

HUI216

Italian Civilization

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3.1 Italy 1000 BCE -- 400 BCE

- Italy did not become a political or administrative entity until the time of the emperor Augustus (27 BCE -- 14 CE)
 - Harmony and peace in Italy, among the various Italic peoples, are important themes for the first time in Virgil's long poem entitled *Aeneid* (finished around 19 BCE)
- Italy was first inhabited by Mediterranean tribes, such as the Ligurians, and other indigenous peoples

3.1 Italy 1000 BCE -- 400 BCE

- The case of the Etruscans
 - The Etruscans' own legend about their origins
 - Greek historians supported their claim
 - Prevailing theories on the Etruscans during the 1940s and '50s in Italy, and the influence of fascism on the development of those theories
 - Massimo Pallottino
 - Myths about the Etruscans
 - Objective vs. cultural relevance for It. civ.

3.1 The Etruscans: geography and basic historical facts

- They settled North and South of the Latins
 - They occupied areas north of Naples (which was a major Greek settlement at that time), the territory of Lazio, (north of the city of Rome), most of Tuscany, and some areas of the Po valley (mostly south of the Po River)
- Their cities were joined in a loose political federation, supported by a religious hierarchy (according to traditional scholarship), a federation which lacked the unity and the organizational strength necessary to stop an aggressive enemy
 - They lost control of the Po valley with the arrival of the Gauls, and the wealthy Etruscan cities of Tuscany were eventually conquered by the Romans

3.1 The Etruscans and the Romans

- They formed the most advanced civilization in Italy until the 6th century BCE
- They participated to the foundation of the city of Rome: some of the first inhabitants of Rome and even some of the Roman kings came from the Etruscan community
- They introduced in Rome several customs, inventions and techniques
 - city planning, commerce, the arch
 - religious practices
 - the *aruspicina*, the art of predicting the future through the observation of the guts of sacrificed animals, or of natural phenomena, mostly having to do with the sky, traditionally associated with the divinities: lightnings, the passage of flocks of birds [see Livy]

3.1 The Etruscans and the Romans

- Romans perfected the arch, as they did with most inventions and ideas that they borrowed from other civilizations
- Etruscans were the first to experiment successfully with complex architecture, and their presence and participation in the early Roman society is often underestimated, as memories of it were fading already by the end of the Roman Republic
- A famous Roman politician, Cato, claimed that "almost all of Italy was once under Etruscan control"; although this is somewhat of an exaggeration, it speaks volumes of the relevance of Etruscan civilization in the eyes of the educated Romans

3.1 The Etruscans and the Romans

- They introduced social customs that became popular among the Romans
 - customs related to the rituals of formal dining
- They introduced a relatively small number of fairly important words in Latin, and from it those words passed into Neo-Latin languages
 - "person" (Italian *persona*) comes from an Etruscan word that designated the mask worn by theatrical performers
 - "histrionic" (and the Italian *istrione*) come from the Etruscan word for actor, etc.

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 1

- The external history of the Etruscans, as there are no direct chronicles extant, is to be gathered only from scattered notices in Greek and Roman writers. Their internal history, till of late years, was almost a blank, but by the continual accumulation of fresh facts it is now daily acquiring form and substance, and promises... to be as distinct and palpable as that of Egypt, Greece, or Rome.
- We are indebted for most of this knowledge, not to musty records drawn from the oblivion of centuries, but to monumental remains -- purer fonts of historical truth -- landmarks which, even when few and far between, are the surest guides across the expanse of distant ages -- to the monuments which are still extant on the sites of the ancient Cities of Etruria, or have been drawn from their Cemeteries, and are stored in the museums of Italy and of Europe.

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 2

- The internal history of Etruria is written on the mighty walls of her cities, and on other architectural monuments, on her roads, her sewers, her tunnels, but above all in her sepulchres; it is to be read on graven rocks, and on the painted walls of tombs; but its chief chronicles are inscribed on sarcophagi and cinerary urns, on vases and goblets, and mirrors and other articles in bronze, and a thousand et cetera of personal adornment, and of domestic and warlike furniture -- all found within the tombs of a people long passed away, and whose existence was till of late remembered by few but the traveller or the student of classical lore.

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 3

- It was the great reverence for the dead, which the Etruscans possessed in common with the other nations of antiquity, that prompted them -- fortunately for us of the nineteenth century -- to store their tombs with these rich and varied sepulchral treasures, which unveil to us the arcana of their inner life, almost as fully as though a second Pompeii had been disinterred in the heart of Etruria...

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 4

- Etruria was of old densely populated, not only in those parts which are still inhabited, but also, as is proved by remains of cities and cemeteries, in tracts now desolated by malaria, and relapsed into the desert...
- ...contained numerous cities, mighty, and opulent, into whose laps commerce poured the treasures of the East, and the more precious produce of the Hellenic genius. Most of these ancient sites are now without a habitat, furrowed yearly by the plough, or forsaken as unprofitable wildernesses; and such as are still occupied, are, with few exceptions, mere phantoms of their pristine greatness -- mean villages in the place of populous cities...
- The glory has verily departed from Etruria.

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 5

- The Etruscans were undoubtedly one of the most remarkable nations of antiquity -- the great civilizers of Italy -- and their influence not only extended over the whole of the ancient world, but has affected every subsequent age, and has not been without effect, however faint, on the civilization of the nineteenth century, and of regions they never knew.
- When we consider the important part they played among the nations of old, it is astonishing that the records of them are so vague and meagre.

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 6

- ...had it not been for their tombs, we should have known them only through the representations of the Greeks and Romans, which would give us a false and most unfavourable impression. For the Greeks describe them as pirates and robbers, or as effeminate debauchees; the Romans brand them as sluggards, gluttons, and voluptuaries. Yet the former acknowledged their power at sea, their commercial importance, and their artistic skill; and the latter were forced to confess that to Etruria they owed most of their institutions and arts: still neither have paid that tribute to her civilization which we have now learned to be due...
- How far we Transalpines of the nineteenth century are indebted to her civilization is a problem hardly to be solved; but indelible traces of her influence are apparent in Italy.

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 7

- That portion of the Peninsula where civilization earliest flourished, whence infant Rome received her first lessons, as in subsequent ages maintained its pre-eminence. It was on the Etruscan soil that the seeds of culture, dormant through the long winter of barbarism, broke forth anew...: it was in Etruria that immortality was first bestowed on the lyre, the canvass, the marble, the science of modern Europe. Here arose
 - "the all Etruscan three--
Dante and Petrarch, and scarce less than they,
The Bard of Prose, creative spirit! he
Of Hundred Tales of love."
- It was Etruria which produced Giotto, Brunelleschi, Fra Angelico, Luca Signorelli, Fra Bartolomeo, Michel Angelo, Hildebrand, Macchiavelli, "the starry Galileo," and such a noble band of painters, sculptors, and architects, as no other country of modern Europe can boast.

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 8

- Certainly no other region of Italy has produced such a galaxy of brilliant intellects. I leave it to philosophers to determine if there be anything in the climate or natural features of the land to render it thus intellectually prolific. But much may be owing to the natural superiority of the race, which, in spite of the revolutions of ages, remains essentially the same, and preserves a distinctive character; just as many traits of the ancient Greek, Gaul, German, and Spaniard may be recognised in their modern descendants. The roots of bygone moral, as well as physical, culture, are not easily eradicated. The wild vine and olive mark many a desert tract to have been once subject to cultivation. And thus ancient civilization will long maintain its traces even in a degenerate soil, and will often germinate afresh on experiencing congenial influences...

3.2 Excerpts from *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* by George Dennis (London, 1848): 9

- How else comes it that while the Roman of to-day preserves much of the rudeness of former times -- while the Neapolitan in his craft and wiliness betrays his Greek origin -- the Tuscan is still the most lively in intellect and imagination, the most highly endowed with a taste for art and literature?
- May it not be to the deep-seated influences of early civilization that he owes that superior polish and blandness of manner, which entitle Tuscany pre-eminently to the distinction claimed for it of being "a rare land of courtesy"?

3.3 Some texts on Etruscan civilization and today's Tuscany

- Elizabeth Caroline Gray, *Tour to the Sepulchres of Etruria*, J. Hatchard & Son: London, 1840
- George Dennis, *The cities and cemeteries of Etruria*, 2 vol. John Murray, London, 1848
- Charles Godfrey Leland, *Etruscan Roman remains in popular tradition*, New York, C. Scribner, London, T.F. Unwin, 1892
 - Magic and folklore in modern Tuscany
- D.H. Lawrence, *Sketches of Etruscan places and other Italian essays*, ed. by Simonetta De Filippis, Cambridge, Cambridge University press, 1992 [1927]
- Dennis and Lawrence are both quoted (on the Etruscans and Tuscany) by Frances Mayes, *Under the Tuscan sun. At home in Italy*, New York, Broadway Books, 1996: pp. 149, 160.
- Mayes refers to the Etruscans for certain qualities of the Tuscans of today (“Italian insouciance and ability to live in the moment with gusto”): p. 178 (see also pp. 146-149).

3.4 The Indo-Europeans arrive in Italy

- [Indo-European tribes](#) (click on the previous link to learn more; the following is a better site, slightly more technical, but also more detailed: "[Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans](#)")
- Indo-Europeans migrated from Central Asia, slowly moving through the regions of Russia and Eastern Europe
- Eventually they arrived in Italy in different waves during the second millennium BCE, and there most of them settled
- Among them were the Latins (later known as Romans, after the foundation of the city of Rome), the Greeks, the Samnites, the Umbrians, the Oscans, the Sicans

3.4 Indo-European languages: the latest theories, from "World's Farmers Sowed Languages as Well as Seeds" by Nicholas Wade (*NYT* 5/6/03)

- The invention of agriculture has long been invoked to explain the spread of the Indo-European languages. Now, Dr. Jared Diamond of the University of California at Los Angeles and Dr. Peter Bellwood of the Australian National University in Canberra have applied the concept to 15 major language families. Their article appeared in the April 25 issue of *Science*.
- The premise is that when humans lived as hunters and gatherers, their populations were small, because wild game and berries can support only so many people. But after an agriculture system was devised, populations expanded, displacing the hunter-gatherers around them and taking their language with them.

3.4 Indo-European languages: the latest theories, from "World's Farmers Sowed Languages as Well as Seeds"

- On this theory, whatever language happened to be spoken in a region where a crop plant was domesticated expanded along with the farmers who spoke it.
- Even if the farmers interbred with the hunter-gatherers whose land they took over, genes can mix, but languages cannot.
- So the hunter-gatherers would in many cases have adopted the farmers' language. That is why languages "record these processes of demographic expansion more clearly than the genes," Dr. Bellwood said.

3.4 Indo-European languages: the latest theories

- . . . Just as China was a powerhouse of new language families in the East, the Fertile Crescent, the arc running through Lebanon and through Iraq, was the source of at least three major language families in the West, the authors say.
- One was Dravidian, a language family now centered on southern India. A second was the Indo-European family, which includes English, French and German in its Western branch and Iranian and Hindi in its Eastern branches. A third may have been Afro-Asiatic, a family that includes ancient Egyptian and Semitic languages like Arabic and Hebrew.

3.4 Indo-European languages: the latest theories

- . . . Dr. Diamond said that agriculture did not drive all language expansions -- the Inuit's spread across the Arctic is an example of that -- but that "for most of the widespread language families the driving force for the spread has been agricultural."
- Dr. Diamond said the new theory also predicted that expansions would occur more easily on an east-west axis than a north-south axis because the crop plants on which an agriculture depends tend to be able to grow only at particular latitudes.

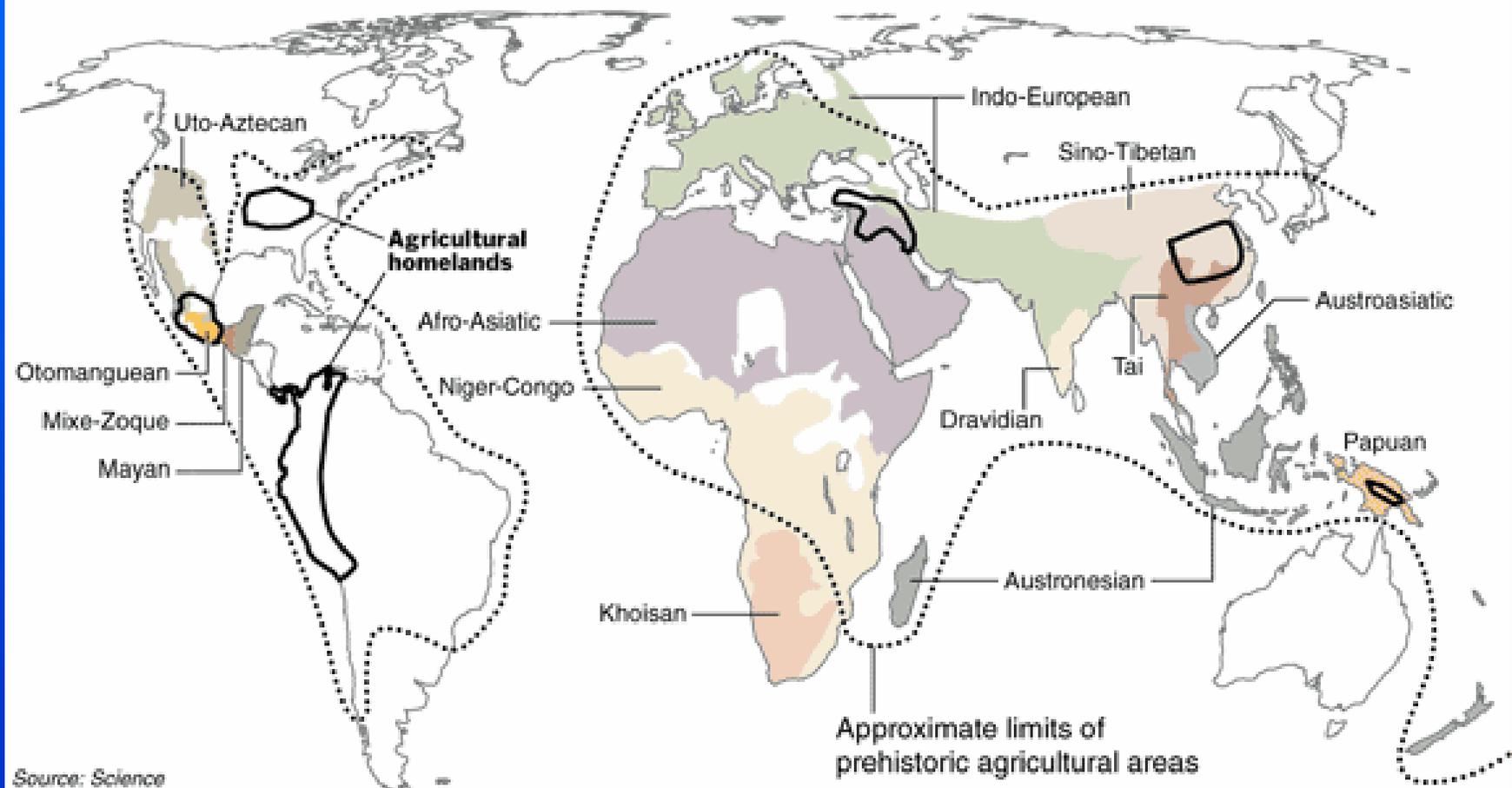
3.4 Indo-European languages: objections to the latest theories

- . . . Dr. Christopher Ehret of U.C.L.A., an expert in the history of African languages, said the authors had overstated the role of agriculture in explaining the pattern of language distribution.
- "In reality, the spread of language families has come about for different reasons in different times and places, but one of the causes has sometimes been the development of agriculture," Dr. Ehret said.
- He said he did not agree with Dr. Bellwood that the Indo-European languages had been spread by farming. Linguistic evidence shows the speakers of the ancestral Indo-European tongue knew of wheels and kept horses in years around 4,500-3,500 B.C., but agriculture had spread to Europe at least 2,500 years previously, Dr. Ehret said.

3.4 Indo-Europeans and other language families according to the latest theories

The Spread of Language

Language families may have originally emerged from six agricultural homelands. Some scientists believe that speech used by early farmers spread outward as agriculture supported ever greater populations.



Source: Science



3.5 Early Italy: a map

3.5 Early Italy: the Greeks

- The Greeks had colonies in the South of Italy and on the East coast of Sicily
 - *Magna Graecia* [Great Greece] for a long time was the name used to identify Southern Italy
 - Syracuse was founded by Corinthians in the 7th century BCE and was one of the wealthiest cities in Italy in ancient time
 - Greek artifacts have been found even in the Venetian lagoon
- Contributions by the Greeks of Italy to Roman civilization
 - The Laws of the 12 tables (450 BCE) were written by the Romans (by their own admittance) only after a careful examination of Greek laws
 - According to Roman historians, a committee of legal experts was sent to the Greek colonies to study their legal system

3.6 Early Italy: contributions by the Greeks to Roman civilization

- The alphabet used by the Romans was modeled after the Greek alphabet (the Etruscan, who lived in proximity of the Greek colonies probably introduced that alphabet in Roman society)
- Roman religion borrowed numerous myths and divinities from the Greeks (and once again the Etruscans were often the intermediary)
- Even Roman literature and music, the arts and theater were developed following the stimulus and the example of the great writers, artists and playwrights of Greece
 - Among those who contributed to spreading the knowledge of Greek civilization in Rome, an essential role was played by Greeks slaves, captured in times of war in the south of Italy and in Sicily, in the Balkans, and later on in Greece
 - One of the required readings focuses on the foundational myth of Aeneas (from Greek poet Homer's *Iliad*; see also Livy)



3.6 Fresco by Raphael: Aeneas escapes from burning Troy carrying his father Anchises, 1514 (the Vatican rooms, Rome); click here for full image and all details

3.6 Federico Barocci, Aeneas' Flight from Troy (1598)





3.6 Aeneas carrying Anchises, marble statue by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1618-19)

3.6 The wolf suckles Romulus and Remus



3.7 The Griko dialect and the Italian Greeks

- In areas of the South, especially in Apulia and more specifically in the peninsula known as Salento, there are a few Italian-Greek communities, still speaking a dialect called Griko or Griko [Gricus], which derives from the Greek language. Although it was believed in the past that those Greek-speaking communities were the direct descendants of the original Greeks of classical antiquity, more recent studies indicated that at the end of the Middle Ages, before the fall of the Byzantine Empire (which was to be conquered entirely by Turks by 1453), small groups of Greeks escaped from Greece and from modern Turkey, settling in Apulia, which was the Italian region closest to them by sea. You can find more information, very well-organized and nicely presented, on this web site, entitled "[Greek \(Griko\) in Italy](#)." I have copied here relevant information from that web site:
 - The Greek language spoken in Italy, known by the names grico, griko, greco-bovese or greco-calabro, is written in Roman characters and is a highly corrupted form of modern Greek
 - Griko is not a unitary language since it is spoken in two geographically and linguistically distinct enclaves, one in the area known as Bovesia near Reggio di Calabria and the other near Lecce, in the area known by the name of Grecia Salentina

3.7 The Griko dialect and the Italian Greeks

- The Greek-speaking territory of Bovesia lies in very mountainous terrain and is not easily accessible. In recent times, many descendants of the early inhabitants of the area have left the mountains to set up home by the coast
- The Griko speakers of Calabria live in the villages of Bova Superiore, Bova Marina, Roccaforte del Greco, Condofuri, Bagaladi, Polizzi and Gallicianò. The villages of Chorio and Roghudi were abandoned after the floods of 1971 and 1972, and their inhabitants were resettled in Mélito di Porto Salvo.
- In Grecia Salentina, the Griko speakers are to be found in the villages of Calimera, Martignano, Martano, Sternatia, Zollino, Corigliano d'Otranto, Soleto, Melpignano and Castrignano dei Greci, although Griko seems to be disappearing from Martignano, Soleto and Melpignano.
- The number of Griko speakers is very limited in Bovesia. Some authors speak of 3,900 speakers at the end of the Seventies, principally in Roghudi and Gallicianò. The number of Greek speakers also appears to have fallen by around 70% since the Fifties

3.7 The Griko dialect and the Italian Greeks

- [...] until the agrarian reforms of 1950-51 took effect, the Griko-speaking peasants lived out a virtually self-sufficient existence on the *masserie*, that has enabled them to preserve their language for such a long time
- [...] The Calabrian Autonomy Statute accords recognition to the historical cultural heritage of the ethnic Albanian and Greek populations and makes provision for the promotion of instruction in both languages in the places where they are spoken
- [...] Although Calabrian Greek is not used as a classroom language anywhere, optional regional courses in Greek language and culture have been held for the past ten years or so in certain nursery and primary schools in Bovesia, thanks to funding from the regional and religious authorities and the EU. Although the number of pupils who choose to attend these courses is limited (fifty at the very most), there seems to have been a resurgence of interest in learning the Greek language and learning about Greek culture.
- [...] It seems at the present time that nobody in Bovesia speaks Griko spontaneously, except for a few people will do so if encouraged - especially shepherds and farmers. Griko, in other words, has given way to Italian and the region's various Italian dialects. There has been a total breakdown in oral tradition, especially since the Fifties, on account of economic changes, depopulation of the region and the growing percentage of the population who have attended school.

3.8 The Carthaginians

- Phoenicians (originally from modern Lebanon) founded Carthage (in modern Tunisia)
- Carthaginians had colonies in Spain, on the islands of Corsica and Sardinia, and on the west coast of Sicily
- They were great sailors of legendary skills, and active merchants who traded a variety of goods in many areas of the Mediterranean Sea
 - They exported agricultural products from North Africa and Sicily, such as wheat and cereals
 - They sold ivory and ebony coming from Africa, salt and spices coming from the Middle East and from Egypt

3.9 Early Italy: other cultures and peoples

- Gauls (*Galli*)
 - Another Indo-European group, they migrated from central and western Europe
 - By 400 BCE the area south of the Alps (Gallia Cisalpina) was occupied by Gallic tribes
 - These semi-nomadic tribes sometimes raided south, once even sacking Rome, in 390 BCE
- Sabines
 - They formed the primitive core of Roman society, together with Latins and Etruscans

3.9 Early Italy: other cultures and peoples

- The rape of the Sabine women
 - Romulus and his warlike band needed one element to complete the founding of the great city; women to provide children.
 - No neighboring tribe, however, would agree, as they viewed the brutal Romans as barbarians and criminals.
 - Typically, the Romans decided to obtain wives by force and went to a neighboring tribe, the Sabines, with a crafty proposal of burying the hatchet by jointly celebrating religious observances with the Romans. Unarmed and unprepared, the Sabines (with their wives and daughters) attended the *Consuelia* festival in Rome, only to find their women taken by force.
 - Three years later, the Sabine fathers and brothers returned for revenge and successfully breached the Palatine defenses; before the Romans were destroyed, their now-reconciled women (with children in tow) threw themselves between the parties, begging mercy for their husbands. War was averted and Rome - based not on blasphemy or rape, but on forgiveness - was well founded.
 - from <http://web.mac.com/heraklia/Dominae/paradigm/index.html>