

Etruscan Adventures

In the summer of 2016 I voyaged to Italy in search of the Romans, and travelled extensively over her diverse landscapes on foot. En route from Milan to Venice, the Po Valley gave shape to Virgil's *Georgics* and Catullus' olive-silvery *Sirmio*. Trekking south, Ravenna introduced me to cultural change in Rome's later empire, and emphasised her Byzantine splendour. Snaking south through Bologna and Florence, I then traversed the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, and crossed the arid farm lands of Lazio, to finally reach Rome. From Rome, the journey continued south for another month, but it was during the penultimate part of my travels - Umbria, Tuscany and Lazio - that, in my blinkered quest for the Romans, I failed to acknowledge the remnants of a civilisation which had its roots fixed even firmer in the fertile Italian soil - the Etruscans. Months later, I came to learn that the ancestors of the Etruscan people existed thousands of years on the peninsula before Aeneas was thought to have led his haggard refugees westward from Troy and conceived the birth of Rome, and that, due to a total lack of Etruscan literature, either written by Etruscans or later scholars seeking to preserve their memory, one had to see the material evidence scattered throughout the three aforementioned regions in order to attempt to understand the Etruscans at all. These findings compelled to return to Italy, to travel Etruria, and find its remnants, which I had failed to acknowledge first time around. Through the immense generosity of the Instone family and the Stephen Instone Travel Award Scheme 2017, I was able to do so this summer. In mid-June, 2017, I flew from London to Rome for an unforgettable week of adventure, investigation, and la dolce vita.

Day 1: Cerveteri (Caisra/Cisra)

My trip to Italy began at heinous-o'clock, since I made sure to catch the earliest flight I could. The idea was to get to Fiumicino, pick up a rental car, and get away from the grit, the grime, and Roman drivers, as quickly as possible. The allure of the cool west coast breezes and the phosphorescent Tyrrhenian waves was too much to bear. A seamless journey brought me swiftly to the car depot. Having had much experience in the past with dodgy Fiats, the woman sorting out my paper work detected a little apprehension in me when handing over the keys to an overworked Punto. In an effort to give me confidence in the car, despite its years and the suffering brought about by hoards of other young drivers, she commented: 'So, everything is in order. I hope you enjoy your time with your *Ferrari-red* Fiat Punto.' The appeasement fell flat, as did her hope to ignite the ghost of a boy-racer in me. I took the keys and began my journey.

Cerveteri was the first stop, 60km north of the capital, famed for its great Etruscan graveyard, the Banditaccia necropolis. The drive out of Fiumicino was thrilling to say the least. It was my first time driving in a foreign country, and I had to adapt very quickly to survive on the road. Driving away from Rome reminded me a great deal of the hazard awareness part of my theory test, only that, in Italy, everything that moves is out to be collided with.

The town of Cerveteri itself is a quiet place, fairly worn-down, with a typically pretty little *centro storico* and typically languorous provincial atmosphere . Once settled into my spartan, monastic, chamber at the back of a rustic guesthouse located just outside the town, I travelled the short journey to Banditaccia, found at the highest outcrop on Cerveteri's surface. This site would be the first of many Etruscan necropoleis on my trip, and for good reason. Etruscan houses were constructed using wood as the primary building material. Their cemeteries, however, were built from enduring stone. The reason for this is that the highly civilised Etruscans of the 6th-2nd centuries B.C. believed that one's soul would live on in the exact place in which one was buried. For this reason, expansive cemeteries were built from stone to provide lasting dwellings for the deceased, at least for those who could afford to fork out for expensive tombs. Moreover, if an aristocrat, who enjoyed the finer things in life as noble Etruscans did, should be expected to live on in a tomb for eternity, it had to be made suitable for his or her tastes and provide everlasting entertainment. The Maroi tumulus (pictured), one of the largest tombs at Banditaccia, contained Greek pottery in abundance, including some exemplary Black-figure vases, intended to be used for practical purposes by the deceased for years to come. Naturalistic scenes full of young trees are painted on the interior walls, the idea being that they could flourish, and be appreciated for doing so, by the new tenants. I wasn't to know at the time that a few days later I would be faced with a complete reconstruction of the Maroi tumulus in the National Etruscan Museum at the Villa Giulia in Rome - a site to behold.



The domed 'Maroi tumulus', a tomb belonging to an Etruscan noble couple of the same name.

In the tomb belonging to the Mengarelli, another noble Etruscan family, it was fascinating to see that the inner chamber was still a work in progress. The Greek designer, imported perhaps from Corinth, had drawn out a series of charcoal lines, still visible on the stone surfaces, which laid out plans for further interior designs. Perhaps this would be a good moment to briefly explain why there was such a strong Greek influence in this tomb, and how a Greek painter came to be hired by Etruscan nobles at Banditaccia, and indeed across Etruria. In the 6th century B.C., in what has been termed the ‘Orientalising period’ in Etruscan history, displaced Greeks sought to reestablish themselves in the west as a result of Persian encroachments into Ionian territory. It is believed that the Greeks entered Italy from the south and travelled north, namely Euboean colonists at Cumae, eventually settling symbiotically with the Etruscans further north. Some scholars believe that the Etruscans lived in a ‘cultural vacuum’, which lacked the expressive artisanal excellence that the Greeks had in abundance. As a result, a great deal of acculturation took place as trade between the two civilisations flourished.



6th century ‘Dado’ tombs, an example of the later ‘street’ model.

Banditaccia particularly stood out to me as a perfect showcase of the development of Etruscan burial practices, and consequential architectural shift, from the 7th century B.C. Villanovan period to the 6th century B.C. Orientalising period, in which the Etruscans experienced a cultural overhaul. The domed tumuli of the 7th century B.C., such as the aforementioned Maroi tumulus, gave way to the ‘Dado’ (dice) model, which saw a divergence from the construction of individual tombs to streets of uniform tombs similar in plan to the modern day grid system (see above picture). Walking down one such 6th century street away from the 7th century tumuli was the ancient equivalent of a journey I had made just the day before, out from the narrow Victorian backstreets at Embankment and over the Golden Jubilee Footbridge.



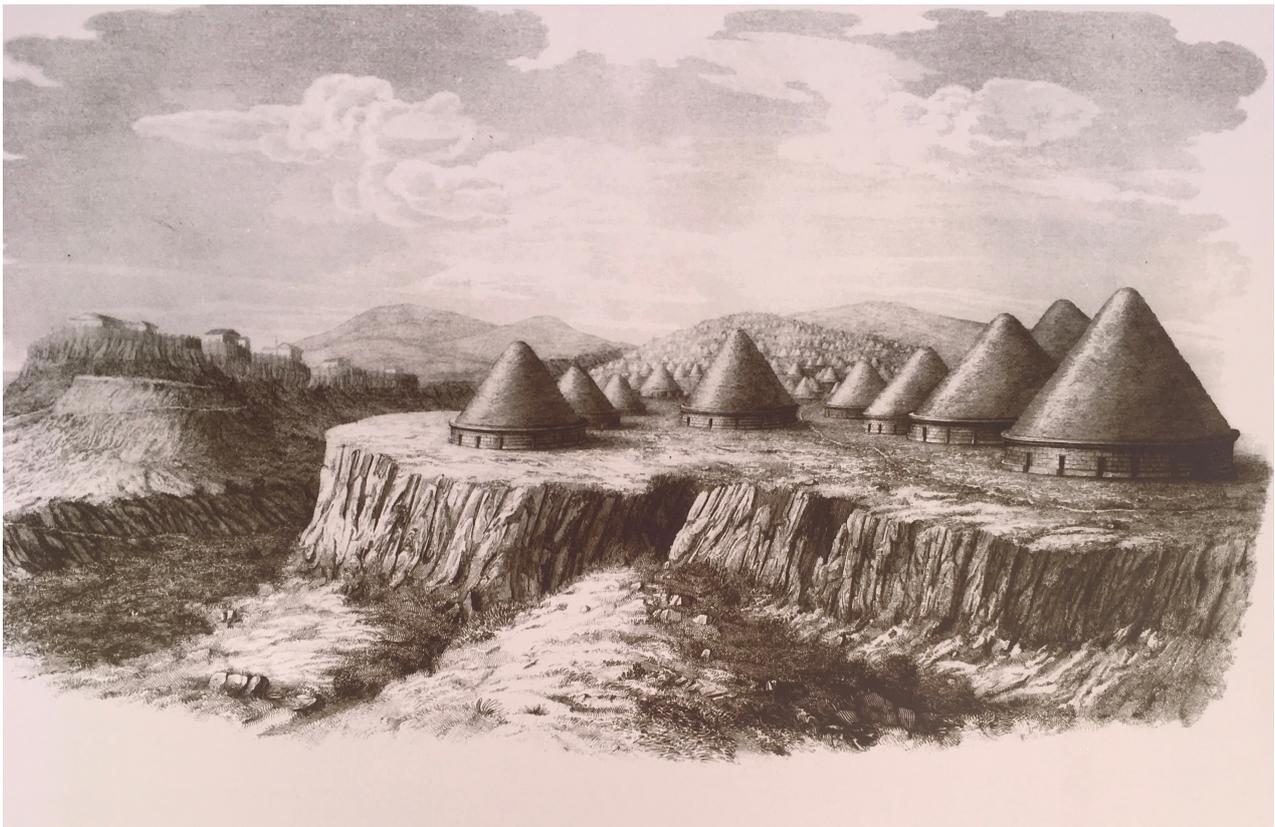
Example of a 6th century tomb interior. The walls and columns are decorated with weapons and shields, once brightly coloured in reds, yellows, and blues.

The afternoon slipped away with ease at the necropolis, and at dusk I headed back to Cerveteri's medieval centre, taking to the Piazza Risorgimento in search of a meal. Despite the pleasant birdsong and gentle breeze, the locals seemed tense. As I passed the police station, the cause of the tension became clear - the Forza Nuova, an Italian political party of the far-right, had sent some passionate, and well-turned out, rhetoricians to Cerveteri, in order to gain influence with the residents. I sat down on a nearby bench and did a little research, quickly realising that Roberto Fiore, member of the European Parliament for Central Italy, and leader of the party, was there in person. I read that in May 2008, Roberto took over party office from Alessandra Mussolini, whose heritage needed no further examination. I wondered what could have lured such a high-ranking member to such a small, provincial town, and could only conclude it was to honour an elder of the party, a local who could barely stand but gave an impassioned speech to great cheers and applause. There was a police presence and a discernible, but passive, objection from other inhabitants, who stood cautiously on the periphery, gesturing at the crowd and whispering to one another, mindful not to draw attention to themselves. I lamented at my inability to understand the bulk of the orations, but listened intently all the same. It seems a Jexit is on the cards, desired and driven, as was the case in the UK, by those who feel forgotten by the perceived establishment.

After a short while the speeches concluded and the rally dispersed. I moved off in search of a quiet place to eat, and I found one alright. A few streets from the square in a small corner, I noticed a vegan restaurant. In a moment of madness, I suddenly felt compelled to find out whether the Italians were capable of abandoning the fundamentals of their cuisine. Unfortunately, they haven't quite mastered an alternative, yet. After my quiet meal near the square, and a couple of drinks with the Anglophile owners, I headed back to the guesthouse, exhausted and happy.

Day 2: Tarquinia (Tarchuna Ἀγιοχάρις)

Up early and keen to get some mileage done in the *Ferrari-red* rust-bucket before it blew a gasket, I set off to the destination which I imagined would be the most exceptional visit of the trip - the Monterozzi (hillocks) tombs of Tarquinia. I felt as though my assertiveness on the road had improved somewhat, and I beamed with smugness when I narrowly dodged a Cerveteri local and his protruding car bonnet at a junction, in a manoeuvre at which he shouted out the driver's window 'You're not in Rome now!'. I considered myself inaugurated, and integrated, behind the wheel.



An artist's interpretation of the Monterozzi necropolis (right), facing the Etruscan city of Tarquinia.

After an hour in the car along some beautiful Tyrrhenian coastal roads, I arrived at the famous Tarquinian necropolis. I was excited to be there for two reasons in particular. Firstly, there was an opportunity to further expand my knowledge of Etruscan burial practices, since I knew there would be graves dating from as far back as the early Iron Age, 1020 B.C. to be precise, to as far

forward as the 4th century B.C.. Secondly, I had seen images in books of the interior decorations within the 4th century tombs: polychrome murals in bright blues and reds depicting Etruscan aristocracy doing what they do best - enjoying themselves. As with Banditaccia, the necropolis consisted of scattered tumuli, belonging to the Tarquinian aristocrats of the day. The area which I visited was called Calvario, and c.60/200 tombs had been properly excavated and were accessible to visitors. Over the whole region, it is believed that roughly 6000 tumuli lay in wait for discovery. As with many of the Etruscan sites, it has been difficult for archaeologists to fully understand the stratigraphy of the Tarquinian necropolis due to dominating medieval layers, but recent archaeology at the site had revealed a new Bronze Age layer, which suggests the site was considerably larger than the typical c.100 inhabitants.

Usually built to house noble couples, during the Hellenistic age the tumuli tombs were expanded to accommodate entire clans. Each tomb was painted by a Greek artisan to the specification of the clan, with carved marbles imported from Greek quarries, such as Paros, for certain interior features, such as the clan leader Partunu's ornate sarcophagus. Depictions of leisure activities take up most of the wall space, with beautiful patterns dominating the ceilings. The paintings included lavish banquets in the Attic symposium style; men and women dancing to lyre music among acanthuses; athletes sparring freely; participation in dynamic hunting and fishing



The famous diver painting in the Tomba Cacia e Pescia, 5th century.

practices; funeral rights overseen by Vanth, the Etruscan goddess of the Underworld, and Charun, a demon whose task it was to lead the dead in procession to the gates of Hades. By far my favourite paintings were those which depicted the Etruscan aristocracy as highly appreciative of the natural world, revelling in its beauty and abundance. In the Tomba Cacia e Pescia, the walls rippled with a tribute to the Tyrrhenian sea. There are fishermen blessed with an enormous catch; dolphins pulling shapes above the water; birds catching a breeze with wings outstretched; seahorses doing whatever it is that seahorses do. Especially memorable was a smaller scene, tucked around a corner, which detailed a man's express joy as he dove from a rock, fingertips pointed, moments from piercing the cool waves

beneath. Such was the Etruscans' infatuation with the natural world which surrounded them that

scholars believe the great Queen's temple, in the city of Tarquinia (for the living), and described by Vitruvius in his *De Architectura*, was later dedicated to Silvanus, who had been preceded by a similar Etruscan deity.

Another interesting revelation in the Tarquinian tombs, which lends evidence to the 'cultural vacuum' argument, is how Greek influence in the Orientalising period changed the Etruscan conception of, and consequently their depiction of, death and the afterlife in the 5th century B.C.. Infernal Etruscan demons are depicted festering in Hades in the Tomba Dei Demoni Azzuri, and Homeric mythological figures, such as Patroklos, can be seen dying heroically on 3rd century sarcophagi. The Etruscan embrace of the Trojan war story is particularly interesting. In the mid-4th century, the Romans were making their first attacks on Etruria, and the Etruscans turned to the story of the Trojan war for a strong parallel, equating themselves Trojans, who defended themselves nobly against the encroaching Greeks. Unfortunately, as hopeful as they were, the Etruscans couldn't have predicted the unstoppable rise of a great empire, which quickly spread throughout their territories. Changes in the Roman political climate and shifting systems of governance in Etrurian lands is evidenced at Tarquinia - the great tombs cease to exist past the 3rd century B.C..



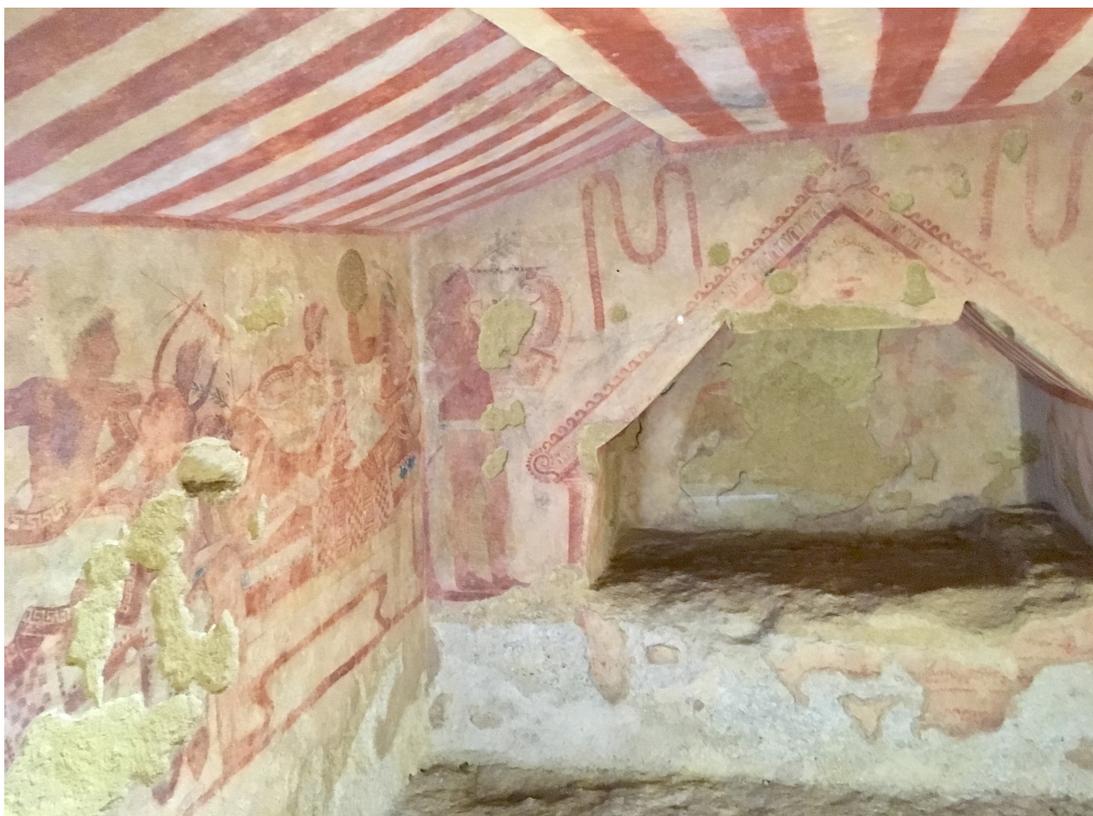
The gate to Hades, painted in the Tomba Dei Demoni Azzuri, 5th century.

After the necropolis, I headed to the local Etruscan museum, which presented me with many of the sarcophagi, and their contents, taken from the tombs I had just seen. The collection belonged to the Conti Bruschi, a modern Tarquinian noble who thought it his duty to preserve the memory of his largely forgotten ancestors. The museum was my first introduction to the fabulously-named noble Etruscan families of the area, and the strange language of the Etruscans as a whole. I was pleased to meet Velthur Auzurinas Larthal (son of Larth, whose sarcophagus is pictured below),



his family, and the odd, but familiar, Etruscan script, which embellished their sarcophagi. I would later learn that the script was borrowed from the expat Ionian Greeks, but that the Etruscans had a language entirely their own, which was distinct in lineage from the Indo-European family tree which seeded all the other historic languages on the Italian peninsula. I'm pleased to report that Velthur lived to the ripe old age of 82, and that he (or his forefathers), and neighbouring families, the Camna and Camna Plecu, weathered battles fought against the Gauls, also depicted on some of the sarcophagi.

That evening I checked into an Airbnb flat (by far the best accommodation site), owned by Laura, a Tarquinian and former student of archaeology. She took me around town and showed me where everything was, and pointed me in the direction of a restaurant for dinner. Famished, I sat down to eat at 6:30pm, with only the waiting staff for company. Out of synch with long Italian



A typical painted interior of a 5th century tomb, depicting Etruscan nobles reposing in the Greek symposium style, attended by servants.

evenings starting at around 9pm, I hopefully endeavoured to find a bar to meet some locals or, at least, soak up some of that dolce vita. Tarquinia is an especially quiet town.

Day 3: Populonia (Pupluna/ ΑΜΟΙ808 Fufluna)

Despite being a considerable distance from Tarquinia, I decided to head out to the North Etrurian coastal town of Populonia, which promised spectacular views of the Tyrrhenian sea from its acropolis. As soon as I arrived at Baratti bay, I immediately understood the Etruscans' infatuation with the sea, and the spirit of the Tarquinian diver 200km behind compelled me to pull over and immediately plunge into the twinkling waters.



Populonia was a stomping ground of 19th century amateur archaeologist Isidoro Falchi. When he first surveyed the area, underneath which he suspected a Populonian necropolis might exist, he felt confident that he would find what he was looking for. He saw a partially cleared area on an otherwise forested valley, interrupted by small, irregular hillocks of differing size. Tombs lay beneath these mounds, which formed when the local Etruscan metal processing industry was at its prime and piled its waste materials high on top of the burial chambers. The tombs lie as deep as 10m, and, over the centuries, they became features of the site which is now called the 'Metalliferous Hills'. So prolific was the area for iron work that Etruscan metal processing practices lasted into the 1st century B.C. under Roman occupation. Unlike Tarquinia, the tombs at Populonia dated from as early as the 8th century B.C., and as late as the 2nd century B.C.. As the only siteseer at Populonia, I wandered lonely around the site, able to step inside the majority of the excavated tombs, dark, and dilapidated, though they were.

At the Necropoli di San Cerbone, the Tomba dei Carri was by far the most impressive tomb, an enormous tumulus which housed the deceased of the wealthiest clan. Most of the contents of the tomb had been looted, but parts of the father's chariot were left in situ. Archaeologists at the site take these chariot pieces as evidence that the family sought to imitate heroic Greek funerals, such as that of Patroklos. The archaeological site was completely deserted, and seemed to have been for quite some time, since the woman at the front desk leapt at the chance to open up the Tomba dei Carri, so I could have a look inside. I had already experienced interiors of great tumuli, but



The Tomba dei Carri.

Left: the passage leading to the inner chamber.

Right: the reconstructed tumulus roof interior.

Below: the view from the archaeological site, looking westward out over the Tyrrhenian.



this was different. We had to bend over, with hands on the floor to keep us steady, as we navigated the incredibly dark and narrow passageway, which led us to the tomb's inner-chamber. My guide eagerly talked me through the architecture and history of the tomb, and also about the conservation efforts made to restore, and stabilise, the structure. Its roof, for example, had largely been reconstructed to resemble the original.

After I had visited the tombs at San Cerbone, I headed up the other side of the Cornia valley to Populonia itself - a very small town nucleated around a single street and square, replete with

medieval tower, sat on the site of the former acropolis. The views from the tower were extraordinary, since it sits perched atop a promontory with a complete 360° panoramic of the Tyrrhenian sea, the island of Elba, Barratti bay, and the Necropoli di San Cerbone. It also had direct visual contact with neighbouring towers such as that of San Vincenzo, 20km north. In the 16th century it became a stronghold of gran duke Cosimo I Medici, to house his Cavalleggeri (light cavalrymen), who patrolled the coast and enforced a newly imposed health and customs authority for maritime trade. As you can see from the picture, his courtyard served me well as a lunch spot. I sat beneath a wizened walnut tree and ate a typical Tuscan panino: course, thick-cut bread with enormous wedges of Pecorino and Finocchiona, a cured pork salami made with fennel and invented around the same time as the Populonia Tower was built. I sat and ate smugly.



The wizened walnut tree, surrounded by the medieval acropolis, where the Etruscan town of Populonia once stood.



The north-easterly view of Barratti Bay from Cosimo I Medici's tower.

Since Populonia was so small, there was little hope of finding a place to stay there. Rather than turn on my heels and backtrack south to Piombino, a large town on the lower end of this particular jut out to sea, I opted to head slightly further north to the medieval town of Bibbona,

and my god, what a great decision that was. With the aid of Airbnb once again, I was able to find a room in the *centro storico*, owned by the quiet, kind, Marco. He welcomed me into his home, sat on a hillside with views over the town. Marco is a keen gardener, and despite having very little space to cultivate anything, he managed to establish a beautiful garden by cleverly exploiting a two-tier balcony set into the hillside, each level comprising a small piece of earth, and a set of steps joining the two. His garden hummed with life. There were varieties of mint in abundance; other native and exotic herbs; cumquats; citruses; loquats; flowers looping and curling through everything; birds gurgling at a fountain. At first glance, it was a vision of a languorous scene from *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Marco introduced me to the Frankfurter couple staying upstairs and, on my return from dinner at a brilliant restaurant in town, I joined them in the garden and we sat drinking, and chatting, to the pulse of the night.

Day 4: Vetulonia (Vatluna 𐌆𐌆𐌆𐌆)

In the morning, Marco asked whether I would like a sweet or salty breakfast, and he was pleased to hear I would take it sweet, since that is how the Italians enjoy theirs. Back out on the balcony, he brought yoghurt and cherries, a cornetto filled with a custard-cream, toasts with jams he had made himself from the surrounding lemons and loquats, and an open invite to take and eat with my breakfast anything which I fancied from the garden. It was hard not to leave his crop totally barren, but I controlled myself.

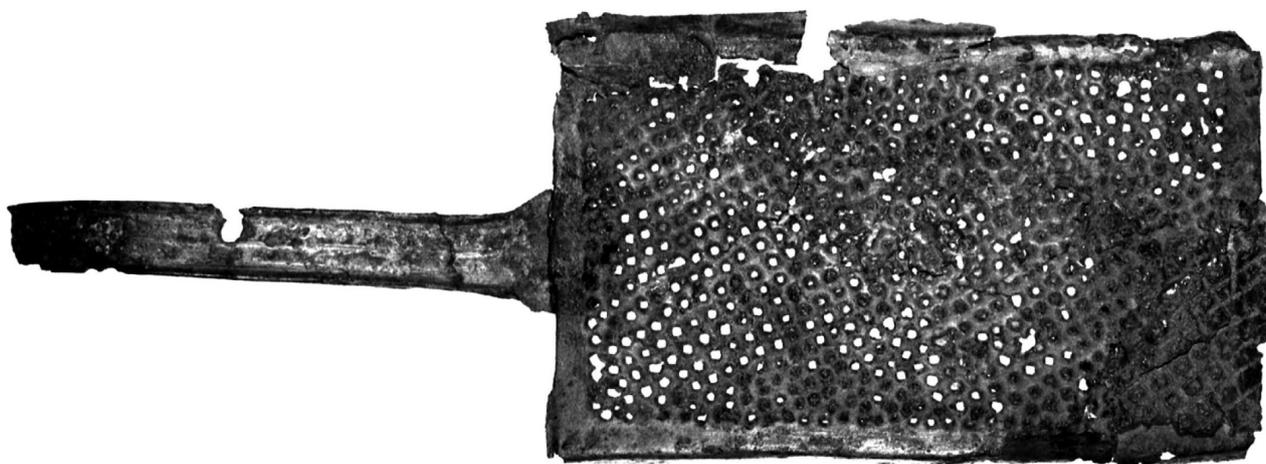
Reluctantly leaving Marco's, I got back into my little, wheezing, car and set off for Vetulonia, an important centre on the southern boundary of north Etruria. The first site at Vetulonia lay on the ascent to the town centre, unsurprisingly situated at the top of a hill, and it comprised of a necropolis with incineration and inhumation tombs, and an industrial area with workers housing. Thanks to the prosperity, and influence, of the Etruscan aristocrats with family businesses built around the processing and trading of precious metals, including iron and gold, Vetulonian Etruscans integrated with Romans and lived in relative stability. It was during the civil wars, fought between rival Roman dignitaries Sulla and Mario in 1st century B.C., that Vetulonia was ravaged, having sided with the defeated Mario. Some evidence of Sulla's destruction remains, such as the Lares, miniature statues of Roman household gods, which were found deliberately broken in the largest Etruscan house. The



A view of the top tier in Marco's garden.

shattering of these, I was told, would have been a necessary precaution before an attacking force could destroy an entire property. Before these wars, in the Archaic and Classical periods, the town had begun to decline anyway, eventually being replaced in importance by the neighbouring Roselle, which had survived the turmoil and was situated in a prime, unspoiled, position on the other side of the valley. Despite her fate, evidence remains of Roman and Etruscan symbiosis at Vetulonia. The site, for example, has a number of clever water systems, created for general Roman-Etruscan use. There are a number of inter-connected wells, linked by underground tunnels, which allowed for a consistently equal level of water to remain in each well, should one be in use more than another. The necropolis too, though largely suffocated by Medieval stratigraphical layers, held many Etruscan, and Roman, treasures, which also testified that Vetulonia was once a prosperous and harmonious settlement.

I stopped for lunch in the medieval town, and had a simple, delicious, meal of *fagioli con burro di salva* (white beans with sage butter) and *pici con sugo all'etrusca* (fresh pasta with 'Etruscan sauce', a kind of Carbonara with added rosemary). Given the richness of the latter dish, and the frugal nature of the former, I gladly indulged in what I imagined to be two historic dishes, one with its roots in poverty and the other in luxury, emblematic of a divided class system. The Etruscans didn't eat pasta, of course, but their nobility certainly enjoyed dairy products, as Etruscan cheese-graters excavated along the Tyrrhenian coast, often found alongside expensive wine drinking vessels, attest. Like so much besides, the graters came over to Etruria in the Orientalising period, but ricotta-making wicker wares have been identified on tomb paintings made earlier than the



An Etruscan cheese-grater, dating from the 'Orientalising' period.

Greek migrations. The *pici* dish had a double

shot of the white stuff and was pretty damn delicious, but not quite as delicious as the humble white kidney bean - earthy, creamy, and tranquillising. The cooking of these beans seemed to me to have been perfected over the centuries by impoverished nonnas, whose families are known to have cultivated such beans as a major dietary staple.

After lunch, the Museo Civico Archaeologico Isidoro Falchi. Falchi's name is stamped on the site of Vetulonia too, since he was responsible for the discovery of the town, the town walls, and the necropolis. At first, local archaeologists dismissed his suggestion of Vetulonia's location, since nothing had yet been discovered in the area. From clues spelled out by Pliny and Ptolemy, and a

couple of coins found by a local friend of his in the area, bearing the abbreviated inscription 'Vetl' in the Etruscan script (see chapter heading), the determined Falchi persisted with his plans for a dig and did indeed find what he was looking for. The museum, found in the Medieval town, is stuffed with booty from the three archaeological sites, which are still being excavated today. Most striking were the vases, showcasing the work of Greek artists whose output has only been found in an Etruscan context. Identified by John Beazley, I recoiled at the gaudy works of the 'Elbows-out Painter', the 'Affecter', and the 'Periznoma Group', which were souped-up in technicolour to suit flashy Etruscan taste. Also memorable were a few vases bearing the inscription 'Sostratus' on their bases. Sostratus, I learned, was a wealthy Greek merchant and an agent of change in Etruria, trading at Cerveteri, Tarquinia, Bolsena, and Orvieto and shaping Etruscan tastes. He is believed to have dazzled the natives with shiny beads in exchange for precious metals, and could well be the very Sostratus of Aegina named by Herodotus in his *Histories*, who exploited untapped markets and brought back huge profits on his wares, such that 'no-one could compete with him' (IV.152). This struck me as a pretty fabulous job by ancient standards - traversing the seas in search of unknown peoples and treasures beyond comprehension.



After a few hours whiled away in the museum, I headed for Grosseto and my accommodation for the night. As is the case with most historic towns in Italy, it's best not to pay too much attention to the outskirts as you make your way to the *centro storico*, as it's easy to be **dissuaded of the possibility of beauty further in**. Once checked into a quiet and unassuming B&B, I took the advice of the owner and headed off to Castiglione della Pescaia, which is famed for its beauty, and

seafood. I hoped to write some music on the beach there and, once fuelled up with panzanella, polpo, and vino di Parrina, I did just that. The night came in in a trance.

Day 5: Sovana (Ἀγῶνας)

Groggy from a night of seaside revelry, I got back in the, now burgundy, banger, and set off for Sovana, a small Etruscan site in the Fiora valley, known for its necropolis. The drive was epic, characterised by the peaks and troughs of a morphing landscape. Along the last stretch to Sovana, it was a job to keep myself from swerving off into the gorge, since the surrounding cliffs, towering above and beyond that which the eye could see from within the car, were perforated by 4th-3rd century rock cut tombs.

The archaeological site, just outside the town, is split in two. First off, I visited the remains of the tombs, and a temple, belonging to the Sovanan elite of the time. The tombs were stripped bare and almost featureless but, every now and again, on the paths in between, an interesting tombstone would make itself known by gently presenting itself through the foliage. I saw male and female faces among Acanthus leaves, and I was reminded of the Etruscan infatuation with the sea and her abundant treasures, but also her perils - on many occasions the great Scylla reared its ugly head, snapping an oar in two, perhaps signifying that the particular noble in residence there had fallen foul of the great Tyrrhenian. A little further up the hill lay the remains of an impressive temple, cut into the cliff face and with a few columns intact. Archaeological work there has revealed that the tombs, and temple, were covered in polychrome stucco, with the intention being that those inhabiting the town a few kilometres east, at the top of an outcrop,



The 4th century temple, cut into the cliff face.

would be dazzled by the memory of their predecessors as the blazing midday sun ricocheted reds and blues in every direction.

The second part of the site lay on the other side of the valley, and comprised a number of tombs set in the cliff face, now overcome by strangling vines and lush ferns. Lining the path up to the final tomb, there were what looked like small incineration tombs - little cavities cut into the rock with just enough room inside them for an urn. Most of these were more-or-less entirely covered by flora, and there was no explanation given for them from the information desk at the end of the track. Again, the tombs here were found empty besides one, which had bronze vessels left inside for the banquets of the dead.



The most ornately carved tomb at Sovana. You can just about make out the great Scylla straddling the mantel.

Back in the car after a pitstop in the town of Sovana and an unconvincing slice of 'Etruscan' pizza, I headed to Orvieto, where I would be staying for the night. My Airbnb choice was just outside the town, out on a nearby plain with south-facing views of the surrounding farmland. I unpacked my belongings and walked off into Orvieto, hoping to gain last minute entry into the Etruscan museum 'Claudio Faina'. I underestimated the walk considerably, and crawled into the city an hour and a half later, bedraggled, parched, and famished. Unable to visit the museum, I headed to the nearest osteria, with hopes of trying some mazzafegati liver sausages, something Orvieto is renowned for. At dinner, eating instead a bowl of umbrichelli, a pasta colloquially known as 'earthworms', I chatted the evening away with two, typically effusive, Americans, sat at the table beside mine. They were fascinated to learn more about my trip, a subject which gave them almost as much pleasure as my answers to the barrage of questions they fired at me

concerning English wildlife - they haven't been yet because they're worried about our fauna, in particular the ferocious badger. Having bade farewell to this bizarre, but endearing, couple, and after another meandering trek across the darkened plains now humming with snoozing crickets, I lay down on my bed and fell into a deep sleep.

Day 6: Chiusi (Clevsin: ʎ|ʒʃʃʃ|))

The next day, I woke to discover that an infernal heat had crept over Umbria. The goats outside my BnB lay grilling in the pitiless sun, and the air was choked and trembling. I gathered my belongings and headed out to the crimson clunker, which had thoughtfully been absorbing the morning heat and compressing it internally, so that, when I opened the door, the blast singed my eyebrows. On the road again, I headed to Chiusi, one of the most famous northern Etruscan cities, which has an equally famous Etruscan museum, and, supposedly, the tomb of the great Etrurian King, Porsenna. In the 6th-4th centuries B.C., Chiusi advanced from its establishment as a 'system' of hilltop villages, scattered over the neighbouring landscape, to being one of the most prosperous towns in Etruria. The museum, however, showcased so much more than the artefacts of those two centuries. There were treasures there, from the Parco dei Forti, for example, which dated back to the 10th century B.C., and evidence that Chiusi thrived as a business town from the get go. Records of oval storage huts, for example, suggest that Chiusi had extensive early grain and wine cultivation operations. From the 7th-6th centuries, artisanal quarters have been identified, such as the Petriolo excavation, which revealed an abundance of wells and ovens; nearby refuse scraps also attest to flowering bone and horn artisan activity. Sacred areas have been identified too, in the Monte San Paolo and Badiola areas. Despite these indicators that



Chiusi's Etruscan museum. The greatest of the trip by a long way.

Chiusi was a great trading town, archaeologists have their work cut out, since systematic destruction over the centuries makes it especially difficult to identify a genuine urban appearance.

Having seen so many Etruscan artefacts from the Orientalising period, it was great to see more Etruscan produce from the Villanovan period, which Chiusi's museum has in abundance. I saw a plethora of 9th-8th century B.C. domestic items, such as bobbins, ring moulds, and fibulae, and much robust, diurnal, wares beside. It was relieving for the eyes to see early Etruscan pottery, antithetical in its reservedness to the later, gaudy, Greek-influenced, stuff. I love it, because it suggests a culture which was perhaps, at one time, more connected to the earth, and one which valued functionality over style. I saw cooking pots and storage jars, all subdued, durable, practical, and only ever embellished minimally, with crude pattern designs, the occasional flourish reserved for cinerary urns. The change in Etruscan tastes took place there rapidly. When Chiusi opened up its doors to the Greeks in the 6th century, trading acted as the catalyst for that change. The loose-knit system of villages melded and became a hub of merchant activity. Exemplary examples of 6th century Athenian Black Figure vases come from Chiusi, and soon after an influx of high-quality Red Figure vases also, once the Etruscans had been dazzled by the works of Andokides and Amasis' 525 B.C. Athenian work. This period of hyper-trade didn't just see the economic growth of the area, but also a total cultural Orientalisation. Greek pottery played key role in dissemination of Greek culture and religious thought, and the high abundance of Greek pottery in aristocratic tombs shows that considerable acculturation took place. Chiusi retained her power right into the 2nd century B.C. as a result of her powerful and prosperous aristocrats, made rich by the extraordinary surge of trading activity. She only eventually succumbed, inevitably, to the rise of the Roman Republic.

The museum at Chiusi was certainly a highlight of my Etruscan adventure. Their galleries are multi-faceted, exploring Etruscan culture from the early Iron Age to the rise of the Republic, in distinct categories such as funerary practices, which they have consolidated to show their developments over a vast time scale. There is also a section devoted to modern receptions of the Etruscans, which included my favourite artefacts of all. In the 19th century, archaeologists collated some disparate funerary finds and slapped them together to present interpretations of what Etruscan Canopic urns would look like. Combinations of bizarre and

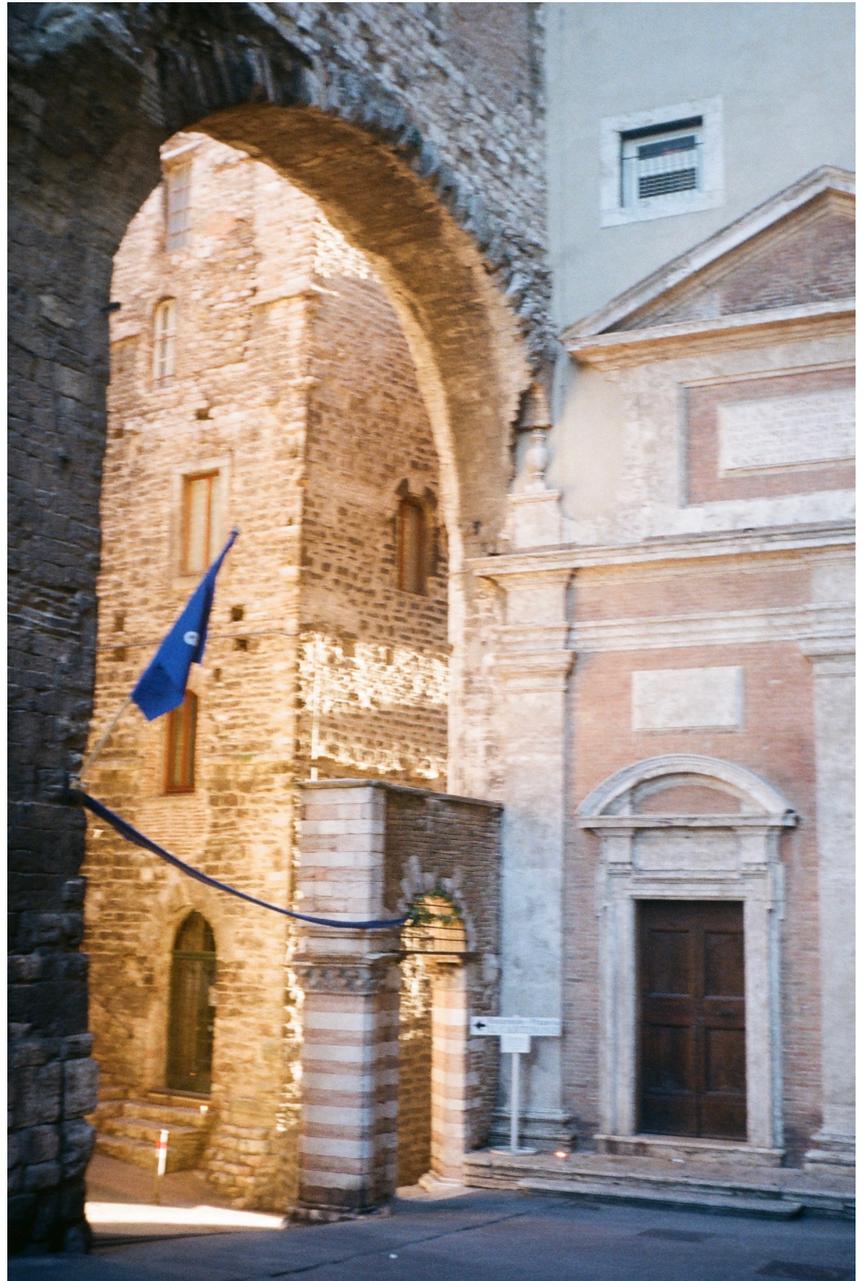
A 19th century interpretation of an Etruscan Canopic urn.



mismatched elements, they were a sight to behold.

The heat from the morning sun had taken its toll on me by 3pm, and, when I inadvertently walked out of the toilet and continued perusing the artefacts with the tub of industrial liquid soap still in my hand, I decided it might be wise to take it easy for a bit. I only became aware of my strange deed when a lady, presumably in need of the soap, took it from me with an urgent, but sympathetic, look. After some blood-sugary gelato, I took a nap in the town centre, but woke in time to take the last tour around, what is thought to be, King Porsenna's tomb. Unfortunately, my guide gave next to no useful information about the tomb. It was a labyrinth of narrow passageways leading to a circular chamber at the heart of the nexus, and, after the spectacular triumph of the museum, I found the brief excursus disappointing to say the least.

In the floundering Fiat once more, I drove a long and beautiful route to Perugia. When I was there before, on my last Italian voyage, she secured herself as my favourite spot in Umbria - a beautiful town situated on a severe peak, her higgledy-piggledy medieval streets lovingly intertwined with Roman and Etruscan monuments, some of which, such as the Arch of Augustus, or the Etruscan Arch, seem to prop the whole place up. I had also previously cemented some favourite food vendors there, and, as soon as I had unpacked, I headed straight for them. The first is La Bottega di Perugia, a beer and wine bar with a sandwich counter, serving such delights as porchetta, capocollo, and carciofi sott'olio. After necking my panino in 0.5 seconds, I headed to L'artigiano Del Gelato, which certainly makes the best gelato i've had Italy to date. My cone of burned *bundino di riso* and *zuppa inglese* (trifle!) was necked only marginally faster, in a formidable 0.25 seconds. When I was last in Italy, I was walking a hell of a lot, sometimes 8h a day, and in constant need of nourishment. At that time, a sandwich and ice cream wasn't enough for dinner, so I went in search of further sustenance. What I found was simply remarkable. Italians are



leisurely with their meals, but, when they're on-the-go, they want snacks which are familiar, hot, and a delivery time from oven-to-mouth sub 10 seconds. So, some Perugian mastermind came up with the ultimate solution: the pizza cone, a thin crust of pizza moulded into a cone shape and baked, then filled with molten layers of passata, mozzarella, and other chosen toppings. I felt unsure about moving on from gelato to hot cheese, so was delighted to find they serve a dessert pizza cone. Because Perugia is so unabashedly refined and without the extravagance and vulgarity of the Baroque, it seems only natural to serve grotesque snacks such as the dessert pizza cone, Vesuvian with its flowing nutella magma and spewing whipped cream, to temper the elegance. I had one, undeservedly, and wept with contentedness, sat outside the Church of Sant'Angelo, one of the oldest in Italy, dating from the 5th century C.E.

Day 6: Perugia (Perusna: Ἀγζοῦρη)

The trip was coming to an end, and I steeled myself with a sense of purpose. I would make for Rome today, but before that I headed out to Perugia's Archaeological museum, in search of the town's treasures. With an impending shift to veganism on my return to England, and a sorry departure from so many of the wonderful food stuffs which take up a great deal of space in my hippocampus, I stopped for a porchetta sandwich on the way - a crusty roll stuffed with sliced, roasted, belly pork, silky fat, and crunchy skin. It was a paean to the pig, and a delicious conclusion to years of merciless hog gobbling. As I walked to the Piazza IV Novembre in the heart of the town, I could hear fanfares. I turned a corner, and a couple of jovial monks trotted by, in traditional robes and with the clichéd haircut - the pudding-bowl, neatly encasing a chrome dome crest. I turned another corner and, leaning under an archway, a maiden stood, bedecked with silken gown and conical hat, chatting away with a knight, helmet under arm, shield resting in the doorway. Making a right onto the Piazza IV Novembre, I was greeted by a site I've never seen before. The entire square was



A man and woman dressed in traditional garb for the Feast of Corpus Christi.

brimming with characters from every medieval strata: aristocracy, knights, cardinals, vassals, etc... In a long procession, they were slowly snaking their way through the city to the steady beat of a drum. The date was Sunday June 11th, and it transpired to be the festival of the Feast of Corpus Christi, to mark the transubstantiation of the Biblical bread and wine. The town's citizens had all turned out for the occasion, each and everyone of them convivial and jubilant, taking photos with the knights and sharing pastries with the kids. It was awesome.



The procession in the Piazza IV Novembre for the Festival of Corpus Christi.

Once the procession had moved off, and the throng died down, I headed for the archaeological museum. Inside, I saw many artefacts unique to the town. I was especially pleased to see a collection of bronze hand-mirrors, now a dull green-grey, but once burnished and reflective. On the back of these are etchings of mythological characters and scenes. These mirrors proved particularly useful to modern scholars, who sought to decode the mysterious Etruscan language. This is because, next to the engraved characters, there are Etruscan transcriptions of their names, which allowed for a reasonable understanding of how the Greek alphabet worked phonetically for the Etruscans, who used Greek characters as the building blocks of an entirely different language. The most dazzling part of the exhibition was a collection of microscopic gold jewellery, which were so ornate, and on such a small scale, that their craftsmanship rivals anything



Intricate Etruscan jewellery.

you can find on the market today. There was also an exhibition on Etrurian proto-prehistory, largely in Italian (so over my head), and a reconstructed tomb in its entirety, belonging to the famous Cutu clan, replete with genuine sarcophagi and pottery.



A reconstruction of the tomb belonging to the noble Etruscan Cutu clan, at the National Etruscan Museum.

After the museum, I wandered Perugia's streets and marvelled at the Roman/Etruscan skeleton which perforated the surface at certain points, and never failing to surprise. At dusk, I headed back to my dodgy hotel, resplendent in its shadowy, rickety, Hitchcock-y ness, and began the mammoth, and somewhat bleak, drive to Fiumicino, the resting place for my Fiat, by now merely a husk of a husk. Three hours later, I arrived at the airport, handed over the keys to my rusty rattletrap, tapped its bumper goodbye, and then charged out of there before the shockwave from the contact rippled through the machine and caused an inevitable collapse. On a train bound to Termini station, I took stock and appreciated how lucky I was to have been afforded the opportunity to take this trip, which had been fascinating, and enriching, at every turn. By the time I got to my BnB, it was getting late, but luckily I had made plans earlier in the week to meet up with someone who knew the city well, and who promised to show me a good time. We sipped beers in front of the Pantheon, and wandered the streets aimlessly, drinking in the lithic beauty and late-night conviviality. It was a momentous evening, and one which has compelled me to return to Rome as soon as possible. Enough said.

Day 7: Rome

The day started a little later than planned, but once out, and back into the throng, I decided to make my final Italian meal a lunch at Bonci, a pizzeria which has the world talking about pizza with reinvigorated enthusiasm. Gabriele Bonci is known as the ‘Michelangelo of pizza’, a title seemingly earned by virtue of his dough alone, made manifest by years of *manipolazione*. He has food lovers from across the globe careening in line as they wait for a taste, and I eagerly joined the slobbering masses upon arrival. Doled out in slices, I had fried zucchini and ricotta on one, crispy potatoes and anchovies on another, and mortadella with onion cream to finish. Definitely another one for the hippocampus, the crackle of the crust still reverberating in my ears.

Afterwards, a trip to the day’s primary destination: the National Etruscan Museum. Set in a magnificent, sprawling, villa, built by Pope Julius III, I meandered my way through the complex, which neatly tied the many threads which had run through my Etruscan investigations thus far. Treasures are gathered there from cities all over Etruria, and many artefacts extracted from the sites I had visited earlier in the week were on display, such as high-quality nenfro rock sculptures from Tarquinia. There were also many great and illuminating exhibitions. When in Sovana, I noticed an abundance of images on tombstones depicting the fearsome Scylla, and the wrath of the oceans, which the museum put a new spin on, since the curators sought to portray the Etruscans as fearsome pirates and overlords of the Tyrrhenian sea, which was new to me. There was also a little section devoted to the general Greek view of Etruscan culture, which was also fresh and fascinating. Greek authors, for example, commented much on Etruscan ‘immorality’, since women, at least in the upper strata, were emancipated in Etruscan society. With each room came more and more extraordinary craftsmanship, such as totemic bronze oil lamps depicting both birds and acrobats in flight and gold jewellery of the same Perugian nano-quality which



The National Etruscan Museum, set in the villa of Pope Julius III.

boggles the mind. It was the perfect final destination on the Etruscan voyage, and I felt contented that I had learnt a vast amount of information, which had only instigated a desire to keep on discovering yet more about this incredible, and much-overlooked, culture.

After the museum, I headed out to the gelato parlour in which my friend from the night before works, to say goodbye and enjoy a last lick of pasteurised paradise. Then, back to the hotel for my bag, a quick train ride to Fiumicino, and a flight home.

I'd like to extend my warmest thanks to the Instone family for affording me the opportunity to lay the building blocks for further study in a field which I find so fascinating. Due to a total dearth of Etruscan literature, and limited historiography from later scholars, going to Italy and visiting the Etruscan sites was really the only way for me to catch a glimpse of this incredible culture, let alone to understand it at all. Mysterious though many aspects of Etruscan society still are to me, this trip has gone a considerable way to demystifying many aspects of it, and encourage deeper investigation. In just one week, the origins of the Etruscans, their language, history, geography, material culture, societal structures, aristocracy, religion, funerary practices, acculturation of Greek culture, art, pleasures, diet, artisanal produce, economy, industry, trade, military, disintegration, modern receptions, and legacy, have all become clearer to me, and the trip has established an interest which will last a lifetime. Once more, thank you.

Richard Sansom