

## The Ancient People of Italy

Before the rise of Rome, Italy was a patchwork of different cultures. Eventually they were all subsumed into Roman culture, but the cultural uniformity of Roman Italy erased what had once been a vast array of different peoples, cultures, languages, and civilizations. All these cultures existed before the Roman conquest of the Italian Peninsula, and unfortunately we know little about any of them before they caught the attention of Greek and Roman historians. Aside from a few inscriptions, most of what we know about the native people of Italy comes from Greek and Roman sources. Still, this information, combined with archaeological and linguistic information, gives us some idea about the peoples that once populated the Italian Peninsula.

Italy was not isolated from the outside world, and neighboring people had much impact on its population. There were several foreign invasions of Italy during the period leading up to the Roman conquest that had important effects on the people of Italy. First there was the invasion of Alexander I of Epirus in 334 BC, which was followed by that of Pyrrhus of Epirus in 280 BC. Hannibal of Carthage invaded Italy during the Second Punic War (218–203 BC) with the express purpose of convincing Rome's allies to abandon her. After the war, Rome rearranged its relations with many of the native people of Italy, much influenced by which peoples had remained loyal and which had supported their Carthaginian enemies. The sides different peoples took in these wars had major impacts on their destinies. In 91 BC, many of the peoples of Italy rebelled against Rome in the Social War. Though Rome emerged victorious in 88 BC, it granted the other cities of Italy full citizenship, thus making all Italians in a sense Romans. At this point cultural differences slowly disappeared, and a unified, Latin-speaking Italian population emerged.

### *Early Italy: The Villanovan Culture*

In times long before we have written records, prehistoric Italy seems to have been home to an ancient people that archaeologists call the Villanovan culture. The Villanovan culture brought iron working to Italy and perhaps brought the first examples of Indo-European language, the major language family from which most languages in Europe and western Asia are derived. The Villanovans cremated their dead and buried them in distinctive urns which are the primary archaeological evidence of the Villanovans. Though little is known about these people, they were probably the ancestors of many native peoples of Italy, though they would eventually be subsumed by new cultures that moved into the peninsula.

### *Northern Italy: The Etruscans*

The Etruscans were perhaps the most important and influential people of pre-Roman Italy and may have emerged from the Villanovan people. They dominated Italy politically prior to the rise of Rome, and Rome itself was ruled by Etruscan kings early in its history. Little is known about the origin and early history of the Etruscans, since their language is not well understood. One thing that we do know from evidence of the

Etruscan language is that it was not Indo-European. In fact, the Etruscan language resembles no other European language, which has led to many theories that they migrated to Italy from some other region such as Asia Minor in prehistory, but there is no scholarly consensus on this question. Thousands of inscriptions, on monuments, religious offerings, coins, and other objects, show that the Etruscans had a culture of writing, and the Romans had great reverence for Etruscan literature. The Etruscans produced many books, though only one example survives (in highly damaged form, as it was preserved as a wrap for an Egyptian mummy). Even after Latin had displaced Etruscan, some Romans still studied Etruscan, though knowledge of the language seems to have died out around 100 AD. Despite all the surviving inscriptions, modern scholars have been unable to decipher the Etruscan language beyond a few words, since it is so unlike any other language.

The Etruscans had great need of writing to preserve religious knowledge, which had an important role in Etruscan society. They sought to divine the will of the gods through various acts of augury, such as reading the livers of sacrificial animals. Detailed texts would show priests what different shapes and bumps on a liver meant. The Etruscans believed in a pantheon of gods, much like the Greek gods, who exercised their will upon men and who could be communicated with through priests and seers. The Romans adopted many aspects of Etruscan religion, especially divination by means of livers, which was performed by a *haruspex* (“liver-reader”).

Though we cannot read their language, and their literature has been lost, we know a great deal about Etruscan life and society through the monuments that they left behind, especially funerary monuments. Many of these show religious scenes, which give us information about Etruscan rituals. Etruscan tombs are also often painted with banquet scenes, replete with dancers and musicians as well as men and women reclining as they eat. Etruscan sarcophagi, some of the most impressive surviving works of Etruscan art, are usually carved with depictions of men and women reclining together as if at a meal. Women are often depicted with men, and Etruscan women seem to have had a much higher status and more rights than in Greek or Roman society.

The basic political unit for the Etruscans—as for the Greeks—was the city-state. From the ninth to the sixth century BC, the Etruscans expanded and colonized throughout Italy, and at their height they ruled lands from the Po River in the north to Campania in the south. These lands were never under a unified government, but had their own city governments while sharing a common Etruscan culture. Still, they often worked together. The Etruscans also assimilated the local cultures into their own.

In the south, Etruscan expansion was soon halted by the growing power of the Greeks, who had also begun colonizing the region. At the Battle of Cumae in 474 BC, the Etruscans were defeated at sea by a Greek fleet, shattering their hold on southern Italy. The coastal territories in the south were soon settled by Greeks, while their inland territories in Campania were overrun by Sabellian people migrating down from the mountains. Around 400 BC, Celts from Gaul (modern-day France) poured over the Alps and into the Etruscan territories of northern Italy. They conquered many of the Etruscan cities in the north, introducing Celtic culture to the region. They also attacked cities further to the south, and though they did not conquer these regions, they weakened the Etruscans throughout Italy.

At the same time, the Romans were often at odds with the Etruscan cities to their north, particularly the powerful city of Veii located on the opposite side of the Tiber. In 396 BC, the Romans finally conquered Veii, an important step in their eventual conquest of the Etruscans. Nine years later this expansion was slowed when the invading Celts sacked Rome itself, but Rome soon recovered, and the Etruscans could not effectively fight both the Romans and Celts. The Etruscan cities were mostly incorporated into Rome's growing Italian confederation, given citizenship rights and introduced to Roman culture. Still, the Etruscans would have an enormous impact on the Romans, especially in terms of religion and government. The elite among the Etruscans became powerful members of Roman society, and many aristocratic Roman families, even the imperial Julio-Claudians, claimed some Etruscan ancestry.

### *Northern Italy: The Celts and their Neighbors*

#### Celts

North of the Etruscans, the area around the Po River and at the base of the Alps was home to several Celtic tribes that had migrated from Gaul. One of the most important such tribes was the Insubres. They founded the city of Mediolanum, known today as Milan, around 600 BC. Other important tribes were the Boii, the Cenomani, and the Senones (all branches of tribes of the same names in Gaul). These tribes expanded south and conquered many Etruscan cities. Most of the Celtic tribes fought bitterly against Roman expansion, though the Cenomani tended to be friendly toward the Romans. The Celts were always feared by the Romans since the Senones sacked Rome in 387 BC, and as a result the Romans placed special importance on subjugating the Celts of Italy. A confederation of Italian Celts and their allies from Gaul were defeated by the Romans at the Battle of Telamon in 225 BC, and again in 222 BC at the Battle of Clastidium, during which the Roman general Marcus Claudius Marcellus slew the leader of the Celts in single combat, earning for himself great fame among the Romans. After this victory, the Celts of northern Italy fell under Roman control, though they would rebel during Hannibal's invasion of Italy and had to be conquered again by the Romans in 193 BC. Celtic culture mixed with Roman culture, and Latin gradually replaced the Celtic languages of northern Italy.

#### Ligurians

The Ligurians lived in northwestern Italy, a region that to this day is still called Liguria. Their origins are mysterious, but they were highly influenced by the Celts. They were made up of many different tribes, the most notable of which was the Apuani. The Ligurians spoke an Indo-European language (not to be confused with the modern Ligurian language) and were respected as warriors. They resisted the growing power of Rome, and mostly sided with Hannibal during his invasion of Italy (though some Ligurian tribes supported Rome). The Apuani continued to resist Roman rule even after the defeat of Hannibal, and inflicted a humiliating defeat on a Roman army, but they were completely conquered in 181 BC, when the Romans massacred 15,000 Apuani

and then deported the remaining population to Campania and Samnium. The Romans settled their former lands with Roman colonists, and soon Liguria was assimilated into Roman ways.

### Veneti

In northeastern Italy, around the modern city of Venice, lived the Veneti. They spoke an Indo-European language similar to other Italian languages such as Latin and Oscan, but with influence from Celtic languages. The language disappeared around the first century BC, as it was replaced by Latin. The Veneti were supporters of Rome and sent troops to help the Romans fight Hannibal during his invasion. In 181 BC, the Romans founded a colony at Aquileia, which became the chief city in the region (Venice was not founded until the fifth century AD). The Romans continued to colonize the region until it was thoroughly romanized.

### *Central Italy: The Latins and Their Neighbors*

#### Latins

The region of Latium, located in west-central Italy, was home to the Latins, who were eventually dominated by Rome. The Latins lived in independent city-states like many other Italian peoples, and they shared a common Latin language (though different cities spoke different dialects). The cities of Latium banded together for mutual defense, forming the Latin League. The Latin League was initially led by the city of Alba Longa, the most powerful of the early Latin states, but in the middle of the seventh century BC the city of Rome destroyed Alba Longa and took over control of the Latin League. Rome eventually dominated the league, and after defeating the other members of the Latin League at the Battle of Lake Regillus in 498 BC, Rome became separate and superior to the rest of the league. Rome and the members of the Latin League agreed to each bear half the cost of the defense of Latium, but the league essentially became a tool of Roman expansion, with the Latin states furnishing troops to fight in Rome's wars. In 340 BC the members of the league rebelled and tried to throw off Roman domination, but the Romans joined with their Samnite foes to subdue the other Latins. After defeating the league in 338 BC, the Romans disbanded the Latin League and established separate alliances with each of its cities. The cities lost their autonomy to Rome, though in exchange they were granted different levels of Roman citizenship, with many given very generous "Latin Rights." During Hannibal's invasion of Italy, all the Latin states remained loyal to Rome. After the Social War they were all granted full citizenship and voting rights. By the end of Rome's republican era, most of the Latin states had become essentially suburbs of Rome, and many important Romans came from these cities.

In and around Latium were a number of other peoples who were not members of the Latin League. These include the Sabines, the Volsci, the Aequi, the Hernici, and the Aurunci. These people seem to have spoken Indo-European languages that were similar to both Latin and the Oscan and Umbrian languages to the south and east.

These peoples were conquered by Rome early in its expansion and given various levels of citizenship rights, until they were all granted full citizenship after the Social War.

### Picentes

On the northeast coast of Italy on the Adriatic Sea lived the Picentes, in a land the Romans called Picenum. The area was conquered by Rome around 286 BC, and the Romans settled large colonies of citizens there, the most important of which was Ariminum (modern-day Rimini). The area became known as Gallia Togata, “Toga-Wearing Gaul,” reflecting the mix of Roman and Celtic culture. Picenum would prove especially loyal to Rome, remaining behind the Romans even during Hannibal’s invasion and when many other Italian regions rebelled.

### Umbrians

Between Latium and Picenum lay Umbria. Before the arrival of Latin, several Umbrian languages were spoken in the region, closely related to Oscan languages, and the Umbrians long inhabited most of north-central Italy. Many Umbrian lands were conquered by the Etruscans, and the Umbrians and Etruscans became bitter enemies. At the same time, those Umbrians that fell under Etruscan rule had some influence on Etruscan culture, and Umbrians fought in the Etruscan army (for example, they joined the Etruscans in the Battle of Cumae). The free Umbrian city-states were eager allies of Rome, as they shared a common enemy in the Etruscans. The Romans settled many colonies in Umbria, bringing Roman people and customs there. The Umbrians briefly joined the Samnites and their anti-Roman confederation in the Third Samnite War, but were defeated with the Samnites at the Battle of Sentinum within Umbrian territory. The Romans built a great fortress called Naria on top of the Umbrian town of Nequinum, which dominated the area. The Romans also built the Via Flaminia, a major highway to the Adriatic, right through Umbria. This allowed the Roman army to quickly march through the region. As a result, Umbria was under tight Roman control. Later, the Umbrians remained allied to Rome even during Hannibal’s invasion of Italy, when many former Roman allies joined the Carthaginians. Umbria gradually adopted Roman culture, thanks in part to the spread of Roman colonists and the linguistic similarities between Latin and Umbrian. The Umbrians briefly fought against Rome in the Social War, but they surrendered quickly and were given full Roman citizenship.

### *South-Central Italy: Campanias*

Campania, the region south of Latium, was home to native peoples who spoke Oscan languages, but the area was colonized by the eighth century BC by Greeks and Etruscans. The Greeks founded the colonies of Cumae and Neapolis (modern-day Naples) in the region, and the Etruscans founded the important city of Capua (originally Capseva). Capua became renowned for its wealth and size. The native peoples of the region were either expelled or assimilated into the colonizing cultures. By the middle of the fifth century BC, however, Sabellian peoples, particularly the Samnites, once again

began major incursions into Campania, and threatened Capua and Neapolis. The Samnites captured Capua in 424 BC, and in 343 BC Capua promised to surrender its independence to the Romans if they would help expel the Samnites. The Romans did so in the First Samnite War, the beginning of Roman-Samnite hostilities, and Capua was given Roman citizenship without the right to vote.

The Second Samnite War broke out in 326 BC when the Samnites occupied Neapolis and its citizens appealed to Rome for help. With Rome's victory, Campania fell under Roman rule, and the region was considered so strategically important, considering it lay between Rome and her Samnite enemies, that the Romans built their first highway, the Via Appia, to connect Rome to Capua.

When Hannibal invaded Italy, the cities of Campania stayed loyal to Rome until Rome's disastrous defeat at the Battle of Cannae. Capua opened its gates to Hannibal and Hannibal used the city as a base of operations. The Romans made several unsuccessful attempts at taking the city, until they succeeded in capturing it in 211 BC. The Romans killed much of the city's population in the sack and Capua was severely punished afterwards, losing its citizenship rights and much of its land. Indeed, much of Campania was confiscated as Roman state land and then bought up by wealthy Roman aristocrats, who established large plantations known as *latifundia* and brought in slaves to work the land. Capua, however, continued to be a prosperous and important city, though by the end of the Roman republican period it had entered a slow decline.

### *Southern Italy: The Greeks*

The coasts of southern Italy were gradually colonized by Greeks, to such an extent that Sicily and southern Italy became known as *Magna Grecia*, "Greater Greece." The Greeks began to arrive in the eighth century BC, coming in search of plentiful lands and new resources that could be sold back to their mother cities in Greece. They lived in *poleis* like those of mainland Greece, and these cities had various sorts of government, ranging from democracies, to oligarchies, to tyrannies. Some of the most important cities founded in southern Italy were Neapolis (modern-day Naples) Tarentum (Taras), Rhegium, Croton, Sybaris, and Bari. There were also several important Greek cities in Sicily, especially Syracuse. Syracuse was one of the largest and most influential cities in the Greek world, though it was famous for having a series of cruel tyrants.

The Greek colonies were primarily located on the coast, while the inland was populated by pastoralist natives, known to the Greeks as Oenotrians, Chones, and Lauternoi. The Greeks maintained control of the hinterlands with their armies, which the locals could not defeat in open battle. The Greek cities often cooperated with one another for their mutual defense against the natives of Italy, though they were not unified and were just as often at war with one another. The most famous conflict between two Greek city-states in Greece was between Croton and nearby Sybaris. The city of Sybaris was famous for its wealth, and its people were regarded as overly prideful by the other Greeks. When the tyrant of Sybaris demanded that Croton hand over a group of political opponents who had sought safety there, Croton refused, and so he marched on Croton with a massive army. Though severely outnumbered, the

soldiers of Croton defeated the army of Sybaris and then captured that city. Famously, to punish the arrogance and greed of Sybaris, the people of Croton destroyed the city and diverted a river in order to swallow up the ruins, ensuring that the city would never rise again.

The Greeks brought many important ideas to Italy, and Greek culture came to have a tremendous impact on the Romans as they emerged as the ruling power of Italy. Many important Greek thinkers, such as the mathematicians Pythagoras and Archimedes, originated in Italy. Perhaps the most important Greek contribution to the region was the introduction of the alphabet. Though writing systems existed in Italy before the Greeks, the Greek alphabet was widely adopted for writing the various languages of the peninsula. The Greek alphabet used in Italy was slightly different than the Attic alphabet that eventually became standard in Greece. The Euboean Greek alphabet used by the Greek colony of Cumae in Campania was widely adopted for the writing of Etruscan, Oscan, and Latin, and evolved into the alphabet we use today.

By the fourth century BC, the Greek cities of Magna Grecia were losing ground to native peoples who had grown powerful and had begun to conquer some of the city-states. The cities looked to mainland Greece for help. First they invited Alexander I of Epirus to aid them against the growing power of the Lucanians and Bruttians, and then Pyrrhus of Epirus to aid them against the Romans. Both of these attempts to defend the Greek cities failed, and by 272 BC the Greek city of Tarentum finally surrendered to the Romans, marking the Roman conquest of Magna Grecia. Greek culture would still have a major impact on Roman civilization, and Greek is still spoken in isolated pockets in Italy to this day.

### *Southern Italy: The Oscans*

The inland of southern Italy was occupied by a variety of peoples, collectively called Oscans. They spoke Oscan, an Indo-European language closely related to Latin. Later in their history they attempted to unite together against the growing power of Rome, though their attempts at political unity failed.

### Samnites

The Sabellians were an Oscan speaking people inhabiting the mountainous inland regions south of Latium. Though some had migrated from the mountains to Campania, it was these people who were subdued by the Greeks and Etruscans. The most important of the Sabellian peoples were the Samnites. Unlike other Sabellians, they stayed in the mountainous interior. The Samnites were formed from a league of four tribes: the Pentri, Hirpini, Caudini and Carricini, all of which inhabited the mountainous inland regions southeast of Latium. The Samnites proved to be the bitterest foe of Rome during its conquest of the Italian Peninsula. As fierce mountain warriors they were a deadly match for the armies of Rome, and it took Rome centuries to subdue them. The Samnites did not live in city-states, but instead in conglomerations of villages. They had a few urban centers, such as the towns of Bovianum and Malventum, but their mountainous homeland was not ideal for cities. The Samnite lands

were organized into large administrative units, each of which was called a *tuoto*, a word from Oscan. Each of the four main tribes of the Samnites comprised a *tuoto*, and seems to have had its own government. We do not know very much about the Samnite governments, though sources suggest that they had elected officials. Perhaps they had republican governments similar to that of Rome. The Oscan word *meddix* comes down to us as a term for a high government official. Each *tuoto* had a different *meddix* as its leader. The Samnite tribes were closely aligned, however, and there is no record of any lack of cooperation or infighting between them.

As discussed above, the Samnites first came into conflict with Rome when they attacked Campania and threatened Capua. The Romans sent military aid to Campania, but when their Latin allies rebelled, the Romans allied with the Samnites in 340 BC. War broke out again in 326 BC when Neapolis requested Roman aid against the Samnites. The Samnites inflicted some humiliating defeats on the Romans during the Second Samnite War, such as the Battle of the Caudine Forks, but Rome gradually gained an edge. In fact, the Romans learned much from the Samnite style of warfare and the famous heavy infantrymen of the Romans were influenced by Samnite soldiers. In 305 BC the Romans ended the war with a victory at the Battle of Bovianum. The Third Samnite War broke out in 298 BC, and was an attempt by many peoples in Italy to join forces to halt Roman expansion. The Samnites led a confederation made up of Umbrians, Etruscans, Celts, and many other peoples. The Romans had grown too strong by this point, however, and they could not be defeated. The Samnites surrendered in 291 and were incorporated into Rome's Italian confederation.

When Pyrrhus of Epirus invaded Italy, the Samnites flocked to his side in hopes of throwing off Roman rule. Even after Pyrrhus departed from Italy, the Samnites continued to fight, though to little effect. They joined Hannibal during his invasion of Italy, but after his defeat they fell under Roman rule once again. Still, the Samnites were bitter enemies of the Romans, and rose up against Rome during the Social War. They were the last of the Italian people to hold out against the Romans, and in 82 BC the Samnites threatened Rome and attacked its Colline Gate. The dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla defeated them, and massacred the survivors. Sulla effectively eradicated the Samnite population, and soon after, the Samnites ceased to exist as a people. Still, some Romans with Samnite names, such as Pontius Pilate, who may have had Samnite ancestry, appear later in Roman history.

## Lucanians

South of the Samnites lived the Lucanians (or Lucani). According to one Roman historian, they maintained democratic governments, though, like the Romans, they would raise up a dictator in times of emergency. They had gradually displaced the native people of the southern Italian interior, known to the Greeks as Oenotrians, Chones, and Lauternoi. The Lucanians proved more aggressive than these peoples, and soon began attacking the Greek city-states in southern Italy. They conquered several Greek cities, and threatened Taras (Tarentum), one of the most important colonies of Magna Graecia. The Greeks requested aid from Alexander I of Epirus, who crossed over into Italy in 334 BC. Alexander of Epirus defeated the Lucanians in several



battles, but was eventually killed by them. The Lucanians, however, suffered from aiding their Samnite relatives in their wars against the Romans, and lost many soldiers to battles with the Romans. When Tarentum was threatened again, this time by the Romans, and the citizens of that city appealed to Pyrrhus of Epirus, instead of fighting the Epirote king as they did Alexander I, the Lucanians quickly joined him in hopes of humbling the Romans. They were mistaken, and when Pyrrhus was forced to flee Italy they were left at the mercy of the Romans. They were subjugated by the Romans, but rebelled and joined the Carthaginians when Hannibal invaded Italy. Once again, they suffered for backing the wrong side. Lucania was devastated in the course of the war, and the Lucanians were suppressed by the Romans once Hannibal was defeated. The region fell into ruin. The Lucanians rebelled against Rome once more during the Social War, and were again defeated. The major towns of the region died out, and swamps and forests reclaimed what had once been settled areas. The region remained a backwater throughout the Roman Empire.

### Bruttians

South of the Lucanians was the region of Bruttium (known in modern times as Calabria). The native inhabitants, such as the Oenotrians, were conquered by the Lucanians around 400 BC. Around 356 BC, a mixed group of subjugated natives and some Lucanians rose up in rebellion and threw off Lucanian rule. These people became known as the Bruttians (or Brettians). The term “Bruttian” was supposedly originally a pejorative term used by the Lucanians for these rebels, but it was soon adopted as a national name. The Bruttians not only threw off Lucanian rule, but they conquered the Greek city-states on the coast, the most important being the Greek city of Croton. Eventually the Lucanians recognized the independence of the Bruttians, and they joined together to defeat Alexander I of Epirus. Later they joined Pyrrhus of Epirus against the Romans, and like their Lucanian neighbors suffered harshly from Roman reprisals. When Hannibal invaded Italy, they rose up in support of him and remained some of his most steadfast allies. Croton remained Hannibal’s winter headquarters, and he could always count on Bruttium for a secure base. In the last years of his war in Italy, Hannibal was more or less holed up in Bruttium, and when he returned to Africa, many Bruttians went with him and fought in defense of Carthage at the Battle of Zama. When Hannibal was defeated, the Romans dealt harshly with the Bruttians. The Bruttians were stripped of their freedom and given a very low status in the Roman Republic’s confederation. Colonies of Roman citizens were established in Croton and elsewhere, and quickly Bruttian customs and language disappeared, being replaced by Roman ways.

### *Southeastern Italy: The Iapyges*

The region known today as Apulia, which makes up the heel of Italy’s boot, was home to the Iapyges. The Iapyges were made up of a number of tribes that probably originated in Illyria, on the other side of the Adriatic Sea. They spoke a language known as Messapian, which was an Italic language but used the Greek alphabet for writing.

## Apulians and Messapians

The two major confederations of tribes were the Apulians to the north and the Messapians to the south. The Apulians were heavily Hellenized and adopted much of Greek culture, while the Messapians were more conservative and stayed closer to their native customs. During Rome's Samnite Wars, the Apulians, worried about the growing power of their Samnite neighbors to the west, allied with Rome, while the Messapians gave aid to the Samnites. Such patterns of loyalty remained standard: when Pyrrhus of Epirus invaded Italy, the Apulians allied with Roman against him, while the Messapians joined with Pyrrhus; later, when Hannibal invaded, the Apulians stayed loyal to Rome while the Messapians joined the Carthaginians. Eventually the region was incorporated into Roman Italy and the Messapian language gave way to Latin (and Greek, which continued to be widely spoken in the region).

## *Sicily*

The island of Sicily, immediately south of the Italian Peninsula, was generally split between the Greeks on the eastern side of the island and the Carthaginians on the western side of the island. The Greeks, especially those in the most important Sicilian polis, Syracuse, often came into conflict with the Carthaginians. The Carthaginians, from the city of Carthage in North Africa (modern-day Tunis) were descended from Phoenician colonists and had set about establishing their own maritime empire. Sicily, just a short distance over the water from Carthage, was an important area for Carthaginian colonization. The Greeks and Carthaginians constantly fought for control of Sicily, and the balance of power swung back and forth between the two. Rome and Syracuse eventually allied against Carthage and drove the Carthaginians from Sicily in the First Punic War. During the Second Punic War, Syracuse changed sides and supported Carthage, though the Romans captured the city in 212 BC and thereby conquered Sicily.

The Greeks and Carthaginians did not originate in Sicily, however, but came to the island as colonists. The native population of the island was divided by the Greeks into three distinct peoples: the Sicels, the Sicani, and the Elymians. The Sicels inhabited the eastern parts of Sicily (and thus had the closest contact with the Greeks), the Sicani the midlands, and the Elymians the western parts of the islands (and therefore interacted most with the Carthaginians). Like the natives of southern Italy, the inhabitants of Sicily, especially the Sicels, fell under the sway of the Greek colonists, and many adopted Greek culture. When Sicily was conquered by the Romans after the First Punic War, the native inhabitants were slowly subsumed into Roman culture.

## *Sardinia: Nuragic Civilization*

The Nuragic civilization derives its name from the nuraghe, massive stone towers built by the Bronze Age population of the island of Sardinia from around 1800 to 1200 BC. These megalithic structures are incredibly common, with about one nuraghe for

every three square kilometers in Sardinia. The people who built them are more mysterious. They seem to have come to the island during the Bronze Age.

Sardinia was colonized by the Phoenicians and later by their Carthaginian cousins. After the First Punic War, the Carthaginian troops on Sardinia rebelled and established their own state. The native inhabitants of the island drove them out, and they turned to Rome for help. The Romans landed on Sardinia and brutally suppressed the native population. Then, in breach of the terms of their peace with Carthage, Rome annexed Sardinia and nearby Corsica. Sardinia became an important source of grain for Rome. After the Roman defeat at the Battle of Cannae during the Second Punic War, the Sardinian natives saw an opportunity to throw off Roman rule and rebelled. The Carthaginians sent them troops in hopes of depriving the Romans of this important island, but the Sardinian-Carthaginian army was destroyed by the Romans in 215 BC. Sardinia was reannexed by Rome, though raids of the “fur-covered Sardinians” would be a constant annoyance to the Romans who tried to govern the island. Eventually, the Sardinians were assimilated into Roman culture. The modern Sardinian language is derived from Latin.

### *Summary*

#### Northern Italy

- Etruscans: Important early rulers of Italy, they spoke a language unrelated to any other European language. They were conquered by the Romans but maintained a strong cultural influence on the Romans.
- The Celts: Celtic-speaking tribes that had migrated from Gaul. One of the tribes, the Senones, sacked Rome in 387 BC. The Celts resisted Roman rule before being conquered by the Romans in the 220s BC. They rebelled during Hannibal’s invasion, but they were all reconquered by 193 BC.
- Ligurians: A people of unknown origin who spoke an Indo-European language related to Celtic and Italic languages. They were conquered by the Romans in 181 BC.
- Veneti: A people living in northeastern Italy who spoke an Italic language with strong Celtic influence. They supported the Romans and were colonized by the Romans, being mostly peacefully assimilated.

#### Central Italy

- The Latins: Dominated by Rome, the Latins lived in a conglomeration of city-states. They formed the Latin League for mutual defense, which also soon became dominated by Rome. Rome eventually defeated and disbanded the Latin League and absorbed the Latin states.
- Picentes: A mixed Italic-Celtic culture that remained friendly to Rome. They were mostly peacefully assimilated into Roman culture after the Second Punic War.

- Umbrians: Inhabitants of large swaths of central Italy, many of their lands were conquered by the Etruscans. They allied with the Romans against the Etruscans, and were eventually colonized and assimilated by the Romans.
- Campanians: Originally inhabited by native Italic peoples, Campania was colonized by Greeks and Etruscans, who founded important cities such as Cumae, Neapolis, and Capua. The inhabitants of the region appealed to Roman aid against the Samnites, but eventually tired of Roman rule. They joined with Hannibal after the Battle of Cannae, but were reconquered and suppressed by the Romans.

### Southern Italy

- The Greeks: Colonists from mainland Greece, they founded many important cities in southern Italy and Sicily, to the extent that the area became known as Magna Graecia. They brought with them Greek culture and the alphabet.
- Samnites: Oscan speaking people from the mountainous highlands, they were Rome's most bitter enemies and fought a series of wars against Rome. They supported every major anti-Roman invasion of Italy, but were eventually subdued and virtually destroyed by the Romans.
- Lucanians: An Oscan-speaking people who dominated southern Italy and conquered many Greek city-states. After backing Pyrrhus of Epirus and Hannibal, they were conquered by the Romans.
- Bruttians: An Oscan-speaking people from the very south of Italy, they were originally subjects of the Lucanians until they broke free. They were bitter opponents of the Romans, and provided Hannibal with his closest Italian allies. After Hannibal's defeat, they were subjugated and mostly destroyed by the Romans.
- Iapygians: Composed of the Apulians and Messapians, they lived in southeastern Italy. They may have originated in Illyria and they were strongly influenced by Greek culture. The Apulians were peacefully subsumed into Rome's expanding empire, while the Messapians were less cooperative and were violently conquered.

### The Islands

- Sicilians: Composed of the Sicels, the Sicani, and the Elymians, they were mostly dominated by the Greek and Carthaginian colonies on the island of Sicily. They were later assimilated into Roman culture after Rome conquered Sicily.
- Sardinians: The Bronze Age Nuragic civilization has left impressive remains on the island of Sardinia. The native inhabitants, descended from the Nuragic people, fought both Roman and Carthaginian attempts to control the island. In 215 BC, they allied with the Carthaginians against Rome, but they were defeated and Rome took over Sardinia.