



**THE MOST IMPORTANT HERITAGE, THE PICTURES OF THE BURIAL CHAMBERS ARE THE EVIDENCE OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND AFTERLIFE BELIEFS OF THE ETRUSCAN POPULATION**

## **TARQUINIA: AN ETRUSCAN NECROPOLIS**

**The necropolis of Monterozzi is the most important one around Tarquinia because of the richness and the artistic value of its mural paintings. The long hill of Monterozzi, site of the main necropolis of the Etruscan Tarquinia, lies between the Tyrrhenian coast and the Civita Hill, where the old town used to be.**

The necropolis, that in 2004 was proclaimed Patrimony of Humanity by Unesco, preserves six thousand tombs, surmounted by burial mounds almost completely levelled by agricultural works: it consists of hypogea dug in the rockbank and reachable by tunneled passages (dromoi).

The area of the necropolis open to visitors is on the west side of the hill, at Calvario. Here, in the second half of the 20th century, more than one thousand hypogea were discovered; about fifty of them, sheltered from rainwater by individual little lodges, show traces of mural paintings.

Only about twenty burial chambers can now be visited, because humidity and sudden changes in temperature can irremediably damage the paintings that need to be protected by special devices. The habit of decorating the tombs, used in Tarquinia up to its involvement in the Roman policy (7th-3rd century) was a privilege of the aristocratic class.

## **MONTEROZZI: THE ETRUSCAN NECROPOLIS**

The design of the tombs of Monterozzi changed with the time: in the ancient and classic ages it consisted of an only square chamber where husband and wife were laid to rest, while in the Hellenistic age the whole family-clan was given burial in the tombs that were larger, sometimes with columns to support the vault. The paintings of the tombs are an important heritage that accurately describe everyday life in Tarquinia and afterlife beliefs, according to which, after death people would continue to live in their burial places. In the oldest tombs, the paintings were placed only on the frontispiece of the shortest inside walls; from the second half of the VI century, they used to cover the whole tomb with figured scenes. Directly painted on the walls, without any support of drawings and with the freshness of the colours, the decorations reveal the life of the dead, his joys and emotions: hunting scenes, banquets, his leave-taking, funerary plays in his honour, etc. The ancient paintings show the foreign painters' influence mostly of Eastern-Greek artists from Asiatic Ionian; starting from the middle of the V century the features of the Hellenistic idea of death are evident, with horrible daemons and mythologic Greek figures populating the afterlife places.

### **THE JUGGLERS TOMB**

This tomb, discovered in 1961 and dating back to the 6th century B.C., consists of an only chamber. The painted decorations show an old man seated to watch dancers and games of skills performed by some jugglers in the honour of the dead. On the opposite wall, there is a scene of dancing to the music of a syrinx player. Under the tympanum of the backwall small frontispiece, a panther and a lion are figured.

### **THE HUNTER TOMB**

Discovered in 1962 nearby the Necropoli of Monterozzi, it goes back to the first decades of the 5th century B.C. The artist meant to create a special atmosphere: the inside hunting pavillon with its wooden supporting structures. The painted fascia, 14 cm high only, is the most interesting decoration among the ones of the whole tent. It figures troops of riders, bulls, lions, deers, dogs and warriors in lively movement.

### **THE LIONESSES TOMB**

Discovered in 1874, this tomb dates back to the 5th century B.C. It consists of a small chamber with a niche in the backwall to house the dead's ashes. On the back frontispiece, two lionesses facing each other are figured. Because of the bright polychromy and its outstanding style, the Lionesses Tomb is an evident example of the influence of the Ionian art in Etruria.

### **THE HUNTING AND FISHING TOMB**

Found in 1873 and formed by two chambers with a double slope, this is one of the most original and famous tombs. On the tympanum of the real sepulchral chamber, there's a painting with husband and wife banqueting. The walls are decorated with hunting and fishing scenes in a seascape background, with dolphins and birds filling the sea and the sky. It is worth noting a small fishing boat and a hunter trying to hit birds with a sling. Scenes of dancing, plays in the open air and the return from hunting are painted in the first chamber.

## **THE ETRUSCAN TARQUINIA**

Tarquinia is one of the most important towns of Etruria. As per an ancient legend that meant to glorify the town's origins, it was founded by Tarchon, Tyrrhene's son and King of Lydia, who led the Etruscan population to Italy. The legendary Tages, the genius child in body and God of wisdom, imposed to Tarchon the site where the town should be founded, the haruspicy laws (the important divinatory arts), as well as the surveying of the fields and the building of dams and canals to drain the region.

The origin of Tarquinia goes back to the Bronze Age (X century B.C.). Situated 100 km from Rome, it lies in a protected area not far from the seaside, on a vast plateau (Pian di Civita) dominating the Marta River valley. Tarquinia developed in the Iron Age (IX-VIII centuries B.C.), gradually undertook the leading role among the other confederate towns and controlled the Tolfa, mountains rich in coveted minerals. Its urban development strengthe-

ned because of the increase of commercial exchanges with Cuma, important Greek colony in Campania, and with other Eastern-Mediterranean populations.

The town of cabins was turned into a stone town whose cultural, commercial and political power was exercised by the rich aristocratic class. To the urban transformation was added the analogous enlargement of the necropolis, the most important one raised on Monterozzi hill. The Tarquinii dynasty, Etruscan Kings who reigned in Rome during the last period of the monarchy, came from Tarquinia itself. After the fall of Veio, the town underwent the political influence of Rome and began to decline.

## **THE ARCHEOLOGIC MUSEUM OF TARQUINIA**

Founded in 1924, at first the Museum housed the grave findings collection of the Museo Civico, coming from the excavations carried out by the Municipio di Corneto, and the Bruschi-Falgari's private collection bought by the State. Then it was gradually enriched with objects coming from the excavations in the ancient Etruscan area and the surrounding necropolises. All the finds are very important and form an organic body about Tarquinia history.

## **GETTING TO TARQUINIA**

**By car:** From Rome: Motorway up to Civitavecchia - then SS Aurelia

From Grosseto: SS Aurelia Southwards

From Viterbo: Via Vetralla – Monte Romano or Via Tuscania

**By train:** Tarquinia railway station is on the Roma-Ventimiglia line, 3 km from the town - bus connection available.

The Necropolis is at the city gates; the Civita (the ancient acropolis) is about 7 km along Monte Romano road.