

The ETRUSCANS

(By Major G. Blake Palmer)

The war in Italy has recently passed right through the territory which formed the nucleus of the old Etruscan civilisation. The Etruscans are a people about whom many conflicting stories were written by the ancients and whose history is full of those many mysteries which attract attention and much unnecessary speculation.

The origin of the Etruscans is still unsettled. Their script which was the first of the Greek type to be introduced into Western Europe records many inscriptions in a language which is still largely unknown to us, although recently some successful attempts have been made at deciphering the more simple names.

These obscure origins and unknown language are associated with a very rich culture which shows many signs of Oriental, Egyptian, and Greek influence. Their arts were highly developed and the funeral customs and religious practices and beliefs had many elements which were transmitted to the Romans and influenced the Christian Church.

The cities of the Etruscans had a definite plan which much resembled that of the early Greek settlements. The massive stone walls which surrounded them



The Etruscan remains are widely distributed and often easily recognisable, even when riding in convoy, and as many of the more important sites are on the present lines of communication, a few notes on these early civilisations which flourished before Rome was founded may be of interest. This is especially so, as many of the better local Etruscan collections are scattered in a number of small towns and the empty tombs are sometimes readily accessible from the roadsides. However, all the important ones containing frescoes are usually securely locked and most of the finds are now in museums.

There are three rival theories as to the origin of the Etruscans. The details of the disputes are not important and at present the majority opinion of experts is in favour of an eastern migration, possibly through Lydia, in Asia Minor, and via the Adriatic to Etruria which occupied most of the modern provinces of Tuscany, Umbra, Lazio, and also north of the Appenines towards the Marches. Other theories favour an invasion from the north, or a local origin, but there are more points against these views.

The Etruscans were essentially a people of city-states and traditionally 12 cities formed the nucleus of the nation about the time of the founding of Rome in the 8th century B.C. It should be remembered that, later, the Etruscans had a powerful settlement in the Rome area and extended their influence to the south towards Capua. Pompeii had a large Etruscan element which survived until comparatively late giving the older city its street plan and other characteristics.



Chimæra Bronze from Arezzo —
V Cent., BC.

have largely survived in the foundations of the mediaeval city wall, such as those of Cortona, not far from Lake Trasimene.