**

According to Plutarch, Romulus founded the city of Rome, relying on the advice and help from priests specially invited for this purpose from Tyrrhenia (*Romulus*, XI, I). Plutarch describes this Etruscan ritual of founding a city in quite a long passage.

The ritual described by Plutarch is Etruscan in essence. Being part of the Etruscan world view, it is based on a concrete principle of building a *templum*. Varro also notes that in general, cities were founded in Latium on the basis of Etruscan rules (*Etrusco rito*) (L. L, 5, 143).

##### **2. Concepts and Rules for Selecting Locations for Temples and Holy Places**

In Book V of his *Laws*, Plato notes that prophecies make it possible to precisely define the name of a deity or demon to be given to a holy place. In this context, he mentions various religious practices known in the ancient world, including "Tyrrhenian" prescience (V, 738).

Vitruvius describes the Italic concept of the localization of temples. The author says that it is completely Etruscan and is based on the principles Tyrrhenian divination (*De Architectura*, I, 7, 1).

Historic sources and archaeological materials confirm that the ritual and rules for founding a city that Romans learned from Etruscans were used when founding numerous cities within the borders of the Roman Empire. These rules of city planning that lay as a foundation of numerous cities in Europe continue to be valid and visible.

#### **4. Culture**

The materials in this thematic group can be divided into the following subgroups:

- a) Alphabet;
  - b) Architecture;
  - c) Entertainment and games
- a) Alphabet

Scientists are unanimous in their opinion that the Etruscan alphabet is of Greek origin and Tyrrhenians must have borrowed it from Greek colonists (presumably from Cumae). This is supposed to have happened at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, which is confirmed by the archaeological

materials reflecting intensive contacts between Greek colonists and Etruscans.<sup>12</sup>

We assume that this alphabet started to be used in Rome in the times of Tarquinius Priscus, son of Demaratus. Priscus probably introduced this novelty, among others, when he ruled in Rome.

This alphabet, which came from Greece to Etruria and then to Italy and Rome, was essentially an Etruscan modification of the Hellenic alphabet. The most noteworthy change in it is the transformation of Greek digamma (Ϝ) into F. Of course, Romans added their own "inventions" (mostly digrams) to those of Etruscans and the modified alphabet was later adopted by other European nations.

#### b) Architecture

Numerous authors point to Etruscans' contribution to Roman architecture, Vitruvius' information on secular and religious buildings being most noteworthy of them. Vitruvius noted that the architecture of Tuscan residential houses, which is most widespread among the five types known in Roman architecture, are simple in structures and quite practical. Vitruvius then describes the features of the houses (VI, 3, 1). In addition to this, Varro writes unambiguously that both rain holes - *compluviums* (L. L. 5, 142) - and *atriums* were Etruscan inventions borrowed by Romans as an example.

Vitruvius writes the following about Roman religious and cult architecture that took shape under the Etruscan influence: "The different species of temples of this [Tuscan] sort are clumsy, heavy roofed, low and wide, and their pediments are usually ornamented with statues of clay or brass, gilt in the Tuscan fashion. Of this species is the temple of Caeres, near the Circus Maximus, that of Hercules, erected by Pompey, and that of Jupiter Capitolinus" (III, 3, 5).

These and other sources make it clear what important influence Etruscan architecture exerted on Roman and, *via Roma*, on European and world architecture.

#### c) Entertainment and Games

Numerous ancient sources say that Romans borrowed the tradition of holding entertainments and games from Etruscans. For example, Luvy notes that Tarquinius Priscus was the first to build a circus, where he held cart and boxing competitions. Initially, participants were invited from Etruria, as there were none of them in Rome. As Livy says, it was then that the tradition of annual games started. The games were called Roman or Great Games (I, 35, 9).

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<sup>12</sup> Cristofani M., 2000, 83.



Livy also writes that in the same period, Tarquinius Priscus introduced theatrical performances in accordance with the Etruscan tradition. Livy notes that the bellicose people had never seen anything like that before – *nova res bellicoso populo* (VII, 2, 3). This remote ancestor of modern ballet probably had deep roots in a cult, as Livy says that the king organized the performance as a means of protection from the epidemic of plague.

In addition, modern researchers increasingly often share the opinion of Guglielmo Maezke, who said that before Greek theatre became known in Italy, there was the original phenomenon of the so-called Etruscan-Italic theatre in the area, which is confirmed first and foremost by archaeological data. Most recent excavations have shown that the architecture of the Etruscan-Italic theatre is also quite different from its Greek analogue.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, it is possible to say that Etruscan theatre, which, like Greek theatre, had its roots in the cult, was a complex of entertainment performances that had an important impact on the formation of the ancient Roman theatre. Roman theatre retained some features of this theatre even after Greek theatrical culture was introduced in Rome, which is clearly visible in Roman comedies.

Etruscologists have devoted a lot of works to yet another issue that can be linked to theatre – the word *phersu* "mask, masked". This character is encountered in epigraphic monuments as well as in wall paintings in burial vaults as a participant in cult rituals and sacrificial offerings.

Many researchers believe that the Latin word *persona* originates from *phersu*.<sup>14</sup> Among the recent theories, we would like to focus on the opinions of G. Breyer and R. Gordeziani, who said that *persona* < *phersana*, where *na-* is a possessive suffix, so the word can be translated as "belonging to *phersu*."<sup>15</sup>

Of the broad semantic field of the Latin word *persona* we would like to point to the following meanings: "Mask, masked, actor, personality." Supporting the opinion that Latin *persona* comes from Etruscan *phersu*, we believe that *Phersu* could have been a character in the Etruscan cult ritual of *histriones*. Later, the character replaced a hero in the Atelana theatre and obtained in Rome the additional meaning of "actor, personality."

The Etruscan ritual that gave rise to gladiatorial combats in Rome probably travelled the same road. According to sources, gladiatorial

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<sup>13</sup> Maezke G., Una ipotesi sulla scena del teatro Etrusco-Italico, in: Incontro di studi in memoria di Massimo Pallottino, Istituto Nazionale di Studi Etruschi ed Italici, Pisa, Roma 1999, 37-46.

<sup>14</sup> For the etymology of *phersu* cf. Kobakhidze E., 1994, 109.

<sup>15</sup> Gordeziani R., op. cit., 292.

combats are of Etruscan origin (Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai*, IV, 153). Presumably, this Etruscan ritual was originally linked to sacrificial offerings and had the shape of cult competitions.

Thus, Etruscan elements in the Roman world were of decisive and fundamental factor in shaping specific institutions. Given this, Etruscan components were decisive in the state system, religion and cult, military system, language, culture, and everyday life in Rome. It is important that the Roman world adopted the components in the period, when its philosophy was taking shape.

Correspondingly, it can be said clearly that Etruscan components are the substratum for Roman culture unlike Greek components that can be regarded as an adstratum.

In addition, Etruscan components, as shown above, exerted an important influence on the cultural identity of European nations directly or *via Roma*.

In conclusion, I would like to quote George Dennis, whose one phrase describes the contribution of the Etruscan civilisation in the formation of European culture: "If we measure Etruria by the standard of her own day, we must ascribe to her a high degree of civilisation – second only to that of Greece."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dennis G., *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, v. I, London 1823, 45.