



The World Before Christ, an LDS Perspective
(4000 B.C. – 0 B.C.)

VOLUME 3

Epoch 1 – 4000 B.C. – 2344 B.C.

The Purpose of Life, Enoch & the City of Zion, Geography of the Earth Before the Flood

Epoch 2 – 2344 B.C. – 1900 B.C.

The Sumerians, The Indus River Valley, Early Europe, African Civilizations, Early Civilizations of India

Epoch 3 – 1900 B.C. – 1570 B.C.

Hammarabi, Shang & Western Zhou of China, Aryans of India, European Settlements

Epoch 4 – 1570 B.C. – 1095 B.C.

The Forty Years Wandering, Joshua, The Age of the Judges, Ruth & Naomi, Eli & Samuel, The Tabernacle

Epoch 5 – 1095 B.C. – 800 B.C.

The Prophets Elijah & Elisha, The Assyrians

Epoch 6 – 800 B.C. – 587 B.C.

The Etruscans, Greek City-States, The Ancient Olympics, The Celts of Europe

Epoch 7 – 587 B.C. – 400 B.C.

Buddha, Confucius, India, Eastern Zhou of China, The World of the Orient

Epoch 8 – 400 B.C. – 175 B.C.

The Barbaric Tribes of Europe Before the Romans, Everyday Life in Egypt Before the Romans

Epoch 9 – 175 B.C. – 0 B.C.

Life in the Roman Empire, Roman Mythology, Roman Law, Cicero

(Excerpt on next page)

Etruscan Culture

The World Before Christ, an LDS Perspective, Volume 3,
"Etruscan Culture", is found on pages 239-246.

As the creativity of the Greeks grew to its full extent, the peoples of the Mediterranean fell more and more under the domination of Greek art. Among them were the Etruscans, who throughout the period of their independent artistic expression were profoundly influenced by their Greek neighbors and contemporaries. Although they may have followed Greek styles, themes, and even details, the Etruscans still had certain rites that were unique to them, and this was born out in no better detail than in the ceremonies carried out in establishing a new city.

First an ideal point was chosen, a pit dug and offerings thrown in; from this point, the perimeter of the city walls was marked out. Then the founder, taking a plough with a bronze share [the part of a plow or other agricultural tool that cuts the soil], yoked a bull and a cow and ploughed a furrow along the line where the walls were to be built, lifting the plough across the places reserved for gateways. The clods were carefully laid on the inner side of the furrow, thus creating a symbolic moat and wall; subsequently the pomoerium, an open space both within and outside the walls, remained sacred and no one could build or plough within it. The Romans believed that their own formula for laying out of colonies and camps went back to Etruscan tradition. First, auspices, or omens, were taken by an augur [OH ger - official omen reader], then the site was oriented to the points of the compass and the main streets laid out, using a surveying instrument called a groma. The word groma, and probably the instrument itself, was derived from the Greeks, but reached the Romans from an Etruscan intermediary. Roman sources also mention that the Etruscans believed no city to be complete without three gates, three streets and three temples, dedicated to Jupiter [chief deity and god of thunder], Juno [wife of Jupiter and goddess of marriage] and Minerva [goddess of wisdom] and that the temples of Venus [goddess of love], Vulcan [god of fire] and Mars [god of war] should lie outside the walls. (Ibid., pages 62-63)

Unlike the construction of their city walls and tombs, the Etruscans did not habitually use stone for their temples, except in building the foundations. This characteristic may well have sprung from a religious feeling for the material, influenced by very archaic types of temple, Italian or Greek, which were built of wood and from the availability of fine timber. Throughout their history, the Etruscans continued to use wood for the superstructure of their temples and, consequently, these have not survived, as the beautiful stone architecture of the Greek world has done. The Etruscans did, however, cover the wooden elements of the temples with terra cotta (a brownish-red glaze), using this medium both as a protection and for decoration.

From early times in Italy, the gods were worshiped and the watching for omens was done in the open air. The building of temples, the dwelling places in which the images of the gods were placed, brought a more human touch to the images. As yet, there is no evidence of any temples dating to the seventh century, but beginning in the sixth century, we find the first such temple at the city of Veii. Vitruvius, a Roman historian in the first century B.C. gives details of the style and proportions of these early temples.

The foundations for the temple should be almost square, though slightly longer than it is wide, and the front half should be a porch with columns. At the back there should be three rooms; the central cella [the room where the image of the god resided] should be slightly larger than the two spaces on either side, which could either be cellae, entered by doors, or open wings. The porch should have two lines of four columns, placed in line with the walls at the back. (Ibid., page 68)

Vitruvius also noted that the frontal elevation of Etruscan temples, with their wooden beams covered in terra cotta decorations, had a broad, top-heavy appearance. These temples were approached from the front only, and of course there were local considerations for many variations in design.

The bronzes must have been among the most splendid objects in an Etruscan house. Many other types of furniture have vanished, since they were made of wood, leather, basketry, cloth or other perishable materials and these we know of principally from illustrations of various kinds. By modern standards, both Greek and Etruscan interiors were quite sparsely filled; they did not habitually use shelves in their houses nor did they build cupboards and, though they had chests without drawers, they kept many of their possessions either in boxes, baskets or hung on the walls, suspended from hooks or nails. In the *Tomb of the Reliefs*, dated to the third century B.C., the interior is cut deep into the rock and the outer walls of the chamber have a series of recesses, carved to resemble couches on which lay the dead. All around the room, as if hanging from nails on the walls, are representations of their possessions, molded in stucco which

was painted in many colors. This would have been a family tomb with many generations represented. Here is a description of one such tomb.

In the middle of the back wall was the place of honor, which had a woman's name written beside it. This recess was carved to resemble an ornate couch and in front stands a low foot-stool on which a pair of red slippers is laid. To the left is a chest, clearly made of wood, with a door and key-hole, while the pile of neatly folded material shown on the top may indicate that this was a clothes chest. On the pilaster [a rectangular support] above are shown a jug and a black drinking cup; on the balancing pilaster to the right, there are a fan, colored wreaths, which were worn at banquets, and a stick. On the frieze [a decoration or series of decorations forming an ornamental band around a room] above the recesses, the military equipment of the men of the family is presented; one may see their swords, shields and helmets, while a pair of great, bronze, circular trumpets flank the doorway.

On four sides of the central pillars, there is a fascinating display of domestic objects, some quite unfamiliar to us, as they were habitually made of perishable materials, and these have raised much speculation. On the pillar to the left, the facing panel has a wooden baton, hung from a thong, a large knife, an axe, a jug, a coil of rope and what are believed to be slings; on the right side of the same pillar are shown a leather bag with a strap, a decorated drinking bowl, a long stick with a curved end, either comparable to a lituus or simply a crooked staff, and an object which has so far baffled certain identification, though a cradle or a wheeled-stand have both recently been suggested.

Opposite, on the facing panel of the pillar to the right, one may see a ladle, tongs and a pan, while above is a large tray, suspended from a handle; this object is almost certainly a gaming board, for parallel lines are visible upon the surface and the small purse associated with it would have held the dice or counters. On the adjacent panel to the right, more slings hang from the volutes [the spiral or twisted designs at the top of pillars] and next to them is an object which some believe to be a basket, while others have suggested a round cheese. A set of spits [pointed bars used in roasting meat] is neatly hung from a handle on the right, there is a wooden knife rack, with two knives placed in it, and below a basin is shown upon a tripod, while animals and birds, among them a duck, so often seen in banqueting scenes, fill out the remaining spaces. (Ibid., page 122)

Each family was viewed as a sacred society, and had its own private burial field where its departed members lived on under the ground, just as the family they were temporarily separated from lived in its own individual housing. We know a little of the physical attributes of the Etruscans. Working from the bodies in the tombs and from grave inscriptions, it has been estimated that the average life expectancy of an Etruscan, whether a man or a woman, was about forty years. It can also be noted that the average height of a man was five feet, four and a half inches, and for a woman it was five feet, one inch.

Upon that portion of land a man considered his own he built his house, to shelter his sacred fire, his hearth which no one outside his family might approach, since under the stone of the hearth lived his gods. For this reason the fire must never be quenched, except upon the one prescribed day of the year, when the fire was ceremonially put out, and ceremonially relighted. Quenching this fire in any other manner would cause the death of the whole family, which included its ancestors. Fustel de Coulanges, a professor of history at Strasbourg in 1864, wrote about the sacredness of the hearth in the home:

*Thus the hearth-fire is a sort of moral being, it shines, and warms, and cooks the sacred food; but at the same time it thinks, and has a conscience....One might call it human....it blazes up, it moves, it lives....it has sentiments and affections, it gives man purity.... (Agnes Carr Vaughan, *The Etruscans*, page 62)*

The man's first house may have been a round hut, built of mud and grass, and with a thatched roof. Unfortunately, our only real guide to the structure of the Etruscan house is the structure of the Etruscan tomb, supplemented by what we can learn from its wall paintings, from scenes depicted on burial urns, and from later houses, from reconstructed dwellings of ancient Pompeii. The many-chambered Etruscan tomb must have been as exact a reproduction of an Etruscan mansion as family abilities and wealth would allow, for it, like a dwelling on the surface of the earth, was intended for the immediate family and for future generations. Just as the sacred fire was ceremonially quenched upon the prescribed days of the year, so upon prescribed days of the year the entire family brought food and drink to the ancestral tomb to share with the dead.

It must be remembered that not only did the Etruscans have gods in general for all the people to worship, they also had gods for each individual family. The performance of a marriage demonstrates this importance. When a young girl was ready to be married, she had to give up her domestic religion, the hearthstone of her father, the god whose sacred fire she had tended since childhood, for the same person could not hold to two sacred fires, or to two series of ancestors.

“From the hour of marriage, the wife has no longer anything in common with the domestic religion of her fathers; she sacrifices at the hearth of her husband.” (Ibid., page 66)

The first step toward marriage was taken at the paternal hearthstone. Here the girl's father sacrificed, and declared aloud that he was giving his daughter over into the keeping of another domestic hearth. Ritually severed from her former life, the young girl then accompanied her husband-to-be to his paternal hearth. Cleansing water was sprinkled over her. She touched the sacred fire and repeated the prayers. The young couple broke bread together. They were now man and wife.

Etruscan family meals, which they also held in honor of the dead, often appear in the tomb paintings. Until recently, visitors to a little known tomb not far from Tarquinia could have seen painted on its wall two family scenes. In the first painting they would have seen, prominent in the foreground, a low table with three vases, or jars. The jar in the center would have been recognized as a *krater*, or bowl for mixing wine with water, as was the custom in other parts of the Mediterranean world. Flanking the *krater* on either side, stood two black-figures on a reddish background. From these three vases the tomb acquired its name: the *Tomb of the Painted Vases*. This tomb has since been cut off from visitors because of vandals, but before that happened, one visitor by the name of Mary A. Johnstone, left us a vivid description of what she saw.

Each scene portrays an Etruscan family, parents and small children, dining al fresco [outdoors] in the garden. The smiling parents recline on their dining-couch, the children sit at their feet: in one scene a brother and a sister, in the other two little sisters. The table, set with food, is drawn within easy reach of the couch. No table implements are visible.

The first scene includes the family pet, a dog or leopard, who crouches under the table, patiently waiting for his share of the meal. The brother and sister wait, too, though not so patiently, for the boy's left arm is around his sister's shoulder, as if to restrain her, or to direct her attention to the fluttering dove he holds in his right hand. The boy is nude, like the young slave who waits near by, ready to serve his masters. The little girl is simply dressed in a loose garment that falls to her feet.

In the other scene, the two little girls, both fully dressed, hold garlands of flowers, as they sit quietly beside each other on the end of their parents' dining-couch. Their mother also holds a garland; she is presenting it to her husband. A special occasion this is, and we are privileged to attend, to admire the jewels worn by both husband and wife, as they sit listening to the music a slave-girl plays. Only one slave-boy attended the other family; here two stand waiting the master's call. (Ibid., pages 63-64)

These two families' names are unknown to us, for no inscription seems to have accompanied either painting. The two black-figured vases tell us that we are in the seventh century, B.C., when Etruscan life was still simple, when husband and wife dined together on the same couch, the custom so misunderstood by the Greeks and the Romans. Everyone knows that a respectable Greek never allowed his wife to share his meals; his bed, yes, but not his meals. After the fourth century B.C., judging from the changes to be seen on the lids of many later urns, husband and wife no longer reclined together at their meals. The husband reclines, the wife sits at his feet. Soon, in deference to Roman custom, the Etruscan wife will sit on a chair or a stool, completely Romanized. Now we will take a look at another family tomb near Orveito.

Two elderly brothers are seated side by side on a couch. An inscription written over their heads introduces them; they are Velio and Arnth, sons of Larth, of the family Velii. The inscription adds that both brothers held religious offices. With the two elderly men sits a seven-year-old boy; he is not nude, as the little boy in the first scene was, but clothed in white. Before the three motionless figures stands the funeral table, its candles lighted, its food ready to be served by the waiting slaves.

The little boy's name is Vel. If the scene is set in the After World, Vel is probably wearing the shroud he was buried in. Three members of the family Velii have already arrived; the table is spread to welcome the older son; he is on his way and soon they will see him, young and handsome, driving his chariot and horses home. While the family waits, two musicians entertain them. You can see them standing near the foot of the table, one with his lyre, the other with the double pipes, both favorite instruments of the Etruscans.

The family Velii was doubtless well-to-do; for another scene in the same tomb shows us the kitchen. On the walls hang a side of beef, a deer, ducks, hares, and birds. Nude slaves bustle about, chopping meat, scrubbing tables, tending the great oven. The slaves have their music, too, and a monkey on a pole to add to their pleasure. Dining together in this fashion is one of the many proofs that in Etruscan life husband and wife were on terms of perfect

equality, both in the present and in the After World that Tages [ancient gods who had revealed proper religious behaviors] had revealed to them. (Ibid., page 65)

These inscriptions show men with their hair parted in the middle, braided, and reaching well down toward the middle of the back. Beards so often seen on early inscriptions went out of fashion, especially for young men, when it became popular to imitate clean-shaven Greek youths. Women's hair styles are shown braided and falling over the shoulder, or drawn up and caught into a knot at the back of the neck. Later the braids are replaced by curls that framed the face. The fifth century saw the braids return, but wrapped around the head under a tight cap. Since the Etruscans, so far as we know, were not a curly-haired people, their women must have had ways of curling their hair. We have no evidence of beauty-parlors for the Etruscan women, but Etruscan men had special shops where they went to have excess hair removed from their bodies. These parlors used pitch instead of razors.

Etruscans were divided mainly into two classes of people, the priestly class, and the commoner class. Girls of the priestly class were initiated into some of the religious rituals, were skilled in the sciences, and were taught how to be a good housewife as well. Management of those large and stately mansions in which the priestly class lived required much of a housewife, no matter how many slaves she had. A common girl, whether serf or slave, had little to look forward to. Education was not for her. As soon as she was old enough, she began to help her mother with household tasks, and at times her father in the fields. She would be married as soon as she reached the necessary age for child-bearing, since this was the whole purpose and end of a woman's life.

Etruscan boys of the priestly class were taught all the rituals of their religion since he was to practice it for his own family and for the society at large. Commoner boys were put to work as soon as they were old enough to help their father till the ground, care for the animals, and tend the sheep. If his father was a worker in metals or precious stones, a maker of shoes or of false teeth, the boy would learn his father's trade.

The Etruscans were a significant sea power, and her vast mineral resources, the wood from her forests and her agricultural potential, provided Etruria with a strong trading position. It is easiest to look at Etruscan trade in two parts: firstly, her sea trade, which brought her into contact with the Greeks, Carthaginians and their predecessors the Phoenicians, together with the other peoples of the east Mediterranean and, secondly, the trade between Etruria and her Italian neighbors and the peoples beyond the Alps. With the exception of the barbarian peoples of the west Mediterranean, Etruria played the part of a primary producer, exporting her mineral resources in return for great quantities of manufactured goods, while in her dealings with her Italian and northern neighbors, she reversed these roles, exporting her own finished products.

The distribution of pottery in which the Etruscans excelled have been found in the south of France, Spain, at Carthage, Sardinia, Greece, and as far east as the island of Rhodes in the Aegean Sea, and Asia Minor.

There must also have been considerable traffic between the cities and towns of Etruria. All these roads led to Rome and served her military needs, while uniting the whole region with the capital, often building entirely new roads and ignoring the local communities. Sometimes, however, the Roman roads followed existing routes, for the Etruscans had been road builders long before they were conquered by the Romans. Paved road surfaces or cobbles are only known in urban areas or their immediate vicinity. Etruscans frequently cut a highway through solid rock, or they diverted the waters of a stream to utilize its bed. Horses, mules and donkeys were used to ride or as beasts of burden. Four-wheeled vehicles were known by the seventh century B.C. but a two-wheeled type of cart was the most often used.

Religion was always closely interwoven with the secular life of the Etruscans. They had a reputation as being a very religious people. The Greeks felt a force of an all-powerful fate in their lives, and were drawn to consult the oracles of the gods and other forms of divination. However, they were also capable of seeing man as a reasonable thinker. The Romans built up a legalistic conception of the relationship between the gods and men. These attitudes seem quite alien to the Etruscans. Among these Etruscan ideas was a profound, almost fatalistic, belief in destiny and the immutable course of divine will, in which the span of nations and men was preordained and a deep conviction that man's highest duty was to seek to understand and live within these prescribed laws.

Rules of conduct, often expressed in ritual observations, had to be minutely fulfilled and, since the Etruscans believed that the will of the gods was shown by portents [signs] in the material world, it was man's obligation to observe such signs and to interpret them correctly. The Etruscans' attitude to portents was summed up by Seneca [a Roman philosopher and statesman who lived from 4 B.C. to 65 A.D.]: "Whereas we [the Romans] believe lightning to be released as a result of the collision of the clouds, they [the Etruscans] believe that clouds collide so as to release lightning, for as they attribute all to the deity, they are led to believe not that things have a meaning in so far as they

*occur, but rather that they occur because they must have a meaning.” Indeed, much of the Etruscans’ best intellectual effort was devoted to this anxious questioning and interpretation of destiny. The Etruscans were renowned in antiquity both for their scrupulous attention to correct ritual formula and for their skill in the art of divination, by which they could regulate their present and future actions. (Ellen MacNamara, *Everyday Life of the Etruscans*, page 153)*

To help them in these endeavors, the Etruscans believed they had knowledge revealed from supernatural sources. Legend has it that a farmer saw a figure spring from the furrow, who had the appearance of a boy but the wisdom of a seer. This strange boy was called Tages, and a crowd gathered around him and he expounded the art of divination. This was written down and as new facts became known they were added to the previous knowledge of how to divine. In another legend, this time a nymph by the name of Vegoia, revealed information concerning the beginning of the world and the unchanging laws of boundaries of men and nations. This, too, was committed to writing, and these became the foundation of Etruscan law, and guidelines on how to divine signs from the gods.

Apart from the interpretation of these supernatural wonders, the Etruscan priest sought to discover the will of the gods by various forms of divination, chiefly the observation of thunder and lightning, the examination of the intestines of animals, especially the liver, of sacrificed animals, and the flight of birds. The principle followed in the divination of the skies was to divide the dome of the sky into sixteen parts, radiating from the observer, who faced south. The eight regions to the left, to the east, were favorable and those to the west were adverse. The region of the sky where lightning appeared was observed and the lightning was divided further into types, the direction in which it traveled and the Roman point of impact. Lightning could be sent by nine gods but there were eleven types in all. The god Jupiter could hurl three sorts of thunderbolts. By observing all these characteristics, the meaning of the lightning might be interpreted. The Etruscans believed that the fortunes of both men and cities could thus be foretold and that lightning might even be summoned by means of prayer and ritual.

The Romans adopted Etruscans’ gods for their myths, changing some of the stories associated with them to suit their own circumstances. Of the major gods of the Etruscans, Jupiter was called *Tin* or *Tinia*, and his wife, Juno, was called *Uni*. Minerva was called *Menrva*, Neptune was *Nethuns*, Mars was *Maris*, and Venus was called *Turan*. Vulcan was called *Sethlans*, Mercury was *Turms*, Apollo was *Apulu* or *Aplu*, and Hercules was *Hercle*.

We have little information about rites performed in the temples, but from what is available, we know they were much given to offering sacrifices, and had an exact calendar for such services. They also had ritual formulas at the dedication of altars and temples, and the founding of cities. The dead were often cremated, their ashes sometimes placed in model huts, implying some belief in the continuation of earthly existence after death. Urns had lids modeled as human heads, which were sometimes set upon a chair in front of a table, which would seem to suggest a conception that even the cremated dead required permanent and familiar surroundings. The tombs, which reproduced the interior of a house and its contents, evoke a similar idea that the spirit of the dead, in some sense, was believed to live on in the tomb, though this need not exclude the idea of the spirit’s journey into a world beyond the tomb.

Etruscan women were given a place in society which was not enjoyed by those of Greece or Rome. Women are shown dining with their husbands, reclining upon the same couch, and also attending the games, sometimes even taking the place of honor. Such customs were appalling to the Greeks, who repeatedly attacked the Etruscans as immoral people. To a certain extent, the Greek opinion of the Etruscans was correct. They had become a wealthy, lazy people who lost the strength of their society through riotous living. Roman historian, Diodorus, writing in the first century B.C. said of the Etruscans: “In general they have abandoned the valiant steadfastness that they so prized in former days, and by their indulgence in banquets and effeminate [feminine] delights they have lost the reputation which their ancestors won in war.” (Ibid., page 169) (*The World Before Christ, an LDS Perspective*, Vol. 3, pages 239-246)