

**THE WORLDS FAMOUS
PLACES AND
PEOPLES; FLORENCE:
VOL. II; PP. 265-460**

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The Worlds Famous Places and Peoples; Florence: Vol. II; pp. 265-460 by Charles Yriarte

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CHARLES YRIARTE

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VOL. II; PP. 265-460**



*Coronation of the Virgin in Church
of S. Croce*

Giotto

627

EDITION ARTISTIQUE

The World's Famous Places and Peoples



FLORENCE

BY

CHARLES YRIARTE

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ETRUSCAN ART.



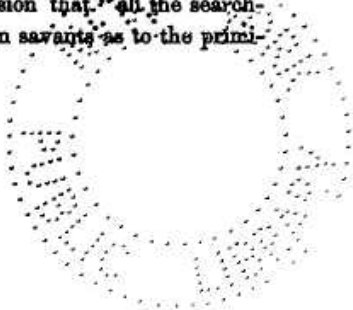
CHAPTER V.

ETRUSCAN ART.

LONG before giving to the world the spectacle of the splendid development of art and civilization which I have endeavored to describe, Tuscany had been in these respects a very favored land.

More than a thousand years before our era the soil of Tuscany was occupied by the Etruscans, a mysterious people whose origin has never been clearly ascertained by the historian or the archæologist. Whether, as has been variously argued, Greek, Phœnician, German, Iberian, or Celtic, the race which peopled Etruria, and settled between the Tiber and the Arno in the tenth century B.C., showed a special instinct for art, and left upon all the objects of its creation so original a mark that its style is the easiest to identify of all those which the archæologists have exhumed.

Mommsen, Niebuhr, and Ottfried Muller have each given their views, accepted by some and rejected by others; Michelet says that the "genius of history is dumb," and Sir George Cornwall Lewis comes to the somewhat sweeping conclusion that "all the searching investigations of modern savants as to the primi-

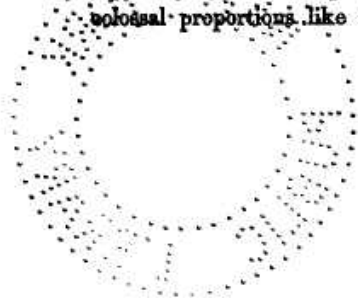


tive history of the Pelasgi, the Siculi, the Thyrrhenians, the Aborigines, the Latins, and other national races are as devoid of any solid foundation as the study of judicial astrology, the discovery of the philosopher's stone, or the elixir of life."

Be this as it may, Etruria was the cradle of Italian art, and a work on the art and civilization of that country which goes back to the earliest times would not be complete without some notice of the first Etruscan monuments. These are believed to date from the close of the tenth century B.C., and the many specimens of them which are to be seen in the different museums have all the conventionality of Egyptian art, a circumstance which may perhaps be accounted for by the trade which Etruria carried on with the East.

Etruscan art, however, was personal, so to speak, while that of Egypt, on the contrary, was immutable, and subject to certain rites, religious prescriptions, mathematical laws, and immovable canons. The Etruscan sought to imitate nature, while the Egyptian covered the human anatomy with an inanimate surface of porphyry or granite which gave no clue to the life beneath. The Etruscan was at infinite pains to reproduce the muscles, the veins, the arrangement of the hair, and the folds of the loose draperies.

There are few large monuments left in Etruria, especially of the first period, though some walls of colossal proportions like those at Fiesole, and lofty



gates like those of Perugia—one of the best-preserved monuments in Italy—may still be seen, belonging to a period in which Greek influence is very visible. The first Etruscan style lasted until the third century of Rome, after which it underwent a modification and became the Tuscan style, contemporary with that of Ægina and Greece, while, five centuries after the foundation of Rome, Greek art had acquired so complete a monopoly that it was to be traced in all Etruscan constructions of the time. One of the most important Etruscan towns, Veii, succumbed in the year 396 B.C. to Rome, and in 283 B.C. the battle of Vadimo brought about the complete subjugation of the Etruscan nation by Rome. The superposition of these two civilizations may be seen close to Florence, at Fiesole, on the slope of the mountain upon which the Roman amphitheatre is built, for hard by this building, with its classic lines, is the colossal Etruscan wall, which seems strong enough to prop up the mountain, and whose enormous layers, placed one upon another without mortar, with the edges as square as if it had been built yesterday, tell us of this people whose origin has remained an enigma for scholars of every age.

Etruscan art produced vases, mirrors, jewels, statues of great size and beautiful style, and scarce as they now are, great numbers of sarcophagi, discs, arms, etc., and tables engraved with inscriptions; and an astonishing number of grotesques are found