

GREEK AND ETRUSCAN INFLUENCES

By

Ethan David Klicko

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# GREEK INFLUENCE ON ETRUSCANS: THROUGH POTTERY STYLE AND ART

Ethan Klicko

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This paper is written to explore the change the Etruscans experienced by the Greeks, in regards to pottery and art forms. It will be centered on the change between early Etruscan pottery and the Villanovan period, to later periods, and how much the changes imitated the Greeks. Which is clear that they were and did emulate the Greeks in their art and pottery forms.

I would like to thank my Faculty readers Dr. Joseph Tiffany and Dr. Mark Chavalas for helping me along this process despite the headaches and worry I caused them along the way and for those that may still come. I would also like to thank my classmate readers who helped me Jeanna Good and Megan Schwalenberg. I should also thank my friends and family for telling me to shut up and get to work when I needed to.

## INTRODUCTION

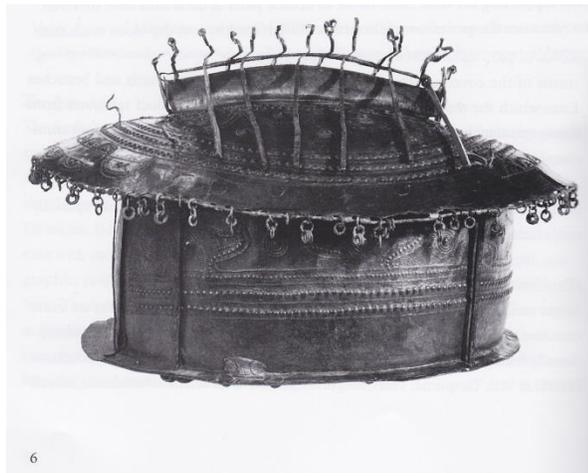
The Ancient Greeks have influenced many cultures even today with mathematics, philosophy, and political philosophy. The Greeks were the first to develop Democracy, and also allowed for sciences to exist. Without these two key aspects we wouldn't have either today, or at least not as developed as they are now. What I am interested in, is the evidence for contact, diffusion and acculturation between the Greeks (1100 to 336 BC) and the Etruscan culture (8th to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuryBC ) of modern Tuscany, Italy. To accomplish this I will begin by defining who the ancient Greeks and Etruscans were. Next, I will examine what other cultures were influenced by them during the time periods defined. My main focus, however, is how did the Greeks influence the Etruscans that lived near modern day Rome, an area where the Etruscan culture spread to but did not originate. Second I will examine how the Etruscans influenced the Greeks, if at all?

To address these questions I will be examining numerous books and articles, artifacts and sites. My emphasis will be on pottery, weapons, artistic styling, and language. While there are different ideologies that are evident, art styles, pottery styles, ways of thinking and architectural methods are some of the areas examined for interaction between the Ancient Greeks and the Etruscans.



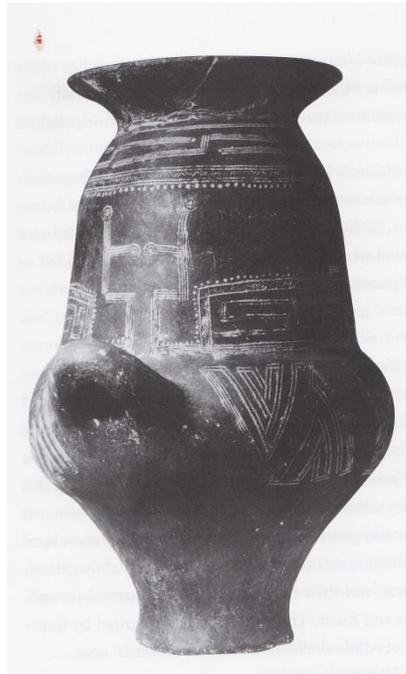
(Fig 1. Haynes page vi)

The Etruscans became who they are linguistically around 700 BC. It's this that made them identifiable as a new and different culture. It's also this language that proves they are different than other groups within Italy. To these other cultures, such as the Greeks, the Etruscans were known as Tyrrhenians, and are often accused of piracy (Haynes pg1). The sequence of their civilization development from early Iron Age villages to the later Etruscan communities is known as Villanovan Civilization, which spanned from 900 to 720 BC. This name came from a site in east Bologna, Villanova di Castenaso, which is where this civilization was first identified in 1853 (Haynes pg4). During the Iron age no linguistics exist or survived, so what we know about them is due to archaeology. These people lived in small haphazardly built huts, which could be circular, oval, or rectangular. The problem is that only a few sites containing these huts have been excavated. While most of the time all that is left is some shallow trenches for the foundation, and postholes, we still can get an idea of the dimensions and shape of these huts because of some funerary ash urns (Fig 2) that have been discovered in some cemeteries in Southern Etruria.



An example of a funerary ash urn (Haynes pg 6 Fig.3)

From these hut urns we can tell the general shapes and dimensions of the huts that these people lived, also how these huts were supported and even possibly that they were decorated by painting on the plaster.



A typical biconic ash urn, that depicts two human figures in a seated position facing each other. (Haynes Fig 4, pg 7)

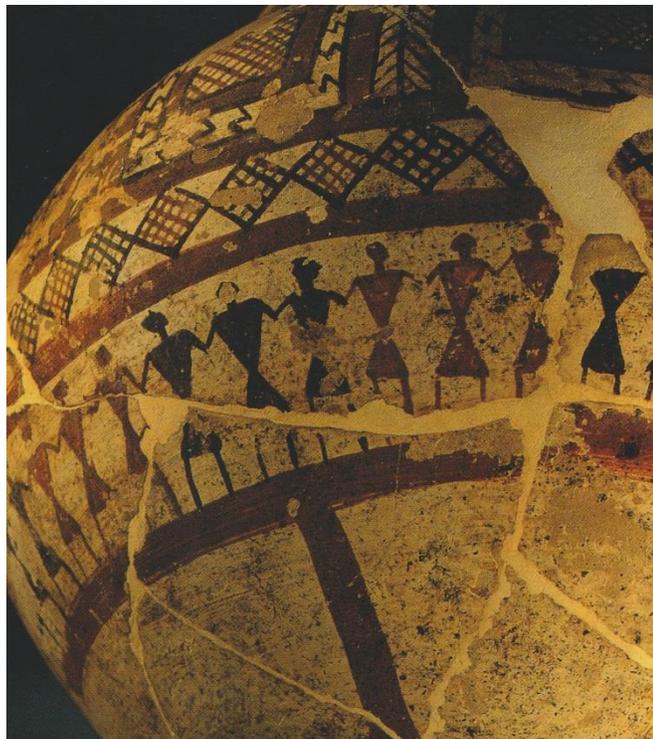
Other more common ash urns, known as biconic ash urns, were commonly decorated with geometric designs, rarely with crude human figures, and were incised into the pottery. The human figures resemble match sticks and do not distinguish between male and female. Sometimes they were seated ( Fig 3), other times they were standing. Hayes comments

that the seated figures may be representing a banquet or feast, while the some of the standing figures that are holding hands could be showing some sort of dance. In the next paragraph she says,

“On the roof of a hut urn from Bisenzio(?) (Rome, Museo Pigorini 105755), the small figure of a man is modeled in high relief just above the door and below the first pair of ridge logs. The suggestion that this is the image of a heroized ancestor protecting the hut at its most vulnerable point, the entrance, is a very persuasive.” (Hayes P7)

This means that while these figures were crude and simple, and probably sometimes hard to distinguish from the other geometric figures, they had a very important meaning associated with them. The rarity in which they used these figures also lends credence to this idea. Even if we simply have not found a bunch of pottery with these figures or if they didn't survive, it is still fairly clear that these people were associating important connotations with these figures. It was during the eighth century that new techniques and motifs made these figures more recognizable. These new figures are depicted as a circle for a head connected to the torso by a small line, the torso is an upside down triangle which is then connected to a slightly smaller triangle, resembling that of a skirt, that then has two straight lines for the legs (Fig 4). Such as with one case from a Globular vase from an early seventh century woman's tomb at Bisenzio. This piece has forty –eighth, clothed people shown holding hands seemingly dancing. These figures are alternate three painted black and three painted red. Haynes says that this change in color might be a simple as a way to make the pottery more aesthetically pleasing, or because in later periods women are depicted as having lighter skin, so perhaps this is an early example of them

differentiating between the sexes. This type of funerary or round dance is common on Greek geometric pottery, although the Greeks clearly depict the sexes with physical characteristics, and the sexes are segregated. The burial where this vase came from a woman of high importance. She had a wooden coffin instead of one of the ash urns, and other typical things a woman from this culture would have. Such as bronze vessels and utensils, and also wool working tools, but she also had objects from Egypt, that would have probably been brought to Etruria by Phoenician and Greek sailors/traders. (Haynes Pg 25).



Picture of the Globular vase from the tomb (Haynes Fig 25a Pg 25)

Another thing that we can use to learn about these people is by what the deposited into the graves with these ash urns, otherwise known as grave goods. The people of this Villanovan

Civilization usually had their cemeteries outside of the villages in the surrounding hillsides, sometimes even in the bottoms of valleys. These people cremated their dead and placed them inside ash urns, such as those already discussed and shown. The burials themselves simple circular pits in soil or rock where the ash urns were placed along with a modest amount of grave goods. Family groups appear to have been buried together. As stated before some men and women were inside hut shaped ash urns, but seems to have been mostly used only for males of high standing. The other times this type of urn are used could mean that these people were trying to simply give this person that died a semblance of their home on this earth, or used as a way to show the links between persons house, their family, and their ancestors. The burial goods associated with these urns were few and modest. Given that these people were cremated and buried in a small area, doesn't leave much room for the placement of burial goods. The modest and few artifacts that were there show little distinction within a village. In other words there is little difference between the social rankings of people. Mainly the difference between the grave goods is between the sexes. Each burial had the typical types of things associated with it, such as cups, jugs, small plates, occasionally some animal shaped vessels, and personal items to that person. The males burials had numerous goods in them that women would not get. Such as rectangular, double-bladed, and later on, semi-lunate and lunate shaped razors, some weapons, and occasionally a bronze rod that had a round or pyramid like tip, made out of bone or amber. This bronze staff would suggest a position of power, they were a leader of some type. The woman had ornaments like changes, rings, bracelets, pendants, but most importantly wool working implements (Haynes Pg 12).

During this period though is also when the uniform nature of the burials started to change. The bronze became richer and more frequent in some while others started to show iron

objects. Some of the bronze is coming from Central Europe, which means that some people were able to afford trading with cultures that were a fair distance away. Also besides the common custom of cremation, while it still continued, a new practice of individual inhumation in trench tombs that had wooden and occasionally stone sarcophagi. These particular tombs had a large increase in grave goods. These tombs show the change in society that means the development of certain individuals or families being the leaders and a division of labor. Also the tombs were rapidly expanding which show that there was an increase in the population size.

The next period for the Etruscans is perhaps the most important for identifying who they were. It is known as the Orientalizing Period, it is this period that the Etruscan cities began to emerge. This period was between 720-575BC. In the previous period the Greeks and Phoenicians expanded throughout the Mediterranean and established trade connections with the Etruscans and continued to expand that trade network in this period. The influence that the Greeks had on the pre-urban Etruscan communities was profound in social and economic changes. To sum up the Etruscans in the seventh century, they were ruled by chief/priests that showed their power by double axes, thrones, scepter, and chariot symbols. In death they had great big burial mounds and they lived luxurious lifestyles. The Greeks introduced the use of purified clay and the fast potter's wheel, among other things. Figures of animals and the occasional humans started to take the place of the normal geometric styles of before. They also introduced special banqueting vessels for ceremonial wine drinking and took the traditional pots and started making them using the potter's wheel. These interactions helped to set up the foundations of change that would eventually lead the Etruscans to merge with the Roman society.

Who were these Greeks who changed a peoples practices and traditions? While this question is difficult because it covers social and material conditions, along with ethnic, cultural

and linguistic traditions. The first culture to speak Greek would be the Mycenaean's of the latter half of the second millennium BC. Who themselves would be influenced by the Minoans who lived on the island of Crete. They passed down the tradition of large scale sea trade and intercultural contact to the Mycenaeans, before losing power in the middle of the millennium. The Mycenaeans thrived for a while before having the centers of their civilization destroyed around 1200 to 1000 BC. The descendants of the people who survived would become the Greek civilization as most people know it today.

This time period is known as the Dark ages, and was responsible for many cultures across the Near East to collapse. While the Near East recovered around 900 BC the Greeks were still recovering and took about another 150 years to recover. But since they were in close contact with the Near East they never actually lost the technologies, ideas, or religious traditions they once had. Although they did either completely or partially lose their knowledge of writing. Instead leaving knowledge to be passed down orally commonly through poems, singing, music, and oral performances. Even with that later Greeks would know little about the this time, and said that a Greek-speaking group known as the Dorians came down from the north and invaded central and southern Greece. Dorians are most commonly known for being the ancestors of the Spartans, who have become mythical in today's society thanks, most notably, to Frank Millers graphic novel and movie adaption 300. As for this story of the Dorians, modern day archaeology has not found evidence for the invasion, and scholars out right deny t and say its fiction (Martin pg 36-38). There is just basically no information anywhere that supports it, whether it never was, or if it never actually existed. Throughout the dark ages the Greeks advanced and became one of the most advanced nations around.

This would lead into the next period known as the Archaic age and when they became fully developed and created their city-state. The Archaic Period was about 750 to 500 BC, and is perhaps the most important period for the Greeks and the foundation for who they would become. One of the key developments during this period would be the city-state or polis as the Greeks referred to it. While the Greeks referred to themselves as Hellenes they were all from independent city-states, which are their own governments on to themselves. These city-states weren't just the cities; they encompassed the rural area for miles around and also included many small settlements. Two of the most well known of these are Athens and Sparta. While only men could be involved politically in these city states, women were still relatively equal to men, much like the Etruscans. While each of these city states shared similar social practices and beliefs, each was slightly different from the rest. For example in most, while more equal than most societies of the time, women of Greece were not allowed into the public space and were to more private lives around the estate. But those of Sparta were more free and were allowed to be in the public to stay fit in order to give birth to healthy babies. The people who made up these city states were made up of the free Greek citizens and the slaves, who were individually owned except for Sparta where they were owned by the city. As the cities began to grow foreigners began to migrate to them, while they didn't have the same rights as Greeks they weren't slaves either and couldn't be treated as such.

Most of what we currently know about the emergence of city states from this time almost solely concerns Athens, which is not a typical city state. But using the evidence that has survived some general conclusions can be made. The population and economy of Greece grew substantially leading to a change in the social structure. The elite of this time prized possessions and riches, which the non-elite were starting to acquire due to success in agriculture or

commerce. It would also appear that these elite would act like petty kings in their areas, preying on the families that lived there. It was these families that most likely contributed to the population increase, needing larger families to farm the land so they could keep the elite happy. Eventually a cry for equity and fairness came from the families leading to the social and political change in these city states. Thus is born the famous Greek democracy. In which all free men citizens had a share and say in group decisions. While that was the goal it wasn't exactly how it worked. There were still restrictions on who could do what, usually by how much property or wealth one had(Martin pg 60-61).

The next phase for the Greeks is the Classical period that was strife with conflict. Starting with the first of the Persian wars, where the Athenians came to the aid of the Ionians who were revolting against the Persian king Darius. Darius was infuriated by the Athenians and landed at Marathon to attack Athens. Sparta was busy with a religious festival so they were not able to help the Athenians, but the Athenians led a surprise attack and routed the Persians. Ten years later it was Xerxes's turn. This is the war and battle that almost everyone knows of due to Frank Millers graphic novel and the film adaptation 300. Although very stylized and action packed, the basics are true. King Xerxes did lead the world's largest army of the time against the Greeks. This can be confirmed by Herodotus, although some claim he slightly embellished his tale, but what story teller doesn't. In it Herodotus describes the count of the army saying this.

“Now I cannot say for certain how many men each contingent contributed to the total number, since nobody can report that, but the number of troops in the whole land army added together was found to be 1,700,000. This is how they managed to count them. They Gathered groups of 10,000 men together at one spot, packed them in as closely as they could and then drew a circle around them from the outside. After delineating the circle and dismissing those 10,000, they erected a dry wall on the edge of the circle high enough to reach a man's navel.” (Herodotus book seven 7.60)

Even if he was not exaggerating the count wouldn't be entirely accurate, most people are very aware that humans come in different shapes and sizes. Either way this army was massive, and the Greek forces that arose against Xerxes army at Thermopylae were pitiful. Even Herodotus states that the Spartans only numbered 300, but goes on to state about three or four thousand other men, all from different places that came to the aid of Leonidas. As the graphic novel and history tells, the Persians won, but at a surprisingly great cost and continued on to Marathon. Already demoralized and weakened, but still in great number, the Persians were defeated at Marathon ending the Persian wars. This was not the end for the Greeks for now they would war amongst themselves in the Peloponnesian wars. This war included all of the Greek city states but Sparta and Athens were the two big ones. Eventually Sparta wore down Athens and defeated them. After Sparta and Athens dwindled into shadows of what they used to be, resulting in Macedonia rising to become the next major power. Macedonia started its rise with Philip II, who started with northern Greece and ended with central and southern Greece by the time he was assassinated. But Philip's ambition to conquer more of the known world was not lost with his death, his son Alexander the Great carried it with him while he conquered perhaps more than any other before him. I don't believe that this kind of expansion would be matched or beaten until Genghis Khan. This period wasn't only filled with war and death, but also a type of birth. It was this period that we saw the rise of Democracy in Athens, and also the birth of philosophy as we know it today. The art of this time became more naturalistic. Man became a more central thing to them, describing and representing man accurately. This can be seen in all their art forms, from sculptures to paintings to depictions on pottery. But also the arts of Drama and theatre arose. The styles and techniques changed because of the vast and diverse empire that Alexander

created. This great empire he created was broken apart into smaller territories by three of his commanders, resulting in the Hellenistic period.

This period is the time when the Greek civilization began its downfall, it was also this time when the Etruscan's began to be absorbed by Rome, while it was conquering Italy. The Hellenistic period for the Greeks starts with the death of Alexander and ends with the Death of Cleopatra VII the last Macedonian ruler, about 300 years after Alexander's death. This period can be summed up into a few kings that ceased power after the death of Alexander and reformed what Greece already was. If it was up to Alexander's mother, her grandson would have taken his father's place. These kingdoms inevitably fought amongst themselves for decades until they set upon set boundaries between themselves. This was until all of the eastern kingdoms eventually fell to the Romans. The Ptolemaic rulers were the longest lasting against the Romans until they chose the wrong side in the Roman civil war and were conquered by them around 30BC. This period is most notable for its ideas of philosophy and science. Which until now had never reached as wide of an audience.

## **METHODOLOGY**

I will be looking at the Greek and Etruscans cultures and how they interacted with each other. Focusing on the Etruscan aspect of it, meaning how did the Greeks change or alter the Etruscan practices or life styles. I will be marking and analyzing these changes by looking at changes in pottery and artistic styles. All in order to answer how were the Etruscans influenced by the Greeks and what are the possible reasons for why they influenced them and also why they didn't if that happens to be the case.

## Etruscan Pottery

The first of the Etruscan's pottery styles is from the Villanovan civilization. These are the people that were using the funerary ash urns, and later began making the special tombs for their elite members. The funerary ash urns are formed by hand and formed by some volcanic clay that was poorly ground into a paste. These clay pots were also irregularly baked over an open flame as opposed to a kiln like later periods, and other cultures. Because of the open flame baking the surface varied from a reddish brown to greyish black. After the firing they would be covered in a polished slip to give them a sort of metallic appearance. The shapes of these are mostly uniform and but peculiar with a single handle on one side at the widest part and is similar to Fig 3. What isn't shown is that these urns would be covered by a small bowl or saucer with a handle, these would be inverted on the top of the urn. The same pottery and techniques also apply to the hut urns that were also filled with ashes. These hut urns are found mostly in the vicinity of Rome. Both of these forms would be decorated with incised lines of geometric shapes. The biggest difference between these clays creations and those of what are to come is that these are rough, crudely made, and are not made with a wheel. These somewhat specialized pottery forms were not the only ones that they were using at this time. The more common pottery isn't any different in how it's made or the materials used. It is still crudely made over an open flame instead of a furnace, and still in simple and heavy forms. The shapes include bowls with a flat vertical or high-looped handle, saucers just like the ones that covered the urns, some flasks that had long thin necks similar to a beak, bowls that had small feet on the bottom, jars that had one or two handles, and *kerni*, groups of vases united on one stem(Birch Vol 2 Pg 287). The majority of the pottery also had geometric designs like the funerary and hut urns. Some of the patterns are so uniform and regular that it would appear that a stamp was used to make them. These shapes are

formed by circles, so perhaps instead of making a stamp specifically for this pottery, perhaps they would just use a hollowed out reed from a nearby river. At least to me that seems more likely to include the use of a simple reed in the process of making pottery then actually making a stamp.

The next period has perhaps the most famous and recognized pottery form of the Etruscans is the *Bucchero* ware, or also called *Bucchero nero*. This pottery is clearly different from anything the Etruscans have done before, and is clearly influenced by the Greeks. This pottery is now formed by wheels, which were introduced to the Etruscans by the Greeks, in Southern Etruria. Now it's important to point out that this period is when the wheel was introduced by Greek settlers, that doesn't mean that everyone was suddenly using the pottery wheel. It would take about another couple centuries for it to be common use in the middle of the sixth century. So naturally the Etruscans still had some changes in style and pottery before they would get to the impressive *Bucchero* ware. Many of the same forms from earlier are still around, but they are better made and have better polish on them. Like with the red and yellow wares that have geometric patterns that clearly imitate those of Greek fabrics, these forms are made with the same techniques but they become lighter, more symmetrical and varied. Even the Greek pottery shapes of the *stamnos*, *Kantharos*, and trefoil mouthed *oinochoe* begin to appear for the first time (Birch Vol 2, pg 289-290). Besides the local ware, made of a greyish clay, there are Greek wares, a pale yellow clay, that were imported to the Etruscans. Also a new variety of pottery appears. This pottery has the same methods and forms of the other Etruscan forms, but was made of uniform black clay. An example of this style was found at Orvieto and had a crudely incised figure of *Bellerophon* and *Chimera*. Later on these would begin to be more polished, and decorated with incised lines, appearing to be the forerunners of the *Bucchero*.

In the seventh century two new forms are found in Caere, modern day Cerveteri, in Southern Etruria. The first one is large red ware jars that have relief designs, with the lower part of the body ribbed. Plates of this style were also found, the use of which are believed to be a jar cover similar to those of the ash urns, or a stand for the jars to catch excess or spilt liquid. The reliefs on these jars are similar to the Greeks Orientalized characters. They would depict animals, monster, hunting, fights, and banquets. The origin of these is unclear whether imported or local. It is surmised that they are local imitations of Greek models. The second form is very similar to the last, but these were painted instead of being reliefs. These were painted in a white outline on a red ground, as Birch describes it.

The most recognizable and what some might call the national pottery of the Etruscans is Bucchero ware.



An example of the different forms and styles that Bucchero ware can have, also shows the clear and polished black it was made with. (Google images, ethnolog.wordpress.com)

This form is characterized by its blackness, its black on the outside and in its core. This pottery form was created from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries and was thin walled and wheel spun. This is clearly different from any earlier forms which were characterized by being relatively thick, burned over a fire instead in an oven, and were reddish brown or greyish black. These pots were first made in Cerveteri, but spread quickly throughout the Etruscan world and some went beyond that. The styles and decorations appear to have varied locally. The decorations varied from incised lines that were filled with red ochre, painted, stamped and molded designs that were made before firing. The paintings and drawings were of local traditions and were influenced by Greek and Oriental designs (Haynes pg 56).

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that the Etruscans were influenced by the Greeks I highly doubt anyone would argue that. From the form to the artistic styling of these people used a lot of influence on the things they created. The Etruscans seemed to be more than happy to change the ways they made their pottery, and art. To most people today that might not seem like such a big deal, but back then it could be. The way that a culture would create something could be specialized towards a tradition that they carry. The things and ways they draw can be specific to that tradition, so why would a culture change those ways? The most obvious being that it's not important to them, they are only making the pottery how they know and for what they need to. When another culture shares the way they do things, and that way is better and easier, the other culture would have no problem changing to adapt those new techniques. I believe this is the case with the Etruscans. I believe they changed because the Greeks introduced new ways of making pottery and new

artistic styles. Starting with the wheel, this allowed for better and easier made pottery. Before the wheel Etruscan pottery is crude at best. About the same time as the wheel was introduced so was the kiln or oven for baking the pottery instead of the open flame they have been using. They also changed their art styles, which took quite a while before it was up to par with the Greeks but they tried. For example the pottery piece with the Chimera, Birch called it crude to the point of being ludicrous. The Etruscans didn't only change to fit a more Greek kind of way, they adapted into multiple cultures. After the section were Birch talks about the Bucchero ware, he talks about canopic jars. No he doesn't start talking about ancient Egyptian mummies and such, he's still talking about the Etruscans. It would seem some of them started to emulate the Egyptians, or were just trying it out. I didn't read into it much since I was concentrating on the Greek aspect of it. But this shows that the Etruscans were kind of a copycat culture. They took many influences from other cultures and integrated them into their own. They were a unique culture and more needs to be done to understand them. It was surprisingly difficult to find information about them, I would spend three times as long looking up Etruscan information as I would the Greeks. But regardless the reason that I believe the Etruscans mimicked the Greeks was because it was better than their own. It was better quality, functioned better, and looked more appealing. They continued to change and adapt up until the Hellenistic era when they were integrated into the Roman society.

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