THE ETRUSCANS

LOST CIVILIZATIONS

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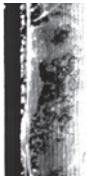
REAKTION BOOKS



TWO
Where is Home?

Climbing up from the dark blue of the Tyrrhenian to the town of Tarquinia, hairpin bends lead you through housing and industrial units, linking the old medieval town to the modern beach resort below. Once you arrive at the top, you are confronted by Etruscan things – postcards, replicas, stickers on buses and posters in ice cream shops. If there is such a thing as an Etruscan tourist hotspot, it's here. The painted tombs, strung along the hillside on the opposite side of town, are the focus. Yet, as any archaeologist will tell you, it's always better to visit the museum first. The object at the core of this chapter can be found in the chambers of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale Tarquiniense, nestled in a medieval palazzo that provides a welcome relief from the summer heat. It dates to the late ninth or early eighth century BCE, making it the oldest artefact included in this book. It is made of a grey-black clay with a soft sheen to its surface, a fabric known as impasto that would later evolve into the material of one of the most beautiful art forms of the Etruscan world. This is a cinerary urn, used to contain the cremated ashes of a human being, or beings.

The earliest known examples of cremation in Italy are far to the south of Tarquinia, in Abruzzo and Puglia. Dating to the Neolithic, they are highly unusual.[1] Both contained the remains of children. The Abruzzo urn included the ashes of a woman, scattered over the remains of two children.[2] One of the children from Puglia shows evidence of trauma, raising questions about the purpose of their death and the need for such an unusual form of burial.[3] There

House urn from the Monterozzi necropolis, Tarquinia.

is a truism in archaeology that the dead do not bury themselves, and it is important to think pragmatically about what this means. The cremation of a body requires the investment of a large amount of time and effort to dispose of the dead. The burnt remains from Early Bronze Age cremations from Sa Figu, Sardinia, show that the bodies were exposed to temperatures of between 400 and 800°C.[4] The amount of material required to heat a pyre to that level is significant, even in a landscape that was more heavily forested than it is today. Once the fuel was gathered, the spectacle of burning would have been seriously impressive for those watching, a statement about the value of the deceased and a way of imprinting their memory on to those left behind.

By the Middle Bronze Age, this highly expensive form of burial was popular across Europe, where the so-called Urnfield societies of central Europe buried their dead in vast cremation cemeteries. One of the largest examples in southern Germany contained over ten thousand costly cremations. This method of cremating the dead arrived in the Italian peninsula at least a century after it became popular in northern Europe, and burial of the whole body continued alongside the newfangled urn burials. Other items seem to have spread southwards too, including styles of pottery and fancy

designs in metalwork. Yet settlements remain unchanged, as far as we can tell from the archaeological record. People's lives were largely unaffected, although the manner of their burial was now no longer a default. For some, the implication is that with cremation and new styles of pottery came people, in spite of the unchanged villages and uncomfortable time gaps. So, from the very beginning, the Tarquinia urn is tied to a central and still compelling question: where did the Etruscans come from?

The Tarquinia urn embodies this idea perfectly – it's in the shape of a house. Objects like this one are usually termed 'hut-urns'.[5] Yet it only takes a glance to tell you that these buildings are more than the term 'hut' implies. This structure is impressive in stature, with decorative architecture cleverly worked into the design. The most striking indication of this is a series of roof beams poking out, forming a spine along the ridge of the building. They are crowned with the heads of birds, with beaks that look suspiciously like ducks. Each pair of heads faces outwards, away from each other and towards the viewer. The building is a circular shape, with a

Reconstructed biconical urn burial from the Museo Etrusco Guarnacci, Volterra.

square doorway marking the entrance. It was through this doorway that the charred and broken bone of the urn's occupant was placed. Other urns still retain a door, hung from holes just above the entry space. The outer surface is smooth and shiny, although the door is outlined with three lines. A ridge around the bottom bulges outwards. Inside, the remains are visible, little grey and white scraps of humanity broken into a thousand pieces.

It seems likely that urns like this one are representative of real-life houses.[6] That is, they depict a tradition of building design that reaches back to at least the Bronze Age. Such structures, built out of perishable wood and thatch, covered with daub (a mix of mud, straw, animal dung, hair and whatever else seemed like a good idea to the builders), do not survive as well as their stone-built successors. Archaeologically, it is often only the shadowy holes of the structural posts of the building that remain. In sites across central Italy, excavators have picked up on these delicate clues, allowing for the reconstruction of buildings from the turn of the first millennium BCE. These are very different from the Urnfield settlements to the north, where people lived in long rectangular dwellings.[7] Instead, they are similar to this urn – square proportioned, with rounded corners and a curving front aspect. The site of Gran Carro, now submerged beneath the waters of Lake Bolsena, was occupied from the thirteenth to the eighth centuries BCE, before being abandoned in around 750.[8] The waters of the lake preserved some of the perishable organic substances, revealing a village of houses built in a similar style to our urn – a village that survived both fire and flood to be rebuilt time and again on similar lines.

To return to the local context of our urn, by the time of its burial, Tarquinia was already a distinct settlement. People had come from smaller villages to live together in a larger community. They made their homes on the hill now known as the Civita, where excavations have exposed the remains of both this early settlement and the later Etruscan city – built over exactly the same site. It lies on a spur of hillside opposite the area where the urn was found, facing the site of the later medieval town. Surface finds across the plateau, predominantly broken pottery, in addition to sub-surface structures, suggest a small township that changed shape

as structures were constructed, used, abandoned and reinhabited. However, away from the Civita site are the remains of a number of buildings near one of the major burial areas, the Arcatelle necropolis, which were aligned on an east–west axis. Someone, or several people, had a clear idea of how these structures needed to be placed within the wider settlement. This was an organized space, with houses, storage areas and what seems to be a ritual complex linked together by trackways that survive in the modern agricultural landscape.

The latter building is something of an enigma. Deep beneath the later temple complex, excavators found a pit containing the remains of a child. Dated to the late ninth century BCE, this burial was contemporary with the early phases of settlement on the plateau, and seemed to be marking out this area as different from the earliest development of Tarquinia as a city.[9] Confirming this idea is the fact that this was no ordinary child – tests on the remains have suggested that the child may have suffered from epilepsy, with the seizures that typify the disease perhaps taken as moments of communion with the world of the divine, or as prophetic visions. Later Etruscan myths tell of a child found in the earth by a ploughman near Tarquinia, who taught the people how to predict the future – of which more later. While it is tempting to draw lines between the legend and the archaeology, the key point made by this burial is that there was a continuity of belief, centred on a central important place; one that survived hundreds of years of change.

This continuity is important to consider if we return to the question at hand: who were the Etruscans? The people living at Tarquinia, who made the urn, built their homes and buried an unusual child in a special place? From the specific evidence discussed so far, and the archaeological evidence in general – styles of pottery and metalwork, continuous occupation of other sites like that of Gran Carro spread across the region – you would certainly think so. Yet the writings of ancient authors present a different story. Herodotus (*c.* 485–426), whose stories of origins have given him the status of the first devoted historian, describes the Etruscans as travelling to Italy from the Eastern Mediterranean – from Lydia, or modern Turkey.[10] He tells of a population crisis

Spectacular bronze Villanovan helmet from a 9th-century burial.

– too many people, not enough food. The solution was obvious to the king of Lydia, Atys, who made his people draw lots to determine their fate. His own son, one Tyrrhenus, was to lead the unlucky losers to a new land across the sea to which he gave his name. Landing in Italy, they quickly overcame the locals and established a new and prosperous kingdom.

It's a good yarn, with plenty of enjoyable ingredients – a handsome hero, a dangerous journey, a dysfunctional royal family. Yet by the Roman period, other historians were adamant that Herodotus was wrong. Livy, writing in the first century BCE, decreed that they were more closely related to northern European peoples – an idea that might tie up to the old conception of people moving in along with cremation burial during the Bronze Age, but which

also neatly connects the Etruscans with then-current Barbarian foes.[11] Living and working in Rome, it could be argued that Livy, otherwise known as Titus Livius Patavinus, was probably in contact with families of Etruscan origin. These survivors, who had adapted to life under the rule of their southern neighbours and successfully integrated into the city's high society, could have shared their own oral histories and origin myths, if not written texts. The later Roman author Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) agreed with Livy, linking the Etruscans to a people he called the Raeti, driven southwards by marauding Gauls.[12] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek scholar living in a by then Roman world, declared that the Etruscans were Italian, and always had been, discarding the fashionable idea of migration in favour of a more prosaic grass-roots narrative. Just to confuse things, Tacitus, a historian better known for his intimate portrait of Roman Britain, supported Herodotus' version of the story.[13] Like Livy, having lived and studied in Rome, Tacitus would also have had the opportunity to meet and speak with Etruscan descendants. If he heard their story from their own lips, Tacitus' informants obviously had very different views to those of Livy.

By the end of the Roman period, and with the destruction of Etruscan texts in the razing of Italy that followed the rise of Christianity and fall of Rome, the tale was tangled. Different stories supporting very different ideas of who the Etruscans really were emerged from the mess. Of course, none of these authors were Etruscan themselves. They were Greek or Roman, members of societies for whom the Etruscans were a menace, an enemy, a people apart. So each scholar whose interpretation of the origin myth is listed above links up their Etruscans with other threats of the time in which they were writing. Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BCE, looked east. His version connected the Etruscans (by then limiting Greek dominion in the Western Mediterranean) with the Lydians, a people incorporated into the Persian Empire. That is, the empire with whom the Greeks had been at war for the first 35 years of Herodotus' life. It was potentially an entirely natural act to link the enemies of Greece from the East with the threat in the West.

Centuries later, Livy was living and writing at a time when Roman dominance was swelling, as the late Republican and early Imperial conquests pushed northwards through Gaul, and at the very end of his life cementing control of the rebellious Alpine peoples of what is now Switzerland and Austria. Pliny and Livy's Etruscans were kin to these present-day foes, who would be vanquished in their turn and brought under Roman influence, just as their ancestral cousins had been. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Turkish-Greek who also supported this thesis, may have been delicately and deliberately removing the Etruscans from Lydia and equating them firmly with the homeland of Roman overlords.[14]

Eighth-century bronze situla showing geometric decoration also seen on biconical urns.

Simple Villanovan bronze fibula.

For Tacitus, the connection is less clear-cut – yet his preference for the Eastern model could conceivably be linked to his writings on another Eastern rebellion – the Jewish Revolt.[15] The Etruscans were recast once again as Eastern enemies of the state.

There is some archaeological evidence that could be construed as supporting the Eastern model of Etruscan origins. At the end of the eighth century BCE, between fifty and a hundred years after our urn was buried, a variety of objects influenced by design and fashion from the Eastern end of the Mediterranean begin to appear in Etruscan burials.[16] They show images that can be clearly linked to ideas from as far away as Iran, while raw materials from Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa pop up in Etruscan tombs. These artefacts, and their relationship to the people who used and buried them, are the subject of the next chapter. Undeniably, they demonstrate at least a connection between the East and Etruscan Italy. The question is whether the objects were acquired by indigenous peoples, or whether they arrived with a new influx of settlers. In this scenario, it was these new arrivals who quickly overcame the makers of the hut-urns, and the first inhabitants at Tarquinia and other Etruscan settlements. The expansion of these population centres has also been used to argue for population change – the location of settlements may have stayed constant, but the growth and development of urban areas through the eighth and seventh centuries could be construed as the result of more sophisticated arrivals from regions already familiar with the concept of city living. The final shift in the archaeological evidence that could be used to support the Herodotus hypothesis is a dramatic change in the disposal of the dead. Cremation, whether in elaborate hut-urns or the more usual biconical urns (these get their name from their shape – an

hourglass-like two cones on top of each other), begins to vanish at the same point in time that these imports arrive, the same moment that the fledgling towns and cities of Etruria expand. The dead are no longer burnt, but buried intact, with increasingly elaborate grave assemblages. Hut-urns go out of fashion, and elaborate tombs for entire corpses become the preferred form of burial for the wealthy.

The arrival of these three major changes – in materials, in settlement size and in the treatment of the dead – at first sight gives some weight to the suppositions of the ancient authors, in spite of their biases. Yet even within these supposedly watertight pieces of evidence for immigration, there are also signs of continuity. First, materials: Etruscan metalwork and pottery, while making use of Eastern motifs, also bears close resemblance to the locally made products found in burials like our urn. Fibulae (metal brooches used to pin clothing in place) are one set of objects which show continuity. Pottery fabrics, too, show clear development from the clays used to build this house urn. Second, as observed above, settlements remain in the same places, with presumably the same populations living within them. Looking at a site like Gran Casso, or Tarquinia, it seems unlikely in the extreme that a new group marched in and took over without establishing their own new towns. Allegiance to places, allegiance to ancestors: growth in the same locations is not evidence for large-scale population movement. And finally, while inhumation gradually became normalized, some aspects of the old ways survived. This is most notable in the retention of house-like features in tomb architecture, with beams like those on our urn carved into rock, and rich fabrics painted onto later tomb walls.[17] The continued dedication to cremation as a burial rite in some areas (notably inland, around the city of Chiusi) further undermines the idea of a new elite sweeping in with new ideas on how to deal with the dead.

The archaeological record from the ninth to seventh centuries BCE is, therefore, a bit of a conundrum, particularly when mixed up with the classical texts. The problem of Etruscan origins during this period neatly illustrates a central issue with investigating the deep past. You can line up 'facts' on either side of an argument;

you can use the evidence to build two entirely different answers to a question. If you give more weight to words then the archaeology can act as your crutch. If you privilege the material culture, you can accuse the texts of inaccuracy. In the history of Etruscan studies, the two sides of the debate have ebbed and flowed. Yet the preference for one point over another was itself defined by the cultural consciousness of the times in which the historians and archaeologists of the past were writing. The rediscovery of Etruscan culture was a painfully slow process, but its pace increased remarkably by vast excavations in the early nineteenth century. At this point, it seemed obvious to everyone that Herodotus was correct, and should be taken literally. George Dennis (1814–1898), who popularized Etruscan archaeology in Britain in the late nineteenth century, summarized the general view of scholars outside Italy: 'No fact can be more clearly established than the oriental character of the civic and religious polity, the social and domestic manners, and many of the arts of the Etruscans.' Dennis was writing to sell the Etruscans to an avid audience, and as a result some of his statements are hopeful in the extreme – for example, he describes the contents of Etruscan tombs as a 'second Pompeii'.[18] The intensity of opinion wrapped up in Dennis's prose makes his discussion of the origins argument particularly interesting. Steadily he wheeled out all the evidence available to support his model of Eastern origins. A snide little comment dismisses the idea of Etruscan culture as Italian in origin as mere nationalist drumbeating. The great Italian (indeed Tuscan) classical archaeologist Giuseppe Micali (1768–1864), who had died forty years previously, was the carefully chosen victim of Dennis's sneer.

Micali was certainly involved in the burgeoning Italian nationalist movement of the early nineteenth century, and the identity of the Etruscans as early Italians was important to the beliefs of this political group. Carlo Denina (1731–1813), historian and friend of Micali, placed the Etruscans at the centre of his history of Italy – a nation unconquered and independent, a league of city states brought together by their love of freedom.[19] Micali was not unaware of the connection between his beliefs about Italy's future and his study of her past, but in the face of criticism he maintained

his view that Etruscan culture was authentically Italian. Prior to the unification of Italy as a nation, these ideas were provocative, even dangerous. After the Risorgimento of 1871, the Etruscans-as-Italians idea became even more important. As nationalist feeling swelled into the early twentieth century, so too did dedication to seeking evidence for the Etruscans as indigenous Italians. The joyful connection of Etruscan virtues with Italian ideals would turn sour, tarnished by association. For after Mussolini and his blackshirts marched on Rome in 1922, the argument over Etruscan origins would become a central part of fascist ideologies of the past.

Mussolini is best known for his self-identification with Roman, not Etruscan, ideals. His infatuation with the concept of *romanità* and his desire to build a second Roman Empire had disastrous consequences for Italy and continues to reverberate in the modern world. The humiliation of his campaigns in Ethiopia undermined his own mystique, in spite of a vigorous propaganda machine. Those affected by unrest in Libya and those fleeing the Eritrean regime are only the latest victims of this colonial misadventure, the inheritors of instability. While preferring to identify with the straightforward, bulldozing march of Rome, the Fascists also had designs on the Etruscan past. In 1922, the medieval town of Corneto was renamed Tarquinia, an exercise in resurrecting past prestige. While the renaming ceremony was an exquisite piece of Fascist theatre, it was in the universities that the effects of this obsession with Italian origins would appear. The classical scholar Giulio Quirino Giglioli (1886–1956) vehemently denied any connection with or influence from Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean.[20] As far as he was concerned, the Etruscans were, and always had been, an early example of Italian cultural supremacy. In this, Giglioli was bang on the message.

While the world prepared for war, a student of Giglioli called Massimo Pallottino was working hard on material from the earliest Etruscan period, including artefacts from Tarquinia. By 1939, Pallottino was ready to publish his analyses. The desire ignited by Fascist principles to prove the Italian origins of the Etruscans had resulted in an extraordinary piece of scientific analysis. Deliberately and carefully, Pallottino put forward the archaeological evidence

Sixth-century canopic cremation urn from Chiusi, a city where old burial customs refused to die.

for the Etruscans having their origins in Italy. He pieced together the connections – settlements, linguistics, artefacts. It was Pallottino who traced the development of ceramics and bronzes, who carefully drew out and plotted the shifting design of fibulae and razors, cups and jugs. More originally, and more dangerously, Pallottino criticized the dominant ideas that had prompted his work in the first place. The whole concept of set cultures represented by objects and based upon a solid definition of race was, to him, entirely inappropriate. While he was happy to accept that, fundamentally, the Etruscans were a home-grown phenomenon, Pallottino was furious at blind adherence to theory in the face of evidence. Here he is, risking his career on the brink of war: 'The majority of scholars do not concern themselves with a critical problem and present conclusions which are accepted without discussion'.[21] After the fall of Mussolini, Pallottino would go on to become the greatest Etruscan scholar of the twentieth century. Yet the argument over Etruscan origins, which he had done so much to elevate above dogmatic political belief, would stagnate. Inside Italy, Italian origins were accepted. Elsewhere, scholars continued to toy with the other ideas. The question drifted into stalemate, as archaeologists nervously steered away from identity politics, fingers burned from the conscription of the past into the ideologies that sparked the Second World War.

Yet in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the issue of Etruscan origins exploded back into life. This time, it wasn't nationalist sentiment that fuelled the resurgence. It was the rise of genetics, and the tempting idea of proving a point once and for all with the aid of deoxyribonucleic acid – DNA. The first attempt to use genetics to discuss Etruscan origins was in 1996, when a group of scientists looked at the genes of 49 modern Tuscans, and concluded that their DNA was about what you would expect – midway between the high variation of Near Eastern genes and the low variation of isolated Western European populations (Basques and Britons).[22] So far, so bland. In 2004, another study looked at DNA from Etruscan burials – a sample of eighty individuals, reduced to thirty due to the risk of contamination from modern sources.[23] The conclusions were equally unsurprising – the level of variation

in the Etruscan remains was absolutely standard for a population sharing common ancestry. The results also showed that modern Tuscans were, by and large, not related to the thirty individual Etruscans whose genes had been sequenced; again, unsurprising given the degree of population shift over time. The DNA had barely moved the argument forward at all, but in 2007, the situation changed. Two teams of scholars came out strongly in favour of the Eastern origins argument. One had sequenced DNA from humans, the other from cows. Let's start with the cows.

One of the great pleasures of a trip to Florence is eating a piece of beef the size of your plate. Tender, delicious and expensive, beef from the Val di Chiana is a special treat. The cows that provide this *bistecca alla fiorentina* are charismatic beasts, pure white with sooty black noses. The breed, known as Chianina, is reckoned to be one of the most ancient in Europe, with a pure gene pool stretching back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Along with ten other ancient Italian breeds, the Chianina cattle were subject to an in-depth genetic analysis with ramifications for the argument over Etruscan origins.[24] The scientists working on the cattle project sequenced the DNA of 164 different animals, which they then compared to the genetic make-up of other breeds from Europe and the Near East. The cattle formed groups of interrelated breeds, associated with particular origin points. The team suggested that the origin for the Chianina cattle, alongside the other Tuscan breeds, was Anatolia, with 60 per cent of the animals' mitochondrial DNA (that inherited from the female line) associated with other breeds from this region. A distinctive quirk in the DNA has been dated to have developed between the late Neolithic and the early Byzantine period – a wide range of time which includes the possible dates for Etruscan migrations. The assumption is that the Etruscans brought their favourite white cows from Lydia, loath to leave behind the top quality beef and attractive hides they had carefully developed in their cattle. The scientists suggested that this migration of people and animals took place during the Late Bronze Age, far earlier than Herodotus places the heroic journey of the Lydians to the West.

The data from the human subjects was also used to support the idea of the Eastern origins hypothesis for the Etruscans.[25]

For this study, mitochondrial DNA was taken from over three hundred living Tuscans, inhabitants of three towns with a link to the Etruscan past: Murlo, Volterra and the Casentino Valley. The results appeared conclusive – the individuals from Murlo in particular were different from other Italian samples, and even in Volterra and the Casentino Valley there were aspects of the DNA, or haplotypes, that were shared with Near Eastern populations but not with other Italians and Western Europeans. The media fell upon the conclusions with glee, presenting a favourite narrative of modern science overcoming messy archaeology. However, the study results are not quite so clear-cut. The results suggested that women with Near Eastern ancestry lived in all three places at some point between the Neolithic and the present day. This is a vast stretch of time, and the history of the Italian peninsula is one of mixing and movement – populations swirling around from the Neolithic through the Roman periods and into the medieval era. More significantly, of the eleven characteristics associated with the Near East that showed up in the Murlo samples, only one was specifically connected to Anatolia – the supposed origin point for Herodotus' Etruscans.

Both of these genetic studies had real problems.[26] The conclusion of the cattle study is hard to accept in light of the archaeological evidence – there really isn't a clear migration into Tuscany, even during the Late Bronze Age. While this time was a period of upheaval elsewhere in the Mediterranean (and this timing for Etruscan origins has even been linked to the fall of historical Troy in around 1200 BCE), is it likely that in the event of the war and famine in the Eastern Mediterranean that people would have diligently transported their cattle thousands of miles by sea? A far more convincing idea, given both the archaeological record and the practical realities of moving a significant population of intractable large bovines, is that the Chianina DNA reflects a careful breeding programme with far older roots, dating back to the original domestication of cattle in the Near East, not Turkey. These white cattle seem more like the descendants of a very early breed, brought under human control during the late Neolithic and transported overland to Italy. The original study authors had thought of this,

and countered it, stating that domesticated animals seem to have spread from south to north through Italy, and that southern Italian breeds have a very different genetic signature. However, a larger investigation found evidence that supported multiple influxes of domestic cows into Italy during the millennia after their initial domestication.

This first set of human DNA studies might appear more convincing. They have certainly convinced the residents of Murlo, who will proudly declare their Etruscan heritage to you while enjoying a morning coffee at the village bar. The thing is that Murlo, and its delightful café bar, was not built on the site of an ancient Etruscan settlement. The neighbouring Etruscan site was abandoned in the fifth century BCE, and while there is evidence for Hellenistic and Roman occupation at the nearby village at the time of writing, there is no sense of settlement continuity. The village developed in response to the needs of the Bishops of Siena for a summer getaway, somewhere cool in the hills away from the intense heat of the episcopal palace. The community of servants, church officials and hangers-on that accompanied this secular pilgrimage were most likely the ancestors of today's residents, not an isolated band of Etruscan survivors. The issue of genetic continuity is even more damaging to the results from Volterra and the Casentino Valley, both places with their own disturbed histories of population movement and change.

These issues were pointed out by a large-scale restudy of the genetic data.[27] To eliminate these problems, a team of geneticists analysed DNA from three different populations: modern Tuscans (including the genes of the Murlo, Volterra and Casentino Valley residents taken seven years previously), medieval Tuscans and Etruscans. They included samples from Florence as a control, and compared their results to two 'standard' genetic signatures characteristic of Europe, and of the Near East. The inclusion of DNA from ancient populations set this study apart, allowing the scientists to establish whether connections did exist between Etruscans, modern and medieval Tuscans. Their results showed that the Florentines and Murlo residents were not related to the Etruscans in their sample. However, there were links with individuals at

Volterra and even more strongly at Casentino Valley. Excitingly, the team were able to establish connections with their Near Eastern sample – and to date these. The result was that the last shared ancestor between the Etruscan and Near Eastern individuals was found to have lived about 7,600 years ago. The ancestors of the Etruscans arrived in Italy during the Neolithic period. The evidence from this cohesive study fits with the data from the large cattle study. It also fits with the Neolithic archaeology, the Late Bronze Age archaeology and the Etruscan archaeology. It comprehensively does not fit with the classical sources and the Eastern origins hypothesis. Finally, after thousands of years of argument, it looks as though Herodotus was wrong, and the Italian nationalists were right.

Origins and migration remain current topics. The news remains dominated by harrowing images of desperate people spending vast amounts of money to escape violence, famine and economic disaster, but ending up risking their lives aboard leaking vessels in a stormy Mediterranean sea. A migration crisis, with Italy in particular struggling to manage the integration of new arrivals and find a strategy that saves lives but discourages people smugglers. The age-old story of the flight of the Etruscans from the East mirrors the modern situation, but Tyrrhenus and his followers would not receive the same reception today. The identity of the person buried in our Tarquinian urn has been recast again and again, each generation reinventing the story of Etruscan origins to suit its own preferences. In a time of population movement, uncertainty and change, even the seemingly conclusive results of the genetic study seem to reflect a separatist view of Etruscan origins, downplaying shared ancestry with the Near East. The question of Etruscan origins is, for now, settled. So where did the images and objects that led Dennis down the wrong track come from?