

The Romans and the Etruscans

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

The Etruscans had many artistic and architectural influences on the Romans, who eventually conquered the Etruscan civilization. In this lesson, you will learn about:

1. [Period and Location: The Romans and the Etruscans](#)
2. [The Arch](#)
3. [Etruscans and the Etruscan Arch](#)
4. [Etruscan Temples](#)
5. [Apollo of Veii](#)



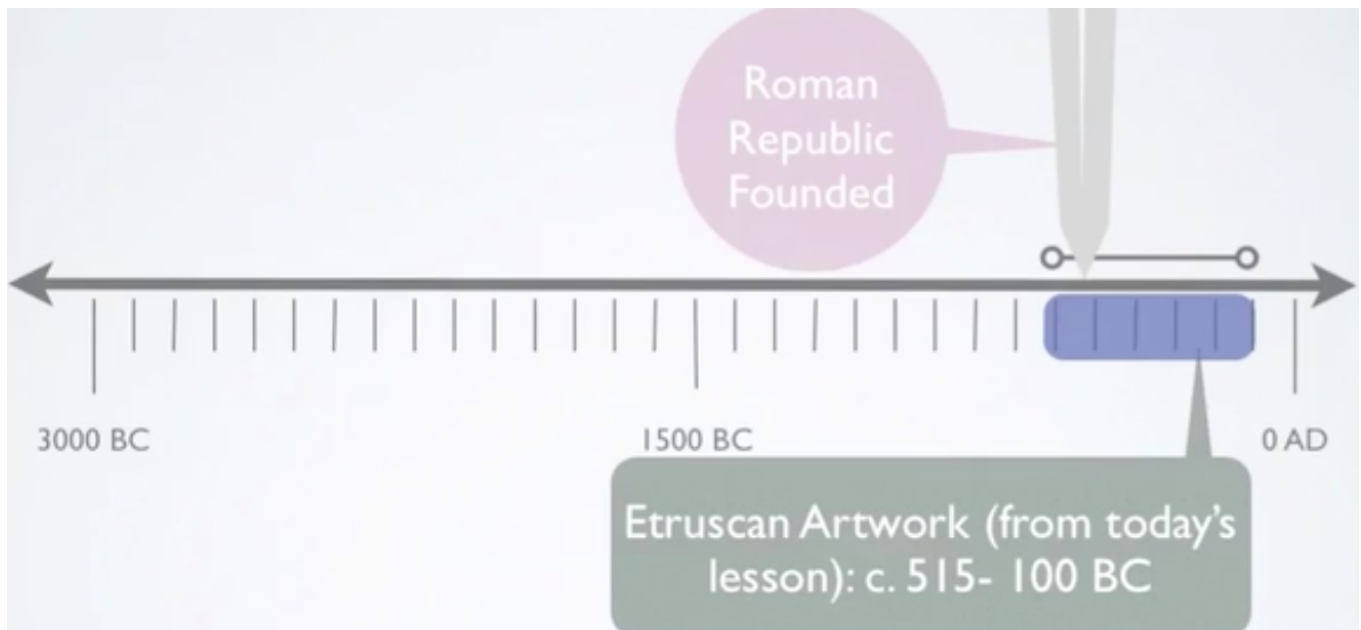
BIG IDEA

The Etruscans were a civilization that predated the Roman civilization and influenced the art and architecture of ancient Rome.

1. Period and Location: The Romans and the Etruscans

The timeframe that we're looking at in this lesson extends from around 515 BCE to 100 BCE. While this period does not include the entire length of time that the Etruscans existed, it includes the timeframe that encompasses the artwork that we're looking at today.

This timeline highlights the period covered in this lesson. Note the arrow that indicates when the Roman Republic was founded—around 509 BCE.



The geographical location for this lesson is the Italian Peninsula near the city of Rome.

The map below shows the Italian peninsula. The blue oval indicates where the Etruscan civilization was centralized.

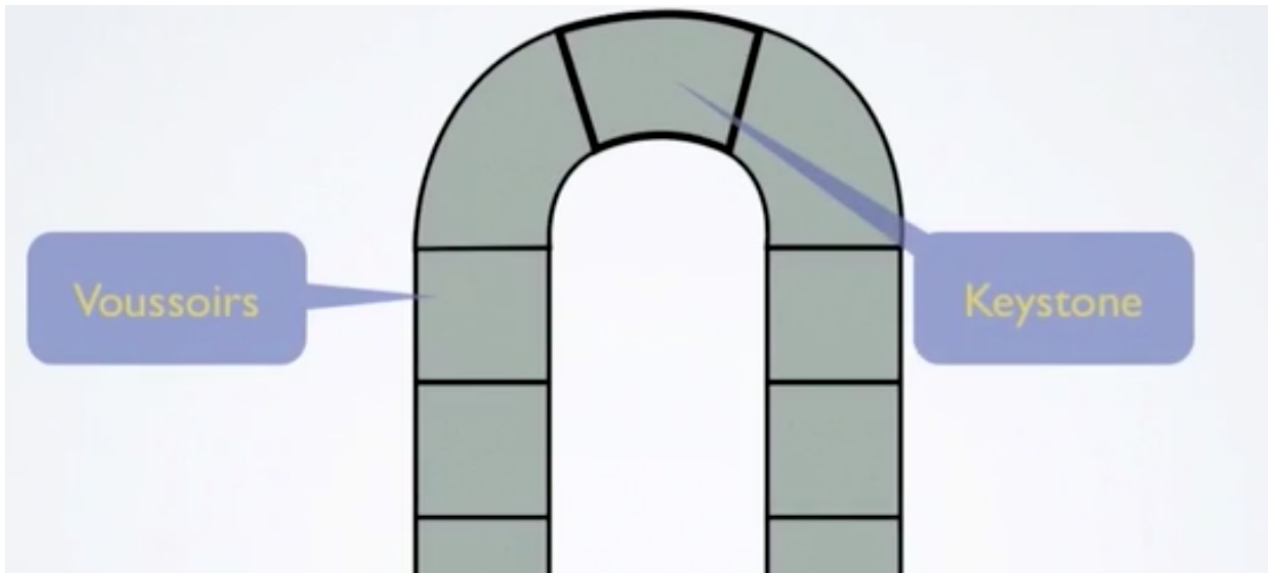


2. The Arch

When studying art and architecture of the Romans and Etruscans, it is important to understand in detail some key vocabulary.

A **rounded arch** is a rather simple semicircle arch. A **barrel vault** is a rounded arch that is essentially stretched out to create a series of rounded arches one right after the other. This creates a tunnel effect. **Voussoirs** are the wedge-shaped stones that make up the arch, and the **keystone**, which is the centerpiece, keeps the whole structure together. Compared to post and lintel and corbel vaults, the rounded arch distributed thrust, or the force of gravity, more efficiently, allowing the Romans to be more innovative with their construction.

➞ EXAMPLE Here is an example of the rounded arch:



In the above image, take note of the voussoirs, which are the stones that make up the arch, and the keystone at the top of the arch. These are two important elements to the rounded arch.



TERMS TO KNOW

Round Arch

A type of arch that consists of a semicircle.

Barrel Vault

A type of vault consisting of a rounded arch extended forward in space.

Voussoirs

The stones that make up an arch.

Keystone

The stone that lies at the top of an arch and holds the entire arch together.

3. Etruscans and the Etruscan Arch

The rounded arch used by the Etruscans was subsequently adopted by the Romans. It became one of the defining characteristics of Roman architecture.



Porta Augusta Etruscan Arch

Perugia, Italy

3rd–2nd century BCE

Stone

IN CONTEXT

It's important to point out that Etruria, where the Etruscans lived, was never an empire, and it never united politically, although the Etruscans controlled most of northern Italy at the height of their civilization. It was concentrated in the major Etruscan cities of Tarquinia, Cerveteri, Vulci, and Veii. The Etruscan ethnic origins are unclear because their language was not Indo-European. It was eventually replaced with Latin after Rome conquered the Etruscans. The Romans referred to the Etruscans as the Tuscii, and the region where they lived is known to this day as Tuscany.

For periods of time, the Etruscans developed along a similar trajectory with the Greeks artistically and architecturally. Some of their architectural elements became highly influential on Roman architectural designs. These influential elements included:

- The rounded arch
- The barrel vault
- The housing layout centered around a central court

4. Etruscan Temples

Etruscan temples were highly inspired by the architecture of the Greeks, particularly in their layout and the stylistic elements seen above. One of the key differences was in their use of building materials.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Below is an image of the reconstruction of an Etruscan temple.



Etruscan temple



DID YOU KNOW

No examples of Etruscan temples exist today. Why? Because in contrast to the Grecian use of stone, the Etruscans only used stone for the foundations of the temples and used a mixture of sticks, clay, and mud as their primary building materials.

5. Apollo of Veii

The Etruscan religion, similar to that of the Greeks and Romans, was polytheistic with specific deities that accounted for many major natural phenomena, such as the sun deity.

➔ EXAMPLE Below is an image of Apulu, or Apollo, as he's more commonly known.



Sculpture of Apulu (Apollo) of Veii

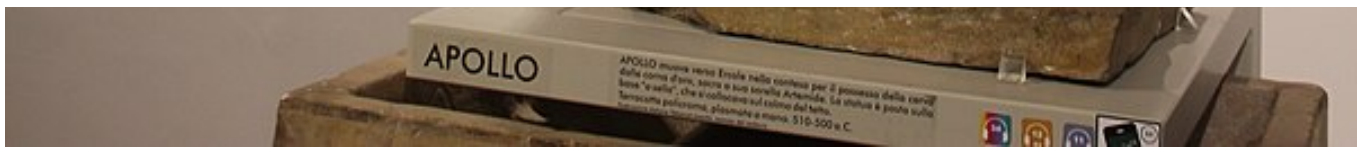
Image shown is a Roman copy

510–500 BCE

Terracotta

This above image is of the Sun God, and he demonstrates the Etruscan familiarity with Greek kouros. It's a life-sized sculpture in terracotta, which is fired clay. It depicts similar stylistic elements to the archaic sculptures from Greece, such as the archaic smile.





Sculpture of Apulu (Apollo) of Veii

510–500 BCE

Terracotta

In the photograph above, you can see how Apulu is shown striding forward. This pose somewhat resembles those of Archaic Greek kouroi but is more naturalistic and less stiff. Archaic Greek sculptures are known for their stiff characteristics, similar to the Egyptian stylistic conventions that we've seen before. A sense of movement has come to be associated with Etruscan artwork.



SUMMARY

The Etruscan civilization was eventually conquered by Rome, but even after their defeat, the Etruscans had many artistic and architectural influences on the Romans. In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of the Romans and Etruscans**.

The arch was an important aspect of Etruscan architecture. Sometimes a rounded arch, or semicircle arch, was used. Other times, a barrel vault, or stretched out arch similar to a tunnel, was used. Regardless, **Etruscans and the Etruscan arch** eventually became important defining characteristics of Roman architecture.

Finally, you learned about the **Etruscan temples**. While Etruscan temples were highly inspired by the architecture of the Greeks, they used materials that did not last over time. This is why there are no standing Etruscan temples today. **Apollo of Veii** was the final piece of artwork that you viewed in this lesson. While archaic Greek sculptures are known for their stiff characteristics, a sense of movement has come to be associated with Etruscan artwork.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Barrel Vault

A type of vault consisting of a rounded arch extended forward in space.

Keystone

The stone that lies at the top of an arch and holds the entire arch together.

Round Arch

A type of arch that consists of a semicircle.

Voussoirs

The stones that make up an arch.