

The Etruscan Question: A Consideration of Their Homeland and Ethnic Identity

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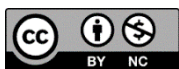
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Abstract

This article explores the origins and ethnolinguistic identity of the Etruscans, an ancient people who inhabited central-western Italy during the early first millennium BCE. Ancient Greek and Roman writers consistently emphasized the Etruscans' uniqueness, particularly in their language, religious customs, and material culture. However, these sources offered competing explanations for their homeland. The eastern origin theory, supported by Herodotus and Hellanicus, suggests that the Etruscans migrated from Lydia (Maionia) in western Anatolia during the upheavals of the Late Bronze Age. According to this account, they were part of the Sea Peoples known as the Turša or Tereš, who appear in Egyptian records from the 12th century BCE. Linguistic similarities between Etruscan and the language of the Lemnian inscription, along with cultural and religious parallels to Anatolian traditions, lend support to this theory. In contrast, Dionysius of Halicarnassus denied any foreign origin, arguing that the Etruscans were autochthonous to Italy. He based this view on differences in language, religion, and social institutions between the Etruscans and the Lydians. Some modern scholars agree, citing the continuity between Villanovan and Etruscan archaeological phases and the lack of clear evidence for mass migration. A third theory, now largely abandoned, posits a northern or Alpine origin, connecting the Etruscans with the Raetians. This paper reconsiders all three views and concludes that the balance of evidence, particularly from linguistic and archaeological sources, points toward an eastern origin with later integration into the Italic cultural landscape. The Etruscans appear to have settled in Etruria between the Tiber and Arno rivers, where they gradually gained dominance and gave their name to both the region and the Tyrrhenian Sea. Despite ongoing debates, the Etruscans' legacy remains vital for understanding the cultural foundations of early Rome.

Keywords: Etruscans, Tuscans, Tyrsenians, Tyrrhenians, Rasenna, Tursha/Teresh, Troia, Etruria, Tyrsenia, Lydia.



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Geniřletilmiř zet

Etrskler, Eski Roma dneminde İtalya'nın Arnus (Arno) ve Tiberis (Tiber) nehirleri arasında yer alan Etruria (=Tuscan/Toscana) blgesinde yařamıř, dili, dini inanları, yařam tarzı ve sanatıyla diğerk İtalyk halklardan aık biimde ayrılan zgn bir halktır. Bu farklılığı ifade eden antik dnemdeki Yunan ve Roma tarihleri, Etrsklerin kendi dillerinde yazılmıř ok sayıda kitabenin varlığından haberdardır. Ancak bugn elimizde bulunan yaklaşık on binden fazla Etrske kitabenin byk unluğ kısa ve sınırlı ieriklere sahip olup genellikle ithaf, adak ya da mezar yazıtı niteliğindedir. Dilbilimsel lemeler sonucunda okunabilen bu metinlerin ğ, dilin henz tam anlamıyla lememiř olması nedeniyle anlamlandırılmamıřtır. Grameri ve morfolojisi byk lde belirsizliğini koruyan Etrsk dili, Hint-Avrupa ya da Sami dillerine değıl, dil ailesi hl kesin olarak belirlenememiř izole bir dildir. Etrsklerin kendi tarihlerine iliřkin kaleme aldıkları metinlerin yanı sıra Yunan ve Romalı yazarlar tarafından yazılan kitapların da hibiri gnmze ulařmamıřtır. Roma İmparatoru Claudius'un Etrsk kaynaklarını kullanarak antik Yunanca kaleme aldığı Tyrrhennikon adlı eser de kayıptır. Etrsklerin tarihine dair yazılı bilgilerin bařlangı noktası, M 8. yzyıl sonu veya 7. yzyıl bařında yařamıř olan Hesiodos'un Theogonia adlı eserinde Tursenlerden (Tyrsenoi) bahsetmesidir ki bu, Etrsklerin en ge M 8. yzyılda İtalya'nın yerleřik halklarından biri olduğnu ortaya koymaktadır.

Antik kaynaklar, Etrsklerin etnik kkeni ve anayurdu konusunda birbirinden olduka farklı  grř sunmuřtur. Bunlardan ilki, onların Doėu kkenli oldukları ynnndedir. Herodotos, Etrsklerin Batı Anadolu'daki Maionia (daha sonra Lydia olarak anılacaktır) blgesinden bir kıtlık nedeniyle g ettiklerini ileri srer. Buna gre Etrsklerin, liderleri Tyrsenos'un nderliğinde İtalya'ya ulařtıkları ve Umbraların topraklarına yerleřtikleri belirtilir. Etrsklerin doėulu kkenini bu řekilde aıklayan grře gre, onlar aynı zamanda Mısır kaynaklarında geen ve Deniz Kavimleri arasında sayılan Turuřa/Tereř halkıdır. Lemnos Adası'nda keřfedilen, Etrskeye yakın bir dile sahip yazıt da bu grř destekleyen kanıtlar arasındadır. Ayrıca Etrsklerin "(T)rasna" ya da "(T)rasenna" adlarını kendi adları olarak kullanmaları, bu ismin Yunanlar ve Romalılar tarafından Tyrsenoi, Tyrrhenoi, Etrusci ve Tusci gibi biimlere dnřtrlerek benimsendiğini gstermektedir. Bu isimlerin Batı Anadolu kkenli tyrsais (kale/kule) szcğyle benziyor olması da nemlidir.

Bu grře karřı ıkan Halikarnassoslu Dionysios ise Etrsklerin Anadolu'dan gelmediklerini ve yerli bir halk olduklarını ileri srmřtr. Dionysios, Lidyalılarla Etrskler arasında dil, din ve hukuk aısından bir benzerlik olmadıėına dikkat eker. Etruria'da kltrel srekliğinin olması, onun bu fikrini destekler. Gnmzde bazı arkeologlar da bu grř desteklemekte, Etruria'da Villanova kltrnden Etrsk kltrne geiřte kesintisiz bir devamlılık bulunduğnu savunmaktadırlar. Bu grře gre, Etrsk kimliėi, yerel halk ile zamanla gelen doėulu unsurların birleřip kaynařması sonucunda ortaya ıkmıř olabilir. İ 8. yzyıldan itibaren mezar tipolojilerinde gzlemlenen deėiřim, kltrel etkileřimle aıklanabilir.

Etrsklerin kkenine dair ne srlen cnc grř ise 18. yzyılda ortaya atılmıř ve onların Alplerin kuzeyinden gelen bir Hint-Avrupa halkı olduğnu ileri srmřtr. Bu grř, Etrsklerin Raetialılarla baėlantılı olduėu ve dilsel izlerin kuzeyde aranması gerektiğini savunmuřtur. Ancak bu teori, gnmzde bilimsel geerliliğini byk lde yitirmiřtir. Etrsk dilinin Hint-Avrupa dilleriyle herhangi bir baėı bulunmadıėı gibi, Etrsklerin kltr, defin gelenekleri, sanatı ve dini ritelleri de kuzey halklarından ok Anadolu ve Ege dnyasıyla benzerlik gstermektedir. Ayrıca kuzeydeki Po Vadisi'nde Etrsklere ait yerleřimlerin ortaya ıkıřı, M 7–5. yzyıllarda yayılma gstermelerinin bir sonucudur.

Bu baėlamda, Etrsklerin Batı Anadolu'dan, zellikle Hermos ve Kaistros nehirleri arasındaki blgeden gelmiř olabilecekleri grř tarihsel, kltrel ve dilsel veriler iřığında daha makul grnmektedir. Mısır'a saldıran Deniz Kavimleri listesinde yer alan ve Trs (Turuřa/Tereř) adıyla anılan halkın Etrsklerle aynı kkten geldiėi olasılıėı da bu dřnceyi desteklemektedir. Ancak bu gn ne zaman bařladıėı, hangi ařamalarla geerleřtiėi ve yerli halklarla nasıl bir etkileřim srecine girildiėi gibi sorular hlen tartıřmalıdır. Etrskler İtalya'ya geldiklerinde Hint-Avrupalı Umbralarla karřılařmıř, zaman iinde onları blgeden dıřlamıř ya da asimile etmiř, blgenin siyasi ve kltrel egemenliėini ellerine almıřlardır. Bu srete, Doėu Akdeniz'den gelen diğerk kltrel etkilerle birlikte, Etrskler kendilerine zg ancak ok katmanlı bir uygarlık inřa etmiřlerdir.

Etrsklerin kkenine dair tartıřmalar, DNA analizleri ve genetik alıřmalarla da aydınlatılmaya alıřılmıř, ancak bu alanda elde edilen veriler kesin sonular ortaya koymaktan uzaktır. Genetik izler doėu kkenli, yerli ve hatta bazı arařtırmalarda Trklerle akrabalık iddialarını destekleyebilecek veriler sunsa da, bugne kadar bilim dnyasında zerinde uzlařılan net bir sonu elde edilememiřtir. Bu nedenle Herodotos, Hellanikos ve onların aktardıėı doėu kkenli g anlatısı, eleřtirel bir mesafeyle yaklařılmakla birlikte, bugn hl en ok kabul gren grřtr.

Sonu olarak, Etrskler sadece İtalya tarihinin değıl, tm Akdeniz dnyasının erken dnem siyasi ve kltrel tarihinde nemli bir yere sahip, kkeni tartıřmalı ancak etkisi byk bir halk olarak karřımıza ıkmaktadır. Onların Batı Anadolu'dan gelen, Deniz Kavimleri hareketine katılan, Hint-Avrupalı olmayan ve Ege ile Anadolu kltrel evresine ait bir halk oldukları ynndeki grř, arkeolojik, dilbilimsel ve tarihi kaynakların bir araya getirdiėi gl bir hipotez olarak nemini korumaktadır.

Introduction

The Etruscans were the inhabitants of the Etruria (=Tuscan/Toscana) region, located between the Arnus (Arno) and Tiberis (Tiber) rivers during the early Roman period in Italy. Ancient Greek and Roman historians, who were contemporary witnesses to their civilization, noted that the Etruscans differed significantly from other peoples of Italy in terms of their language, art, way of life, and various cultural characteristics. These

historians were also aware of the existence of numerous inscriptions written in the Etruscan language. However, among the approximately 10,000 or more inscriptions that have survived to the present day, only a very limited number, such as the Linen Book of Zagreb, the inscriptions from Capua and Pyrgi, and the Cippus Perusinus, contain substantial textual content. The majority of these inscriptions are dedicatory, votive, or funerary in nature. Written predominantly from right to left, and occasionally from left to right or with alternating directions after each line, these inscriptions are generally brief and limited in content.¹ The Etruscan language remains undeciphered, with significant gaps in our understanding of its grammar and morphology. Many of the transcribed texts cannot be fully interpreted. The primary reason for this linguistic challenge is that the Etruscan language is distinct from those spoken by the Greeks, Romans, and other Italic peoples of Italy, as well as from the Indo-European languages and the Semitic languages of the Phoenicians and Hebrews (McDonald, 2022, pp. 14, 22, 146; Becker and Turfa, 2017, p. xxiv; Wallace, 2008, pp. 222–225; Forsythe, 2005, p. 12; Scullard, 2000, pp. 26, 31; Cornell, 1995, p. 46; Demircioğlu, 1987, p. 16; Georgiev, 1981, pp. 232–254; Pulgram, 1958, pp. 194 ff.; Whatmough, 1937, pp. 224–232).² The ancient Greek and Roman writers, who were contemporaries of the Etruscans, undoubtedly read the literary works written by the Etruscans in their own language.³ Among these works, there were likely one or more books recounting Etruscan history.⁴ However, neither these books nor the *Tyrrhennikon* (*Etruscan History*), a book written in ancient Greek by Roman Emperor Claudius using sources in the Etruscan language, have survived to the present day.⁵ Moreover, neither Claudius nor the ancient Greek and Roman historians, who serve as our primary sources for Etruscan history, had access to written records detailing the early history of the Etruscans' homeland. The earliest available historical reference they could rely on appears in *Theogony*, a work by the ancient Greek poet Hesiod, who is believed to have lived at the end of the 8th century BCE (or in the first half of the 7th century BCE). This reference provides definitive evidence that the Etruscans were among the settled peoples of Italy as early as the 8th century BCE and that the ancient Greeks referred to them at that time as the *Tyrsenoi* (Tyrsens). Hesiod (*Theogonia*, 1011–1016) expresses this information as follows:

“Circe, the daughter of Hyperion’s son Helius, in love with patient-minded Odysseus, gave birth to Agrius and Latinus, excellent and strong; and she bore Telegonus because of golden Aphrodite. These ruled over all the much-renowned Tyrrhenians, far away, in the innermost part of holy islands”.

Ethnonyms and Early Attestations

Not all Greek writers after Hesiod referred to the Etruscans by the same name he used in his work. While some Greek historians called them *Tyrsenoi* (Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 1016; Herodotus, I, 94), others referred to them as *Tyrrhenoi*, Tyrrhens (Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 566; Euripides, *Cyclops*, 1; Thucydides, 4.24; Polybius, II, 16.1; Diodorus Siculus, V, 9.3; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, *Antiquitates Romanae*, I.29.1–2; Strabo, V, 1.7, 2.3;

¹ On Etruscan inscriptions see Prayon, 2019, pp. 20, 48–56; Bellelli & Benelli, 2018, pp. 23–76; Dynneson, 2018, pp. 162–163; Agostiniani, 2013, pp. 457–477, 459–468; Bourdin, 2012, pp. 554–558; Wallace, 2008, pp. 135–225; Demircioğlu, 1987, pp. 25 ff.; Dennis, 1985, p. xxiv; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 242–243, 257–262.

² On the Etruscan language see also Bellelli & Benelli, 2018, pp. 18–20, 77–100; Agostiniani, 2013, pp. 469–475; Bonfante & Bonfante, 2002, pp. 49–63; Renfrew, 1987, pp. 70–73; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 229–255; Whatmough, 1937, pp. 224–232.

³ One of the works known to have been written in Etruscan was a tragedy by Volnius. Although this work has not survived, our knowledge of it comes from Marcus Terentius Varro, the author of *Lingua Latina*, who lived between 119–27 BCE. See Varro, V, 9.55.

⁴ Censorinus, who lived in the 3rd century CE and cited Varro, wrote in *De die natali* (17.16) that there existed a work titled *Tuscae Historiae*, written in the 8th century of the Etruscan calendar or the 2nd century BCE. See Maggiani, 2017, p. 538. According to *Tuscae Historiae*, Etruscan history began ten *saecula* before the work was written. Based on this, Varro calculated the beginning of Etruscan history to be 761 BCE. The term *saecula* was understood by the Romans as a period of either 100 or 110 years, whereas the Etruscans used it to define the maximum lifespan of an individual. In Rome, each *saecula* was marked by the *Ludi Saeculares* (Secular Games), which were celebrated every 100 or 110 years. See Plutarch, *Sulla*, 7.2–5; Kaya, 2024, pp. 231 ff. It appears that the Etruscans also composed literary works in their own language. Ancient sources mention Etruscan books (*Etrusci Libri*, *Etruscorum Libri*, *Etrusca Scripta*, *Tusci Libelli*, *Chartae Etruscae*), Etruscan poetry/songs (*Tyrrhena Carmina*), and *Etrusca Disciplina* without specifying particular titles. See Cicero, *De Haruspicum Responso*, 25 (*Etrusca Scripta*), 37 (*Etrusci Libri*); Cicero, *De Divinatio*, 1.20 (*Chartae Etruscae*); Censorinus, *De die natali*, 17 (*Etrusci Libri*); Macrobius, *Conviviorum Primi Diei Saturnaliorum*, III.7.2 (*Etruscorum Libri*); Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, 2.138 (*Tuscorum litterae*), 2.199 (*Etrusca disciplinae volumina*); Juvanalís, *Saturae*, 13.62 (*Tusci libelli*). Lucretius, *De Natura*, 6.381 (*Tyrrhena Carmina*). See also de Grummond, 2013, p. 542.

⁵ Claudius wrote his 20-volume work titled *Tyrrhennikon* (Etruscan History) in ancient Greek, see Suetonius, *Divus Claudius*, 42.2. See also Plutarch, *Moralia*, 312.28 (*Tyrrhennikon*).

Pseudo-Scylax, *Periplus*, 18; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 4.1755). In the Latin language of the Romans, they were known as the *Etrusci* and *Tusci* (Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I, 29.1–2, 30.1–4; Strabo, V, 2.1. Varro, *Lingua Latina*, 5.55, 161; Cicero, *De Divinatio*, I.72, II.106; Livius, I, 15.1; Vergilius, *Aeneis*, II.18; Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, III.5.50, 8.1–2; Tacitus, *Annales*, 4.55; Pomponius Mela, *Chorographie*, II.4.60, 72.123; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 134), whereas in the archaic Umbrian language, they were called *Turski* (*Turscum nomen*, Bonfante & Bonfante, 2002, p. 51). Over time, the name *Tusci* replaced *Etrusci* in Roman usage. Consequently, the Roman term *Tusci* was later adapted into ancient Greek as *Thuoskoi*. The Etruscans, however, referred to themselves as *Rasenna* or *Rasna* [= (T)rasenna or (T)rasna], a name that also belonged to one of their leaders (Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I, 30.3–4; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 134 [*Tyrrheni, qui postea Tusci sunt dicti*]; Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, III.5.50 [*Tusci*]; McDonald, 2022, pp. 15, 29, 33, 67; Dynneson, 2018, pp. 162–163). As we will discuss further in the following sections, if the Etruscans had indeed arrived in Italy as part of the Aegean Migrations or the Sea Peoples' movements, their name in the ancient Egyptian language would have been *Twr(y)š* (variants: *Twrwš.w*, *Twjrš.w*, *Twjrš.w* = *Toorooshah*, *Tooreeshah*, *Toorshah*), which is transcribed as *Turuša/Turša* or *Tereš* (Breasted, 1906, p. 579; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 55 ff.). All of these names represent phonetic adaptations of the consonantal root *trs* in four different languages, Greek, Latin, Etruscan, and Egyptian, through the addition of various vowels.⁶

The mention of the name *Tyrsenoi* in *Theogony* in the work of Hesiod (see above), the earliest poet of antiquity after Homer, firmly dates the presence of the Etruscans in Italy to the 8th century BCE. In other words, the Etruscans were among the settled peoples of Italy in the 8th century BCE and were already residing in the region known by their name, Etruria (Greek: *Tyrsenia/Tyrrhenia*). However, their presence in Etruria before the 8th century BCE remains a subject of debate, both in antiquity and in modern scholarship.

Ancient Origin Debate

One of the earliest figures to engage with the question of the Etruscans' ethnic identity and homeland was the historian Herodotus of Halicarnassus, who wrote his *Historiai* in the 420s BCE. Another contemporary of Herodotus, Hellanicus of Lesbos, also addressed this issue. Although his work *Phoronis* has not survived in its entirety, it was still extant during the reign of Augustus (31 BCE–14 CE). According to the information cited from *Phoronis* by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his *Rhomaïke Arkhaiologia* (*Roman Antiquities*), the *Tyrrhenoi* (Etruscans) were originally Pelasgians who migrated from Greece and settled in Italy. Upon their arrival in Italy, these Pelasgians came to be known as the *Tyrrhenoi*. However, Dionysius rejected this account provided by Hellanicus, arguing that the Pelasgians and the Etruscans were not the same people. He also elaborated on the reasons behind his skepticism (I, 25.1–4, 26.2, 28.3, 29–30).⁷

According to Herodotus, the homeland of the Etruscans was Maionia, a region that would later come to be known as Lydia (Herodotus, I, 94; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I, 27.1). Strabo, citing Demetrius of Scepsis, records that the earliest known name of Maionia was Asia (XIII, 4.8; for Maionians, see Beekes, 2003, pp. 15 ff.), a word that may represent the Greek adaptation of *Assuwa*, the land of the Assuwans, one of the Late Bronze Age peoples of western Anatolia (Kaya, 2018, p. 103). Some modern historians suggest that the Assuwans were among the peoples referred to as Luwian in Hittite texts, describing a population inhabiting what is now roughly the Aegean region of Turkey (Kaya, 2021, pp. 120–121, note 21). According to Herodotus, a famine that affected Maionia (Assuwa), which encompassed the Kaistros (*Küçük Menderes*) and Hermos (*Gediz*) river basins in western Anatolia and would later be known as Lydia in the Iron Age, led to the

⁶ "Etrusci" is the Latinized form of the Greek *Tursenoi* [(E)t(u)rsi = Etrusci]. Similarly, the name "Tusci" is also a Latinized version of the Greek *Tursenoi* [(E)tr(u)rsi = Trusci = Tusci]. For the Egyptian *Tw-ry-š* / *Twjrš.w*, *Twrwš.w*, *Twjrš.w* (= *Tooreeshah*, *Toorooshah*, *Toorshah* = *Tereš*, *Turuša*, *Turša*), see Breasted, 1906, p. 243 (no. 579); Wainwright, 1959, pp. 197 ff.; Tykot, 1994, p. 64; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 55–56. On the names of the Etruscans see Krahe, 1954, pp. 153–154; Schachermeyr, 1929, pp. 222–224.

⁷ Dionysius of Halicarnassus also references the Greek tragedian Sophocles (495–406 BCE) and the historian Thucydides (460–400 BCE) in support of the idea that the Pelasgians and Tyrrhenians were the same people. According to Dionysius (I, 25.4), Sophocles referred to the Pelasgians as "Tyrrhene Pelasgians" in his work *Inachus*. See also McDonald, 2022, p. 8. Similarly, Thucydides (4.109) states that the Pelasgians and Tyrrhenians were the same people. Modern historians have described the Pelasgians as part of the Aegean peoples of the 3rd millennium BCE (or as pre-Greek populations). Their homeland was the second of the two regions in western Anatolia that, in the 1st millennium BCE, became known as Ionia and Aeolis. For more on the Pelasgians, see Kaya, 2023, pp. 69–76.

forced migration of half the population. This migration, he explains, was led by Tyrsenos, the son of King Atys. The migrants found the most suitable land for establishing their colony cities in the territory of the Umbrians (*Umbri/Ombrici*) in central-western Italy. After settling in Umbrian lands, the Lydian colonists came to be known as *Tyrsenoi* after their leader, Tyrsenos (Herodotus, I, 94; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I, 27, 28.1–2, 30).⁸ Among these colonists was an individual named Tarkhon, who founded the city of Tarquinii (Tarquinia), which was named after him (Strabo, V, 2.2). Herodotus also provided chronological information that allows for an approximate dating of Tyrsenos' father, Atys.⁹ Based on this information, it appears that the Etruscan migration to Italy could have taken place in the 12th century BCE, around the time of the Trojan War.¹⁰

The view opposing Herodotus and Hellanicus of Lesbos, who linked the Etruscans' homeland to Anatolia and the Aegean islands, was presented by the Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who lived during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus (31 BCE–14 CE). Although, like Herodotus, Dionysius was originally from Halicarnassus (modern Bodrum), he resided in Rome and made use of the sources available in his time. Among these sources, there were two conflicting accounts regarding the homeland of the Etruscans: one suggesting that they were "natives of Italy" and the other identifying them as "foreigners to Italy." According to those who believed the Etruscans were indigenous to Italy, the reason they were called *Tyrrhenoi* (Tyrrhenians) was linked to the word *turseis*, which meant "fortress" or "tower" in both the Etruscan and Greek languages. This was because the Etruscans were the first people in Italy to build and inhabit fortresses (Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I, 26.2, 30.2). Additionally, according to another tradition recorded by Dionysius (I, 29.1–2), there was a time when the Greeks referred to all the Latins, Umbrians, Ausonians, and other Italic peoples collectively as Tyrrhenians. For these reasons, Dionysius sought to clarify the question of the Etruscans' homeland and ethnic identity by researching the languages, cultures, and traditions of both the Etruscans and the Lydians, who were his contemporaries. As a result of his investigations (I, 26–30), which he dedicated five chapters of the first book of his *Rhomaïke Arkhaiologia* to, he found that although there were certain cultural and traditional similarities between the Etruscans and the Lydians, they did not speak the same language, differed in laws and institutions, and did not worship the same gods. According to Dionysius (I, 30.1–3), the Etruscans (=Tyrrhenoi/Tyrsenoi) were also distinct from the other peoples of Italy in terms of their language, religion, and way of life. Moreover, Xanthus of Lydia, a contemporary of Herodotus or slightly older, did not mention any colonists migrating from Lydia (Maionia) to Italy, nor did he record any information about a Lydian king Atys having a son named Tyrrhenos.¹¹ For all these reasons, Dionysius of Halicarnassus concluded that the Etruscans had no connection to the Lydians or Pelasgians. In his view, the Etruscans were an indigenous people of Italy. However, Dionysius (I, 30.2) also rejected the idea that they derived their name from living in fortresses called *tyrseis* or from one of their rulers.

Modern Theories

As can be inferred from our discussion thus far, there were two distinct perspectives in antiquity regarding the ethnic identity and homeland of the Etruscans. The first view regarded the Etruscans as having an eastern origin, linking them to Anatolia and the Aegean, while the second considered them to be

⁸ According to Strabo (V, 2.4), a group of Lydians, led by Atys' son Tyrrhenos, migrated to Italy due to a famine. Before reaching Italy, they first went to the islands of Lemnos and Imbros, where they established colonies. Plutarch (*Romulus*, 25.5) similarly records that the Etruscans were colonists from Sardis.

⁹ According to Herodotus (I, 7), Atys was the fifth of the 22 kings of the Heraclid dynasty (*Heracleidae*), which ruled in Lydia. The Heraclids reigned for 505 years until its last king, Candaules, was overthrown in the early 7th century BCE. See also Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I.27.1–4, 28.1–2 (where Tyrrhenos is referred to as the son of Telephos, and his arrival in Italy is linked to the period after Trojan War); Beekes, 2003, pp. 22 ff.; Scullard, 2000, p. 28 (dating the migration to the late 13th century BCE); Kaya, 2018, pp. 102–105, note 23.

¹⁰ The exact date of the Trojan War remains a subject of debate. Since antiquity, no consensus has been reached regarding the precise date of the conflict. However, the most widely accepted chronology, dating back to antiquity, was proposed by the Alexandrian historian Eratosthenes (284–194 BCE). According to Eratosthenes, Troia was sacked and destroyed by the Achaeans in 1184 (or 1183) BCE. For the various dates given in ancient literary sources regarding the destruction of Troia, see Kaya, 2023, p. 135, note 101.

¹¹ According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (I, 28.1–2), the Lydian historian Xanthus mentioned two sons of Atys, named Lydos and Torebos. However, Herodotus (I, 94) states that Atys had two sons named Lydos and Tyrsenos. In Herodotus' account, Tyrsenos led the migrating people, while Lydos remained in the homeland, which was later named Lydia after him.

indigenous (autochthonous) to Italy. Modern historians continue to debate the Etruscans' ethnic origins and homeland, aligning themselves with one of these two perspectives (see below). Furthermore, some contemporary scholars have introduced a third perspective, arguing that the Etruscans spoke an Indo-European language and that their homeland was in Europe. This argument is based on information provided by the Roman historian Titus Livius, or Livy (V, 33.11), who lived between 59 BCE and 17 CE:

"The Alpine tribes are undoubtedly of the same stock (the Tusci/Etruscans), especially the Raetii, who had through the nature of their country become so uncivilised that they retained no trace of their original condition except their language, and even this was not free from corruption".

Based on the claim that the Raetians were of Etruscan origin (Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, III.20.133), the third perspective, first proposed by the 18th-century French historian Nicolas Fréret (1753, pp. 72–114) and later incorporated into ancient history literature as the "northern origin" theory, argues that the homeland of the Etruscans was the region north of the Alps, where the Raetians lived. According to this view, the Etruscans were either of Indo-European origin or closely related to the Indo-Europeans. However, later scholars who supported the northern theory have not reached a consensus regarding the exact homeland of the Etruscans or the timeline of their migration.¹² Some scholars who support this theory argue that the Etruscans, as an Indo-European people who migrated to Italy by crossing the Alps, originated from the Balkans or Illyria. Others suggest that they had roots in the Aegean and Greek world but arrived in Italy from the north via the Balkans and the Alpine region. According to certain scholars who consider the Etruscans to be of Indo-European origin, they derived their name from an ancestor named Ras or (T)ras. Proponents of this theory generally date the Etruscan migration to Italy to the 12th century BCE or between the 10th and 8th centuries BCE. Scholars who argue that the Etruscan language belongs to the Indo-European language family propose that, upon reaching northern Italy, the Etruscans initially coexisted with the Umbrians in the Po Valley. Later, they migrated to the region that would come to be known as Etruria, named after them (Dynneson, 2018, pp. 163 ff.; Ulf, 2017, pp. 22 ff.; Briquel, 2013, p. 36; Whatmough, 1937, pp. 181 ff.; Pulgram, 1958, pp. 182 ff.; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 49–53, 63–66).

By the mid-20th century, the northern (European) origin theory, which had been popular in earlier periods and developed under the influence of prevailing racial ideologies, had lost almost all scholarly support. This decline was due to the lack of convincing evidence or findings proving that the Etruscans migrated to their homeland, Etruria, from northern Italy (Ulf, 2017, p. 21; Pulgram, 1958, pp. 185 ff.; Renard, 1943, pp. 11–14; Whatmough, 1937, p. 214; Randall-MacIver, 1924, pp. 257–259; Grenier, 1912, pp. 8–9). Moreover, this theory fails to explain how and why key aspects of Etruscan civilization, such as their distinct, Eastern-influenced art, tomb typology, burial customs (inhumation), alphabet, and their linguistically isolated language, emerged specifically in the region of Etruria (Pulgram, 1958, p. 186). Furthermore, it has been established that all the evidence and documents previously used to support the claim that the Etruscans first arrived in the Po Valley via the Alps and settled there date only to the 6th century BCE and later. This is because, during the 7th–5th centuries BCE, the Etruscans expanded their dominance beyond the Etruria

¹² Although the first modern historian to propose that the Etruscans were Indo-Europeans who migrated from the north was Nicolas Fréret, the most prominent advocate of this theory was Barthold G. Niebuhr (1850, pp. 57 ff.). Niebuhr, who argued that the Raetian region was the homeland of the Etruscan people, was followed by Wolfgang Helbig (1879), who also claimed that the Raetians were of Etruscan descent. Another proponent of the northern origin theory, Luigi Pigorini (1882), argued that the Etruscans were of European origin. According to him, the Etruscans migrated into Italy alongside the creators of the Terramare culture and practiced cremation burial, placing the ashes in urns. A proponent of the same view, Gustav Körte (1907, pp. 730–770), argued that the Etruscans were a people of Northern Aegean origin. According to him, they were a seafaring people who entered Italy via the Alps in the 8th century BCE and settled in Etruria. Fritz Schachermeyr (1929, p. 65), who considered the Etruscans to be of Indo-European origin, believed that they were a maritime people who began migrating from Western Anatolia around 1200 BCE. According to him, they initiated a second wave of migration in the 8th century BCE, during which they occupied the coast of Etruria. Other proponents of the northern origin theory include Paul Kretschmer (1943, pp. 84–87, 213–214; 1925, pp. 300–319), Luigi Pareti (1952, pp. 63–128), and Gaetano de Sanctis (1956, pp. 114–137). P. Kretschmer argued that the Etruscans' homeland was the Danube and Balkan regions and that they were invading migrants who entered Italy from the north via the Alps. While the Etruscans were not direct relatives of the Indo-Europeans, he considered them their cousins. Pareti also identified the Danube and Balkans as the Etruscan homeland. Gaetano de Sanctis maintained that the Etruscans were of European origin. According to him, they were a people who practiced cremation burial and entered Italy after crossing the Alps.

region, and one of the areas they came to control was the Po Valley in northern Italy. In this region, the Etruscans founded new cities, including Adria/Hadria, the city that gave its name to the Adriatic Sea, and established the Etruscan league of cities. This league, which was organized around a common religious cult,¹³ consisted of twelve member cities (Livius, I.8.3, IV.23.5, 25.7; Strabo, V, 2.2; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, VI, 75). However, the Etruscan rule in northern Italy came to an end in the early 4th century BCE when invading Celtic (Gaulish/Galatian) tribes crossed the Alps into Italy. Facing Celtic incursions, the Etruscans retreated to the Alpine region inhabited by the Raetians, seeking a secure refuge (Livius, V, 33.1–5, 34–35 [dates the entry of the Gauls/Celts into Italy via the Alps to the reign of Tarquinius Superbus, the Etruscan-origin king of Rome]; Diodorus Siculus, XIV, 113.1; Justinus, XX.5). Inscriptions dating to the 3rd century BCE have been discovered in this area, serving as evidence of their presence.¹⁴ The language of these inscriptions bears similarities to that of the Etruscans of Etruria but does not belong to the Indo-European language family (McDonald, 2022, pp. 14, 22, 146; Wallace, 2008, pp. 222–225; Scullard, 2000, pp. 26, 31; Pulgram, 1958, pp. 194 ff.; Cornell, 1995, p. 46; Whatmough, 1937, pp. 224–232).

The view that the Etruscans were indigenous to Italy, originally proposed by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (I.30.1–3, see below), has been embraced and supported by some modern historians (Ridgway, 2006, p. 655; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 52 ff.; Beloch, 1913, pp. 50–54; Meyer, 1893, pp. 500 ff. [According to Meyer and Beloch, the Etruscans were indigenous to Italy and expanded west to east while engaging in piracy across the Mediterranean, eventually settling on the island of Lemnos]). According to scholars who follow Dionysius, archaeological research conducted in the Etruria region has provided visual evidence demonstrating that most Etruscan cities developed on the same sites as earlier Villanovan settlements. Archaeologists who have uncovered these visual findings argue that in the region inhabited by the Etruscans (Etruria), the defining characteristic of the Villanovan culture (900–750 BCE), which represents the Iron Age culture of the area, was the cremation of the dead, with ashes placed in urns and buried. Moreover, this burial practice, along with other material remains identified through archaeology, was already present in the Late Bronze Age (12th century BCE). For these reasons, scholars have suggested that the Villanovan culture developed gradually from the Late Bronze Age, leading to the designation of this earlier phase as the Proto-Villanovan culture.¹⁵ In other words, there is no archaeological evidence of a cultural rupture or transformation indicating a migration into Etruria during the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age up until the 8th century BCE. According to proponents of this view, the shift that occurred after the 8th century BCE, marked by the transition from cremation to inhumation (burial without cremation), was a result of the influence of foreign cultures arriving from the East. Furthermore, there are notable parallels between the Villanovan culture, which defines the Iron Age culture of Etruria, and the culture in the territory of the Latins (Latium), Etruria's southern neighbors. For this reason, it is argued that the Etruscans were not an eastern people who migrated to Italy but rather an indigenous population that had inhabited Italy since the 3rd millennium BCE, creators of the Villanovan culture, and a non-Indo-European people (Ridgway, 2006, pp. 639–653; Scullard, 2000, p. 26; Scullard, 1967, pp. 34 ff.; Cornell, 1995, pp. 45–47; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 35–37, 48 ff.; Pallottino, 1948, pp. 11–16). Some scholars have adopted this perspective while refraining from asserting a purely homogeneous indigenous origin. According to them, the Etruscan people emerged as a nation in the mid-8th century BCE through a process of blending and assimilation between native populations and independent external elements (Ridgway, 2006, p. 655; Cornell, 1995, p. 47; Dennis, 1985, p. xxi; Pallottino, 1947, pp. 150–151). This transformation was driven by cultural interactions and external influences, ultimately shaping the Etruscans into a unified historical entity over time.¹⁶ According to another variation of this perspective, some scholars argue that the Villanovan culture, which gradually developed from the Late Bronze Age

¹³ For more on the Etruscan League of twelve cities, see Tagliamonte, 2017, pp. 34 ff.; Becker, 2013, pp. 364 ff.; Scullard, 1967, pp. 231–236; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 131–135.

¹⁴ Etruscan inscriptions have also been discovered in Liguria and southern France. For a list of Etruscan inscriptions found in these regions, see Bourdin, 2012, pp. 554–558.

¹⁵ The term Proto-Villanova was introduced in 1937 by archaeologist Giovanni Patroni to define the early phase of the Villanovan culture. See Bartoloni, 2020, p. 101. For more on the Villanova and Proto-Villanovan cultures, see Lomas, 2018, pp. 11–16, 20 ff.; Stoddart, 2016, pp. 6–12; Bradley, 2020, pp. 40–41; Dynneson, 2018, pp. 164 ff.; Torelli, 2006, pp. 33 ff.; Moser, 1996, pp. 30–37.

¹⁶ The first proponent of the autochthonous theory, which argues that the Etruscans were a mixture of independent elements, was Giacomo Devoto (1951, pp. 57–58). The most significant historian to develop and advocate for this theory was Massimo Pallottino, see Pulgram, 1958, p. 184.

onward, was originally associated with an Indo-European population that practiced cremation. These communities lived in mineral-rich regions, and this wealth attracted the Etruscans, who had first settled on the island of Lemnos during the Sea Peoples' migrations, prompting their gradual movement into the territory of the Indo-European Villanovans. However, the non-Indo-European Etruscans were relatively few in number, particularly in terms of female population, and their migration was not sudden but rather a prolonged process over many years. Skilled in urban life, governance, and advanced military organization, the warrior Etruscans eventually became the aristocracy of the Villanovan villages they overtook. During this time, they intermarried with the Villanovans and introduced their language and burial customs (inhumation) to them. As a result, by the early 7th century BCE, an Etruscan nation had emerged (Scullard, 2000, p. 28).

The material findings uncovered through archaeological research are silent; they do not possess the clarity or certainty needed to definitively determine when, under what conditions, and how the process of local-foreign interaction took place. Moreover, there are disruptions between the Proto-Villanovan culture of the Late Bronze Age and the subsequent Apennine culture (c. 1200 BCE), which followed in the same era. Additionally, the Proto-Villanovan culture of the Bronze Age was not exclusive to Etruria.¹⁷ It was also present in regions that later, during the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, came under Etruscan rule, such as Campania and certain small areas around Bologna (Beekes, 2003, p. 34). Moreover, modern scholars who advocate for the indigenous origin of the Etruscans do not dispute, like their ancient predecessor Dionysius of Halicarnassus (I.26–29), that the Etruscan language was distinct from all other languages spoken in Italy. The Etruscan language bore no resemblance to either the Italic languages or Greek. According to these scholars, Etruscan was not part of the Indo-European language family (Scullard, 2000, pp. 26, 31; Pulgram, 1958, pp. 194 ff.; Whatmough, 1937, pp. 224–232). However, if an indigenous population gradually transformed into the Etruscan people/nation through the integration of independent elements (Pulgram, 1958, p. 184), this raises several unresolved questions: Where and how did the distinguishing Eastern characteristics that defined the Etruscans originate? When and how did their linguistically unique language develop? And why did the populations of the Villanovan culture outside Etruria not speak the same language as the Etruscans?

Eastern Evidence

The observation made by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his time, that the Etruscan and Lydian languages were not the same, cannot be regarded as definitive evidence supporting the idea that the Etruscans were indigenous to Italy. This is because there was an approximate 1,000-year gap between the period when the Etruscans are believed to have left their homeland and the time when Dionysius recorded his conclusions regarding their language. Undoubtedly, over such a long period, neither the Etruscan nor the Lydian (Maionian) language could have retained its original form as it existed in the Late Bronze Age.¹⁸ Moreover, an inscription discovered in 1884 on the island of Lemnos, which some ancient sources describe as the land of the *Tyrrhenoi* (Thucydides, IV.109; Diodorus Siculus, V.81.1, X.3.1, 19.6; Strabo, V.2.4), has been dated to the 6th century BCE. Linguistic analysis of this inscription has revealed similarities between the language of the Lemnians and that of the Etruscans (McDonald, 2022, pp. 17 ff.; Wallace, 2008, pp. 218–222; Forsythe, 2005, p. 38; Beekes, 2003, pp. 25, 37; Bonfante & Bonfante, 2002, pp. 61–63; de Simone, 1986, pp. 723–725; Georgiev, 1981, pp. 251–254; Harrel-Courtes, 1964, p. 10; Pulgram, 1958, pp. 195 ff.; Gage, 1950, pp. 15–28; Pallottino, 1947, pp. 9–11; Pallottino, 1948, pp. 73–74; Kretschmer, 1943, pp. 213–214; Fiesel, 1931, pp. 63–64; Conway, 1926, p. 408). The claim that the Etruscans were indigenous (autochthonous) to Italy is not supported by several cultural and artistic elements that reflect Eastern, particularly Anatolian, influences. These include their burial typologies, most notably tumuli and rock-cut tombs, as well as their artistic styles, chariot racing, metalworking techniques, and a lifestyle characterized by luxury, banquets, music, and dance (Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I, 30.1–3; Scullard, 2000, p. 27; Shrimpton, 1991, pp. 103–106; Atlan, 1970, p. 6;

¹⁷ For the geographical extent of the Villanovan culture, see Lomas, 2018, pp. 19–20 ff.; Ridgway, 2006, p. 643.

¹⁸ The Lydians who were contemporaries of Dionysius of Halicarnassus were Thracian tribes that had settled in the region later known as Lydia during the Aegean Migrations (Sea Peoples' movements), which are believed to have contributed to the collapse of 2nd millennium BCE civilizations. See Kaya, 2018, pp. 101 ff. For more on the Aegean Migrations, see Kaya, 2021, pp. 371–388; Kaya, 2023, pp. 199 ff.

Demircioğlu, 1987, p. 16). Additionally, religious practices such as hepatoscopy (divination through the examination of animal livers and intestines) and ornithomancy (divination through the observation of birds) also point to Eastern influences.¹⁹

According to modern historians who follow Herodotus, Hellanicus, and other ancient writers who shared their views, the homeland of the Etruscans was the Aegean world. This perspective, which identifies the Etruscans as an Eastern-origin people, is supported by some scholars who argue that their homeland was the region known in antiquity as Lydia, modern-day western Turkey, particularly its Aegean region. Furthermore, according to a piece of information recorded by the Roman historian Tacitus (56–120 CE), who was born in northern Italy, the Etruscans themselves also believed in this Anatolian origin (Tacitus, *Annales*, IV.55). Some scholars argue that the homeland of the Etruscans was not limited to Lydia but also included certain Aegean islands, particularly Lesbos and Imbros, as well as parts of Greece, the Syrian coast, and Cyprus (Brizio, 1898; Akerström, 1943, pp. 156–158; Piganiol, 1953, pp. 328–352; Pallottino, 1956, pp. 49 ff.; Pfiffig, 1969, p. 8; Ulf, 2017, p. 25). Others have suggested that the Etruscans shared a common ancestry with the Turks (Çınar, 2020, pp. 45 ff.; Doğan, 2008, pp. 161 ff.; Sertkaya, 2006, pp. 58 ff.; Tulunay, 2005, pp. 21 ff.; Türkkan, 1998, pp. 16 ff.; Miršan, 1998; Ayda, 1975, pp. 421 ff.). However, despite considerations such as the wolf legend, philological analyses, etymological approaches to place, personal, and tribal names, and the fact that the Etruscans spoke a non-Indo-European language, this theory lacks a solid geographical and historical foundation. Due to this major shortcoming, the hypothesis that the Etruscans and Turks were of the same lineage has not gained scholarly support.

The primary arguments of modern scholars who support the eastern origin theory are based on the testimonies of contemporary ancient Greek and Roman writers, who observed that the Etruscans were distinct from all other peoples of Italy in terms of their language, religious beliefs, way of life, and artistic traditions (Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I.30.1–3; Strabo, XVII.1.43; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 12.517–518; Cicero, *De Haruspicum Responso*, 25, 37, *De Divinatio*, 1.20; Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, 2.138, 199; Macrobius, *Conviviorum Primi Diei Saturnaliorum*, III.7.2; Juvenalis, *Saturae*, V.13.62; Lucretius, *De Natura*, 6.381; Censorinus, *De die natali*, 17). Additionally, nearly all ancient historians who addressed the question of the Etruscans' homeland regarded Herodotus of Halicarnassus as a reliable source. Beyond historical accounts, modern scholars who advocate for the eastern origin theory and follow Herodotus and Hellanicus also rely on two strong linguistic and etymological arguments. The first of these, as previously mentioned, is the discovery of an inscription on the island of Lemnos. This inscription, which dates to the 6th century BCE and belongs to the funerary stele of a warrior, has revealed linguistic similarities between the language of the Lemnian people and that of the Etruscans (see above). The second argument supporting the eastern origin theory (Breasted, 1906, p. 579) is the presence of a group referred to by the consonantal sequence *Trs* (*Tw-ry-š*) among the Sea Peoples who attacked Egypt during the reigns of Pharaoh Merneptah (1213–1204 BCE) and Ramses III (1183–1152 BCE). Another claim put forth by proponents of the eastern origin theory (Beekes, 2003, pp. 44–46; Georgiev, 1948, pp. 101–108) is that the various forms of the Etruscans' name (*Tyrsenoi* / *Tyrrhenoi* / *Etrusci* / *Tusci*), which were incorporated into the languages of their Greek and Roman contemporaries, share a common origin. This origin is identified with the legendary city of Troia (Greek: *Troie*) in the Northern Aegean region of Turkey and the Troians (*Troies*) of the Late Bronze Age. This theory is further supported by Hittite cuneiform texts, which mention a place named *Taruisa*/*Taruishaš*/*Truishaš*, widely believed to correspond to Troia/Ilium (For the identification of Troia with Taruiša, see Kaya, 2021, p. 263; Brice, 2005, pp. 359–360).

As noted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who opposed Herodotus and Hellanicus, as well as by modern scholars who support his view, there is no reason to believe that all the information provided by Herodotus and Hellanicus represents historical fact. At the very least, Dionysius' objection to Herodotus' claim that the *Tyrsenoi* who migrated to Italy were led by Tyrsenos, the son of King Atys of Lydia, and that the *Tyrsenoi* (=Etruscans) of Italy derived their name from him, cannot be dismissed. As previously mentioned, the Lydian

¹⁹ Etruscan tumuli have been compared with those of Lydia and Phrygia, see Naso, 2023, pp. 24–29. For further connections between Etruscan material culture and Anatolia, see Naso, 2023, pp. 29–47; Hodos, 2023, pp. 65–66; Beekes, 2003, p. 25; Prayon, 2019, pp. 33–37 (lifestyle), 83–107 (religion), 116–127 (burials), 108–138 (architecture and art). For ancient sources on their lifestyle as well as religious beliefs and practices, see below.

historian Xanthus refers to two sons of King Atys in his work. However, neither of them is named Tyrsenos, further undermining Herodotus' account (see above). Additionally, the information recorded in Dionysius' work, that the name *Tyrrhenoi* was derived from the word *tyrseis*, meaning "fortress/tower" in both the Etruscan and Greek languages, appears to be of considerable significance. This interpretation gains further support from the name of Teira/Thyra (later Thyraia/Thyrea in the Byzantine period), an ancient settlement within the borders of Lydia, corresponding to modern-day Tire in the Aegean region of Turkey. The name is believed to mean "fortress/city." This etymology is also reflected in the name of the Lydian city Tyrrha, which, according to tradition, was named after a son of King Atys. Moreover, the same linguistic pattern is evident in the final elements of several other city names in the region, such as Thyateira (*Thya-teira*, meaning "Thya's city/fortress"), Temenothyra (*Temenos-thyra*, meaning "Temenos' city/fortress"), Hadrianuthera (*Hadrianus-therai*, meaning "Hadrian's city"), and Grimenothyra (*Grimenos-thyra*, meaning "Grimenos' city").²⁰ If this is the case, the names of the Etruscans (*Tyrsenoi*, *Tyrrhenoi*, *Etrusci*, "*T"rasenna"/"T"rasna*) and the name of the sea west of Italy, Tyrrhenian Sea (*Tyrrhenia*), which derives from their Greek designation *Tyrrhenoi*, may have been carried from the region of Lydia to Italy through the Etruscans. Similarly, the name of the sea to the east of Italy, Adria (Hadria), along with the Etruscan city Adria (Hadria), which is thought to have given the Adriatic Sea its name, was transferred from Lydia to Italy via the Etruscans (Livius, V, 32.8–9). These names, containing the consonantal elements *t/d*, *r*, such as Teira/Thyra and Adria, as well as the word *tyrseis* (meaning "fortress, tower, citadel"), which Dionysius claimed was the root of the *Tyrsenoi* name, were likely of Lydian origin. Even the Etruscan city Tarquinii and the Etruscan personal names Tarquinius and Tarkhon, which contain the same consonantal elements (*t* and *r*) as Teira/Thyra/Tyrrha and *tyrseis*, may be related to these Lydian-derived names and words. The same consonantal pattern (*t* and *r*) also appears in *Troia/Troie*, *Troes* (Trojans), and *Taruša/Taruishaš*, as well as in the names *Turša/Turuša* and *Tereš*, which are mentioned in Egyptian inscriptions as the name of a people (see below). Therefore, these linguistic connections reinforce Herodotus' claim that Lydia was the homeland of the Etruscans. In Herodotus' time, the 5th century BCE, the region known as Lydia corresponded roughly to the central-northern Aegean region of modern-day Turkey.

Migration Narratives and Eastern Connections

It is difficult to dismiss Herodotus' account of the Etruscans' homeland as lacking historical foundations. Likewise, it is equally challenging to deny the possibility of a migration from Lydia to Italy approximately 750 years before Herodotus' time. While there may be no compelling reason to believe that the Lydians who migrated to Italy were led by a Lydian prince named Tyrsenos, the broader idea of migration itself, as reported by Herodotus, may indeed be rooted in a historical event. This possibility is further supported by our knowledge of the mass migrations that marked the end of Late Bronze Age civilizations.²¹

If, as Herodotus suggests, the reason for the Lydian colonists' migration to Italy was famine, then this famine may have occurred within the broader context of the Aegean Migrations. A key indication of this is found in the Karnak Inscription, which describes how Pharaoh Merneptah (1213–1204 BCE) sent grain to the Hittite king Šuppiluliuma II toward the end of his reign to help sustain the Land of Hatti (Kaya, 2021, pp. 238, 240, 374; Brice, 2005, p. 331). However, just one year after providing this aid, Merneptah was forced to defend Egypt against invading forces. Both his records and those of Pharaoh Ramses III (1183–1152 BCE) refer to these invaders as having come "from the lands of the sea." Modern scholars later identified these groups as the Sea Peoples, a term used to describe the various migrating and invading groups that contributed to the collapse of Late Bronze Age civilizations (Kaya, 2021, p. 374; Kaya, 2023, pp. 200–201). Among the Sea Peoples, Egyptian inscriptions also mention a group recorded with the consonantal sequence *Trs* (*Tw-ry-š/Twrjš.w*, *Twrwš.w*, *Twrjš.w*), which has been transcribed (Breasted, 1906, p. 579; Pallottino,

²⁰ Umar, 1993, pp. 295 (Grymenothyra), 345 (nr.1. Teira/Tire), 774 (Teira), 787 (*Thyraia/Thyrea* and *Teira* (Tire) are names meaning "fortress"); Büchner, 1912, pp. 1879–1880 (Grimenothyra). According to William Mitchell Ramsay (1960, pp. 111, 160–162 no. 94, 161 note 1), Teira means "town/city". For Tyrrha/Tyrrhenia, see Tykot, 1994 p. 60; Grant, 1980, p. 270, note 41; Pallottino, 1956, p. 55.

²¹ For the migrations known in ancient history literature as the Aegean Migrations or Sea Peoples, see Kaya, 2021, pp. 373–387; Kaya, 2023, pp. 199 ff.

1956, p. 55) as *Turša/Turuša* or *Tereš* (*Toorooshah*, *Toorshah*, *Tooreeshah*). Undoubtedly, just as the Greeks and Romans adapted the Etruscans' self-designation (*(T)rasenna/(T)rasna*) into *Tyrsenoi*, *Tyrrhenoi*, *Etrusci*, and *Tusci*, the Egyptians similarly modified this name into *Turša* or *Tereš* to fit their own linguistic system. If this is the case, the Etruscans, who originally inhabited the Kaistros (*Küçük Menderes*) and Hermos (*Gediz*) river basins in the central and northern Aegean region of present-day Turkey, may have become part of the broader Aegean Migrations (also known as the Sea Peoples' migrations). As a result, they might have been among the groups that attacked Egypt in the first two decades of the 12th century BCE.

The Etruscans, whom the Egyptians referred to as *Twrwš.w*, *Twrjš.w*, *Twjrš.w* (*Toorooshah*, *Tooreeshah*, *Toorshah* = *Turša*, *Turuša*, *Tereš*), undoubtedly began searching for a new homeland after their defeat in Egypt. This search, undertaken by sea, appears to have divided them into two groups: one settling on the islands of Lemnos, Imbros, and Samos,²² while the other turned toward the Western Mediterranean, ultimately arriving in the land of the Umbrians in Italy, a region that would later be named after them as *Tyrsenia/Tyrrhenia/Etruria*. If this reconstruction is correct, the Etruscans who settled in the Umbrian territory did not, as Herodotus and subsequent ancient writers claimed (Herodotus, I.94; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I.25.3, 27.1; Strabo, V.2.2; Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, III.8.1; Tacitus, *Annales*, IV.55), derive their name from Tyrrhenos, the leader said to have guided them after their arrival in central-western Italy. These names, *Tereš/Turša*, *Tyrsenoi/Tyrrhenoi*, *(T)rasenna/(T)rasna*, *Etrusci/Tu(r)sci/Thou(r)skoi*, which evolved into different forms across various languages, were already the Etruscans' original designation. The Latin pronunciation of this name (*Etrusci/Tusci*) became historically associated with the region they settled in, Etruria/Tuscania. Meanwhile, the Greek form (*Tyrrhenoi*) gave its name to the sea west of Etruria, which continues to be known as the Tyrrhenian Sea to this day.

If the Etruscans were indeed the *Turša* (or *Turuša/Tereš*) mentioned in the list of Sea Peoples recorded in Egyptian inscriptions with the consonantal sequence *Trs* (*Tw-ry-š*), then their migration to Italy could have taken place around the mid-12th century BCE, following the Trojan War, as suggested by Herodotus and certain other ancient sources (Herodotus, I.7; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I.28.1–2; Vergilius, *Aeneis*, VIII.454). However, even among supporters of the eastern origin theory, there is no consensus regarding the exact date of the Etruscans' arrival in Etruria. Some scholars argue that they reached Italy as early as the 12th century BCE, while others propose a gradual migration or a two-wave movement between the 10th and 8th centuries BCE (Atlan, 1970, p. 6; Pulgram, 1958, p. 187; Peet, 1924, p. 573; Bérard, 1941, pp. 512–516). It appears that both chronological frameworks may hold validity. As previously mentioned, Egyptian pharaonic inscriptions contain evidence that could be interpreted as supporting the occurrence of this migration in the 12th century BCE (see above). Evidence that migrations may have continued beyond the initial wave can be found in ancient sources that recount legendary accounts of individuals from the Greek world arriving in Italy. One such figure is Demaratus, the father of Tarquinius Priscus, the fifth king of Rome (Dionysius Halicarnassensis, III.46.3, 47.1; Livius, IV.3.9; Strabo, VIII.6.20). Additionally, archaeological research has uncovered numerous artifacts dating to the 10th–8th centuries BCE, reflecting influences from eastern cultures. A significant cultural shift occurred in the 8th century BCE, when the Villanovan tradition of cremation, a defining characteristic of the earlier Iron Age culture, was replaced by inhumation, burial without cremation (Bradley, 2020, p. 40). It appears that the migrants responsible for introducing and establishing this new cultural practice from the second half of the 8th century BCE originated from the region known in antiquity as Lydia as well as the islands of Lemnos and Imbros. As previously mentioned, an inscription found on Lemnos contains a language similar to Etruscan. Furthermore, ancient sources also reference the presence of Etruscans on the islands of Lemnos and Imbros (see below).

Settlement in Italy

The region that the Etruscans migrated to and eventually lent their name to (Etruria) in the 12th century BCE was not an uninhabited land. It was already settled by the Umbrians (*Umbri/Ombrici*), an Italic people. Like Lydia, the Etruscans' supposed homeland, this region was also nourished by two rivers, the Arnus (Arno)

²² For information on Lemnos and Imbros as the Etruscans' homeland, see Strabo, V.2.3–4; Diodorus Siculus, X.9.6; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, I.25.3; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.1755; Polyaeus, *Strategemata* VII.49.1; Plutarch, *Moralia* 28 (Tyrrhenides). For the claim that Samos was the Etruscans' homeland, see Diodorus Siculus, X.3.1.

and Tiberis (Tiber), and was characterized by fertile soil and a similar climate, making it an attractive area for settlement. After migrating westward across the Apennines and settling between the Tiber and Arnus rivers, the Etruscans did not speak the same or even a closely related language as the Umbrians. While the Umbrians belonged to the Italic branch of the Indo-European language family, the Etruscans were not an Italic people and spoke a non-Indo-European language (Benelli, 2017, pp. 245–270; Pulgram, 1958, pp. 191–195; Whatmough, 1937, pp. 224–232). For this reason, the Etruscan inscriptions, numbering over 10,000, written in their adapted 26-letter alphabet, which they borrowed from the Euboean Greeks and modified to fit their own language, have yet to be fully deciphered (see above). Beyond their linguistic differences, the Etruscans and Umbrians also diverged significantly in terms of cultural practices, way of life, and religious beliefs, particularly in burial customs. Like the peoples of their supposed homeland in Lydia, the Etruscans practiced inhumation (burial of the dead), whereas the Umbrians followed the cremation tradition, burning their dead and placing the ashes in urns before burial.

It remains uncertain how the Etruscans' relationship with the Umbrians evolved after their arrival in Umbria's territory. Plinius (*Naturalis Historia*, III.5.50) claims that the Etruscans drove out the region's native Umbrians. However, it is unlikely that the complete displacement of the Umbrians, who were later forced to retreat to the Apennine Mountains, occurred suddenly. More plausibly, the Etruscans and the Umbrians coexisted peacefully for an extended period, possibly until the late 9th century BCE. Over this time, the Etruscans gradually gained demographic and political dominance at the expense of the Umbrians. This process was likely driven by factors that contributed to the growth of the Etruscan population, including a gradual influx of new migrants from the Aegean world beginning in the 10th century BCE and possibly a second wave of migration in the following century. If this reconstruction is correct, the complete retreat of the Umbrians into the mountainous region east of Etruria likely occurred between 800 and 750 BCE. This shift marked the beginning of a new era, known as the Orientalizing Period, characterized by the dominance of Etruscan inhumation burial practices (Nowlin, 2021, pp. 29–59; Neil, 2016, pp. 16–20; Ridgway, 2006, pp. 653–666; Forsythe, 2005, pp. 47 ff.), an increase in population and the expansion of settlements, the emergence of urbanization, the rise of an elite class, and the integration of Etruria into international trade networks.²³ Possessing a highly developed culture, as well as strong maritime and military capabilities, the Etruscans played a pivotal role in ushering in this new period. Already in control of Umbrian territory, they consolidated their political power, much as Etruscan kings later did in Rome. By the first half of the 8th century BCE, the Etruscans had become the undisputed rulers of Etruria and were so dominant in the region and the adjacent western sea that both came to be named after them (Tyrrhenia). This growing power and influence explain why, by the late 8th century BCE or early 7th century BCE, the Etruscans were recognized by their Greek contemporaries, including the poet Hesiod, as the "famous *Tyrsenoi*."

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Etruscans referred to themselves as *(T)rasna/(T)rasenna*, and their homeland, *Etruria/Tuscania (Toscana)*, was the first name by which the region was historically known to the Romans. Over time, the Romans began calling them *Tusci* (Tuscans), while the Greeks referred to them as *Tyrsenoi* and *Tyrrhenoi*. The Etruscans were not only a people who spoke a language distinct from that of the Romans, Italic groups of Italy, and Greeks, but they were also a non-Indo-European people. Their language bore no connection to the Semitic languages spoken by the Phoenicians and Hebrews. Additionally, the theory that their language belonged to the Ural-Altaic language family, which includes Turkic, has not been widely accepted in the academic world. For this reason, despite extensive research, the Etruscan language remains undeciphered in its entirety, and its affiliation with any known modern language group remains uncertain.

The question of whether the Etruscans were a European people who crossed the Alps from the north has now lost its relevance. However, the debate continues over whether they were an eastern people who migrated to central-western Italy via the Mediterranean, originating from Lydia (modern-day western Turkey), the Aegean islands, or Greece, or whether they were an autochthonous population that had lived in

²³ Archaeological research indicates that in the 800s BCE, Etruscan settlements expanded both in terms of territory and population, the emergence of elites began, and the process of urbanization commenced. See Lomas, 2018, pp. 17–19.

Italy since the 3rd millennium BCE. There is no definitive answer to these questions that all scholars agree upon. DNA studies, which have analyzed skulls and bones in the hope of determining the Etruscans' ethnic identity and homeland, have not yielded conclusive results (Lomas, 2018, pp. 6 ff.; Achilli *et al.*, 2007, pp. 762–767; Vernesi *et al.*, 2004, pp. 697–703; Perkins, 2017, pp. 109 ff.; Scullard, 2000, p. 27). While some findings have suggested traces supporting the eastern origin theory, the autochthonous theory, and even the idea of a connection to the Turkic peoples, no single interpretation has been universally accepted by the academic community.²⁴

Believing in the accuracy of the information provided by Herodotus, Hellanicus, and other ancient literary sources from the 5th century BCE, which claim that the Etruscans were of eastern origin and migrated to Italy during the Sea Peoples' movements around the time of the Trojan War in the 12th century BCE, seems more compelling than rejecting it. The strongest argument supporting the idea that the Etruscans were one of the Late Bronze Age peoples of central-northern Aegean Turkey is the testimony of Herodotus, a historian born and raised in Halicarnassus (modern Bodrum), as well as other ancient sources that followed his account (Strabo, IV.2.4; Horatius, *Satires*, I.6.1; Vergilius, *Aeneis*, IV.55; Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana*, I.1.2; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 277.53; Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, III.5.50; Tacitus, *Annales*, IV.55.3). A second key argument lies in the linguistic connections between the Etruscans' self-designation, *(T)rasenna* or *(T)rasna*, and various words associated with urban fortifications and settlements in central-northern Aegean Turkey. These include the name of the Etruscan city (H)adria, which may be linked to words such as *teira/thyara* (meaning "city/fortress"), *tyrseis* (meaning "fort/tower"), and *Troia/Troes* (meaning "the city of Troy / Trojans"). The third key argument is the name *Trs* (*Turša/Tereš*), which appears in Egyptian inscriptions from the reigns of Pharaoh Merneptah and Ramses III, referring to one of the Sea Peoples that attempted, but ultimately failed, to invade Egypt. The fourth significant factor is the well-established fact that the Etruscans spoke a language distinct from all their contemporaries in Italy. Evidence that this language was spoken outside Italy comes from an inscription discovered on the island of Lemnos. The linguistic similarities between Lemnian and Etruscan suggest a connection, and it is highly plausible that the inhabitants of Lemnos were of Lydian (Maionian) origin. The fifth key argument is the strong resemblance between Etruscan culture and the Iron Age and earlier cultures of Turkey, rather than with the Greeks or Italic peoples. These similarities include tumulus and rock-cut tombs, burial typologies, artistic styles, chariot racing, metalworking techniques, and a lifestyle that emphasized luxury, banquets, music, and dance. Additionally, the Etruscans' religious practices, such as hepatoscopy (divination by examining animal livers and intestines) and ornithomancy (divination through the observation of birds), bear closer parallels to Anatolian traditions than to those of Italy or Greece. Another supporting factor is the geographical and climatic similarities between Lydia and Etruria. At the very least, Maionia, the name of Lydia's central region during the Late Bronze Age, covered a two-river basin area, much like Etruria. Both regions were located in the central and northern parts of their respective lands, reinforcing the plausibility of an Anatolian origin for the Etruscans.

All of this suggests that the Etruscans were one of the Late Bronze Age peoples of the Aegean region in what is now Turkey. The region where they were most densely settled corresponds to the area between the Kaistros (Küçük Menderes) and Hermos (Gediz) rivers, which in historical periods came to be known as Lydia. Their original name, *(T)rasna/(T)rasenna*, shares the same consonantal structure (*t* and *r* (*s*)) as the words *Teira* and *Tyrseis*, meaning "city" or "fortress, tower, citadel." This suggests that their name may have been derived from their homeland in this region. At least a portion of the Etruscan population became part of the Aegean Migrations that occurred in the late 13th and 12th centuries BCE. It was likely due to a severe famine that they were compelled to abandon their homeland and became one of the migrating groups that reshaped the ancient world. The *Turša* (or *Turuša/Tereš*) people, recorded with the consonantal sequence *Trs* (*Tw-ry-š*) among the invaders who attacked Egypt, were likely the Etruscans. After their defeat in Egypt, they continued their maritime journey in search of a new homeland. Ultimately, they settled in the region between the Tiberis (Tiber) and Arnus (Arno) rivers in western Italy, a land already inhabited by the Umbrians, an Indo-European Italic people whose language the Etruscans did not understand. What likely

²⁴ Some researchers have methodologically challenged the contribution of DNA studies to the investigation of a people's ethnic identity, see Ulf, 2017, p. 28; de Simone, 2008, p. 199.

attracted them to this area was its geographical and climatic similarity to their homeland, as well as its rich natural resources, particularly iron and copper which were essential for their advanced metallurgical skills.

After settling in the region, the Etruscans did not change their original name, *(T)rasenna* or *(T)rasna*, which they had used in their homeland. Over time, this name evolved into different linguistic forms: in Greek, it became *Tyrsenoi* and *Tyrrhenoi*, while in Latin, the language of the Romans, it transformed into *Etrusci* (Etruscans) and *Tu(r)sci* (Tuscans). The land they inhabited became known as Etruria (later Toscana), meaning “the land of the Etruscans,” while the sea to the west of their territory was named *Tyrrhenia*, meaning “the sea of the *Tyrrhenians*”. Undoubtedly, the reason this sea was named *Tyrrhenia* rather than *Etruria* is closely linked to the fact that the Greeks, as a dominant maritime people, held naval supremacy before the Romans and thus played a decisive role in naming the bodies of water in the Mediterranean.

The Etruscans who arrived in Italy in the 12th century BCE were undoubtedly warriors and possessed a more advanced culture compared to the indigenous Umbrians, but they were not numerically dominant. For this reason, they likely coexisted with the Umbrians in Etruria, the region that would later bear their name, and may have even intermarried with them. However, it was not until the 9th–8th centuries BCE that the Etruscans grew into a population large and powerful enough to establish cultural dominance in the region. This transformation was likely facilitated by a second wave of migration or multiple gradual migrations from western Anatolia (particularly Lydia, in present-day Turkey) and the Aegean islands, including Lemnos and Imbros.

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