

**Tuscany Yields Another Amazing Discovery
From the Ancient World**

**By
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Fifty miles north of Rome, near the town of Tarquinia, a team of archeologists from the University of Turin, led by Alessandro Mandolesi, Professor of Etruscology and Italic Antiquity, recently announced the discovery of a 2,700 year old sepulcher containing what was believed to be the remains of an Etruscan prince, in comparatively pristine condition, untouched by thieves or tomb raiders over the centuries. When asked about it, Professor Mandolesi declared that "...the integrity of the monument is something really amazing."

The tomb was believed to be that of a prince because of its proximity to the much larger "Queen's Tomb" dating from 600 BC, the time that Lucius Tarquinius Priscus served as the fifth King of Rome (616-579 BC), and because of a spear, the jewelry, and other items of value found near or on the body.

However, a bone analysis performed by Judith Weingarten, an alumna of the British School at Athens, has since revealed that the body is actually that of a 35 to 40 year old woman, with some saying that the spear was most likely placed near the woman as a symbol of the union between the woman and the burnt body of a man on the opposite shelf in the tomb. Weingarten, however, disagrees with this assumption, and speculates that it was to indicate the high status of the woman herself, since women in Etruscan society had a freer lifestyle than was customary in Greek and Roman society. According to the Greek historian, Theopompus, they were more carefree, than their Greek and Roman counterparts, consorted with

numerous men and raised children whose fathers may not always have been known to the children.

The Etruscans themselves are an interesting people. No one is sure exactly where they came from (Asia Minor?) since it appears they did not speak an Indo-European language, but rather one of unknown origin. No other community of the same ethnic and social characteristics have been found anywhere else in Europe or Asia. All that is known is that they lived in west-central Italy from the 9th century BC onward. The Necropolises of Tarquinia and Cerveteri hold some 6,000 Etruscan tombs depicting the daily lives and buildings of the only urban civilization known to have existed in ancient Italy prior to that of the Greeks and Romans.

However, there is considerable evidence that they intermingled with the people in the regions which they eventually conquered, and in due course, both spread their own and adapted to the customs and traditions of the people they displaced or eventually resided among. A clear history of the Etruscans is difficult to pin down because many of the accounts of their exploits written centuries later by historians like Livy (First Century BC/AD) were colored by similar myths and legends derived from those of the early Greeks, Latins and Sabines who succeeded them in central and southern Italy.

Nevertheless, we do know that the Tarquinian Kings from Etruria ruled most of central Italy, including Rome and its environs, until the establishment of the Roman Republic in 509 BC. (See the legend of the rape of the young Roman woman, Lucretia, by a Tarquinian Prince, her subsequent suicide, and its role in the overthrow of the Tarquinian Monarchy, also cited by Livy. The man who led the revolt against the

monarchy was an ancestor of the Brutus who led the assassination of Julius Caesar 500 years later!)

Even so, it was the Etruscans who drained the swamps of the Roman Forum, built the Cloaca Maxima (sewer), the Circus Maximus (the first and largest stadium in Rome), and set up the ruling bodies of government (Senate and Comitia Curiata, etc.), plus the laws and customs, which continued without too much variation (except perhaps for the use of Tribunes of the People to protect the rights of Plebeians) down to the time of the Roman Emperors.

The tomb which Professor Mandolesi and his team recently discovered and are in the process of excavating, is considered such a great achievement because its covering slab was still intact and nothing seems to have been disturbed in the intervening centuries. In fact, a small vial of ointment was found still hanging from its nail on the wall. The spear at the side of the skeleton plus some brooches on the chest indicate a person of considerable status. A large bronze basin and a dish with the remains of some food offering lies near the feet, while the incinerated remains of another individual appears on the stone table opposite. A small unopened cylindrical bronze chest will soon be examined to see if anything else (jewelry, perhaps) might add to the identification of the body.

Needless to say, we will all be awaiting the next chapter in this intriguing story of the discovery of the tomb of this Etruscan person of high status.