

THE ETRUSCANS

The people who had the greatest influence on early Rome were the Etruscans, who controlled the area of the Italian peninsula north of the Tiber. No one is quite sure where the Etruscans came from. Some experts think they were native to Italy, while others think they came from the eastern Mediterranean. Their civilization, based on a group of large, well-planned cities, was at its peak between 800BC and 400BC.

A gold perfume bottle, found in the tomb of an Etruscan nobleman

The Etruscans traded with the Greeks in southern Italy, and adopted the Greek alphabet, which they passed on to the Romans. They were also highly skilled artists, who created elaborate sculptures in bronze and terracotta, and decorated the walls of their tombs with brightly painted frescoes.

Many of the things we think of as typically Roman were actually inherited from the Etruscans. They enjoyed chariot races and gladiator fights, built arches, aqueducts and sewers, and invented the toga. They also played a part in shaping the early government of Rome.



THE KINGS OF ROME

Early Rome was ruled by a king, who was chosen and advised by a council of elders - or *senes*. According to Roman tradition, there was a series of seven kings, but there are no written records from the time to back this up. The last three kings were said to be Etruscans.

Rome was situated on a route used by Etruscan traders to cross the Tiber, and experts believe that around 600BC the Etruscans took control of the city. Under the Etruscans, Rome grew into an impressive city with a public square surrounded by temples, a proper drainage system and huge defensive walls to protect it.

INTERNET LINK

For links to websites where you can watch short movies about the Etruscans and the growth of Rome, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com



The Etruscans often decorated the lids of their coffins with terracotta sculptures, such as this one of a man and his wife.

