THE PALACE OF MINOS

LESS than a generation back the origin of Greek civilisation, and with it the sources of all great culture that has ever been, were wrapped in an impenetrable mist. That ancient world was still girt round within its narrow confines by the circling "Stream of Ocean." Was there anything beyond? The fabled kings and heroes of the Homeric Age, with their palaces and strongholds, were they aught, after all, but more or less humanised sun-myths?

One man had faith, accompanied by works, and in Dr. Schliemann the science of classical antiquity found its Columbus. Armed with the spade he brought to light from beneath the mounds of ages a real Troy; at Tiryns and Mycenæ he laid bare the palace and the tombs and treasures of Homeric Kings. A new world opened to investigation, and the discoveries of its first explorer were followed up successfully by Dr. Tsountas and others on Greek soil. The eyes of observers were opened, and the traces of this prehistoric civilisation began to make their appearance far beyond the limits of Greece itself. From Cyprus and Palestine to Sicily and Southern Italy, and even to the coasts of Spain, the colonial and industrial enterprise of the "Mycenæans" has left its mark throughout the Mediterranean basin. Professor Petrie's researches in Egypt have conclusively shown that as early at least as the close of the Middle Kingdom, or, approximately speaking, the beginning of the Second Millennium B.C., imported Ægean vases

were finding their way into the Nile valley. By the great days of the XVIIIth Dynasty, in the sixteenth and succeeding centuries B.C., this intercourse was of such a kind that Mycenæan art, now in its full maturity of bloom, was reacting on that of the contemporary Pharaohs and infusing a living European element into the old conventional style of the land of the Pyramids and the Sphinx.

But the picture was still very incomplete. Nay, it might even be said that its central figure was not yet filled in. In all these excavations and researches the very land to which ancient tradition unanimously pointed as the cradle of Greek civilisation had been left out of count. To adapt the words applied by Gelon to slighted Sicily and Syracuse, "The spring was wanting from the year" of that earlier Hellas. Yet Crete, the central island—a half-way house between three Continents—flanked by the great Libyan promontory and linked by smaller island stepping stones to the Peloponnese and the mainland of Anatolia, was called upon by Nature to play a leading part in the development of the early Ægean culture.

Here, in his royal city of Knossos, ruled Minos, or whatever historic personage is covered by that name, and founded the first sea empire of Greece, extending his dominion far and wide over the Ægean isles and coast-lands. Athens paid to him its human tribute of youths and maidens. His colonial plantations extended east and west along the Mediterranean basin till Gaza worshipped the Cretan Zeus and a Minoan city rose in Western Sicily. But it is as the first lawgiver of Greece that he achieved his greatest renown, and the Code of Minos became the source of all later legislation. As the wise ruler and inspired lawgiver there is something altogether biblical in his legendary character. He is the Cretan Moses, who every nine years repaired to the Cave of Zeus, whether on the Cretan Ida or on Dicta, and received from the God of the Mountain the laws for his people. Like Abraham he is described as the "friend of God." Nay, in some accounts, the mythical being of Minos has a tendency to blend with that of his native Zeus.

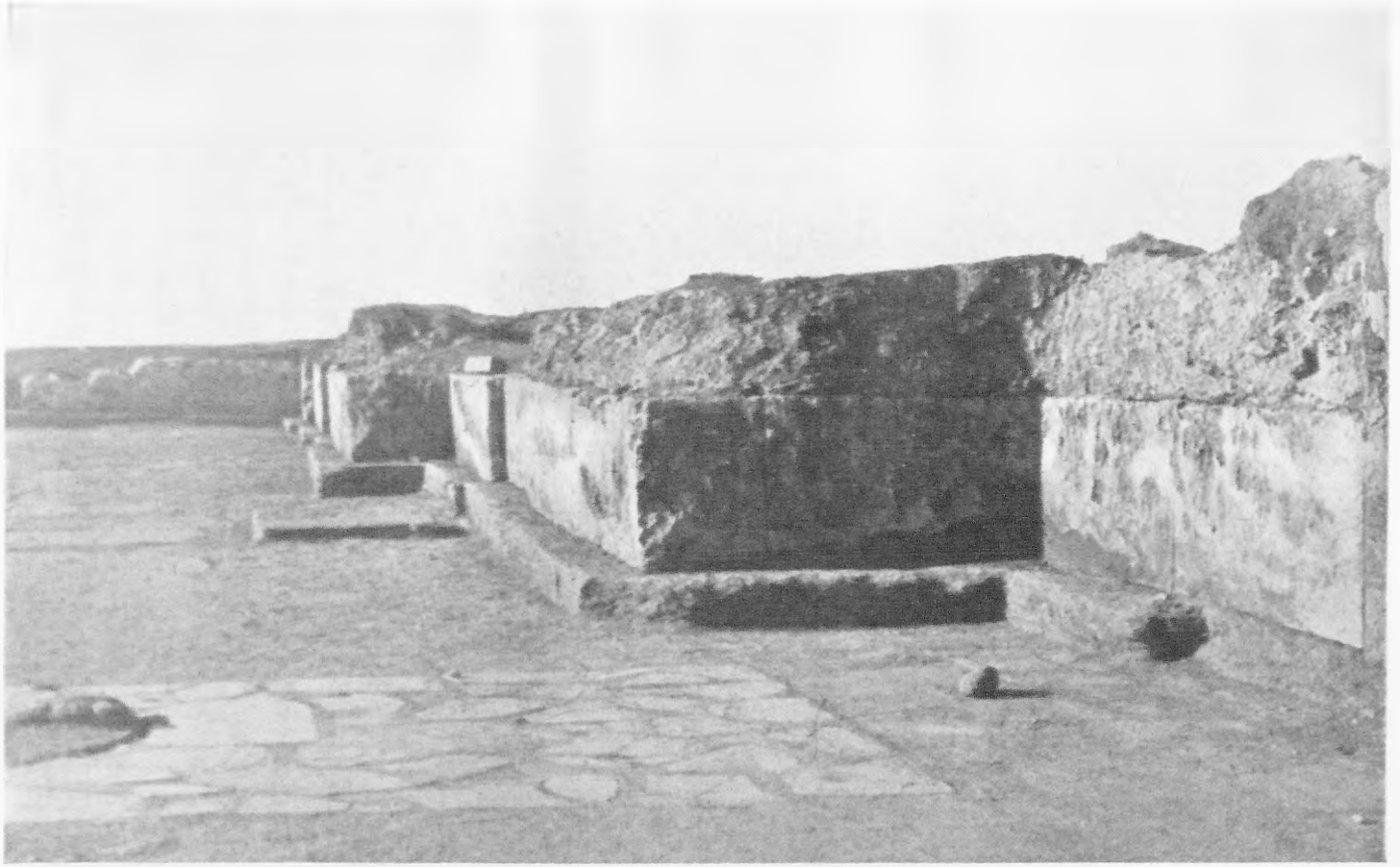


FIG. 1.—Western Court of the Palace, Knossos.
Seen from S.W. Portico.

This Cretan Zeus, the God of the Mountain, whose animal figure was the bull and whose symbol was the double axe, had indeed himself a human side which distinguishes him from his more ethereal namesake of classical Greece. In the great Cave of Mount Dicta, whose inmost shrine, adorned with natural pillars of gleaming stalactite, leads deep down to the waters of an unnavigated pool, Zeus himself was said to have been born and fed with honey and goat's milk by the nymph Amaltheia. On the conical height immediately above the site of Minos' City—now known as Mount Juktas—and still surrounded by a Cyclopean enclosure, was pointed out his tomb. Classical Greece scoffed at this primitive legend, and for this particular reason, first gave currency to the proverb that "the Cretans are always liars." St. Paul, too, adopted this hard saying, but in Crete itself the new religion, which here, as elsewhere, so eagerly availed itself of what might aid its own propaganda in existing belief, seems to have dealt more gently with the scenes of the lowly birth and Holy Sepulchre of a mortal God. On the height of Juktas, on the peaks of Dicta, which overlooked, one the birth-place, the other the temple of the Cretan Zeus, pious hands have built chapels, the scenes of annual pilgrimage, dedicated to *Avthentés Christos*, "the Lord Christ." In his shrine at Gaza the Minoan Zeus had already in Pagan days received the distinguishing epithet of Marnas, "the Lord" in its Syrian form.

If Minos was the first lawgiver, his craftsman Daedalus was the first traditional founder of what may be called a "school of art." Many were the fabled works wrought by them for King Minos, some gruesome, like the brass man Talos. In Knossos, the royal city, he built the dancing ground, or "Choros," of Ariadne, and the famous Labyrinth. In its inmost maze dwelt the Minotaur, or "Bull of Minos," fed daily with human victims, till such time as Theseus, guided by Ariadne's ball of thread, penetrated to its lair, and, after slaying the monster, rescued the captive youths and maidens. Such, at least, was the Athenian tale. A more prosaic tradition saw in the Laby-

rinth a building of many passages, the idea of which Dædalus had taken from the great Egyptian mortuary temple on the shores of Lake Moeris, to which the Greeks gave the same name; and recent philological research has derived the name itself from the *labrys*, or double axe, the emblem of the Cretan and Carian Zeus.

Mythological speculation has seen in the Labyrinth, to use the words of a learned German, "a thing of belief and fancy, an image of the starry heaven with its infinitely winding paths, in which, nevertheless, the sun and moon so surely move about." We shall see that the spade has supplied a simpler solution.

When one calls to mind these converging lines of ancient tradition it becomes impossible not to feel that, without Crete, "the spring is taken away" indeed from the Mycenæan world. Great as were the results obtained by exploration on the sites of this ancient culture on the Greek mainland and elsewhere, there was still a sense of incompleteness. In nothing was this more striking than in the absence of any written document. A few signs had, indeed, been found on a vase-handle, but these were set aside as mere ignorant copies of Hittite or Egyptian hieroglyphs. In the volume of his monumental work which deals with Mycenæan art, M. Perrot was reduced to the conclusion that, "as at present advised, we can continue to affirm that, for the whole of this period, neither in Peloponnese nor in Central Greece, no more upon the buildings nor upon the thousand-and-one objects of domestic use and luxury that have come forth from the tombs, has anything been discovered that resembles any form of writing."

But was this, indeed, the last word of scientific exploration? Was it possible that a people so advanced in other respects—standing in such intimate relations with Egypt and the Syrian lands where some form of writing had been an almost immemorial possession—should have been absolutely wanting in this most essential element of civilisation? I could not believe it. Once more one's thoughts turned to the land of Minos, and the question irresistibly suggested itself—was that

Fig. 2.—Magazine No. 5, showing great Store Jars.

early heritage of fixed laws compatible with a complete ignorance of the art of writing? An abiding tradition of the Cretans themselves, preserved by Diodoros, shows that they were better informed. The Phœnicians, they said, had not invented letters, they had simply changed their forms—in other words, they had only improved on an existing system.

It is now seven years since a piece of evidence came into my hands which went far to show that long before the days of the introduction of the Phœnician alphabet, as adopted by the later Greeks, the Cretans were, in fact, possessed of a system of writing. While hunting out ancient engraved stones at Athens I came upon some three- and four-sided seals showing on each of their faces groups of hieroglyphic and linear signs distinct from the Egyptian and Hittite, but evidently representing some form of script. On inquiry I learnt that these seals had been found in Crete. A clue was in my hands, and, like Theseus, I resolved to follow it, if possible to the inmost recesses of the Labyrinth. That the source and centre of the great Mycenæan civilisation remained to be unearthed on Cretan soil I had never doubted, but the prospect now opened of finally discovering its written records.

From 1894 onwards I undertook a series of campaigns of exploration chiefly in Central and Eastern Crete. In all directions fresh evidence continually came to light, Cyclopean ruins of cities and strongholds, beehive tombs, vases, votive bronzes, exquisitely engraved gems, amply demonstrating that in fact the great days of that "island story" lay far behind the historic period. From the Mycenæan sites of Crete I obtained a whole series of inscribed seals, such as I had first noticed at Athens, showing the existence of an entire system of hieroglyphic or quasi-pictorial writing, with here and there signs of the co-existence of more linear forms. From the great Cave of Mount Dicta—the birth-place of Zeus—the votive deposits of which have now been thoroughly explored by Mr. Hogarth, I procured a stone Libation Table inscribed with a dedication of several characters in the early Cretan script. But for more

exhaustive excavation my eyes were fixed on some ruined walls, the great gypsum blocks of which were engraved with curious symbolic characters, that crowned the southern slope of a hill known as Kephala, overlooking the ancient site of Knossos, the City of Minos. They were evidently part of a large prehistoric building. Might one not uncover here the palace of King Minos, perhaps even the mysterious Labyrinth itself?

These blocks had already arrested the attention of Schliemann and others, but the difficulties raised by the native proprietors had defeated all efforts at scientific exploration. In 1895 I succeeded in acquiring a quarter of the site from one of the joint owners. But the obstruction continued, and I was beset by difficulties of a more serious kind. The circumstances of the time were not favourable. The insurrection had broken out, half the villages in Crete were in ashes, and in the neighbouring town of Candia the most fanatical part of the Mahomedan population were collected together from the whole of the island. The faithful Herakles, who was at that time my "guide, philosopher, and muleteer," was seized by the Turks and thrown into a loathsome dungeon, from which he was with difficulty rescued. Soon afterwards the inevitable massacre took place, of which the nominal British "occupants" of Candia were in part themselves the victims. Then at last the sleeping lion was aroused. Under the guns of Admiral Noel the Turkish Commander evacuated the Government buildings at ten minutes notice and shipped off the Sultan's troops. Crete once more was free.

At the beginning of this year I was at last able to secure the remaining part of the site of Kephala, and with the consent of Prince George's Government at once set about the work of excavation. I received some pecuniary help from the recently started Cretan Exploration Fund, and was fortunate in securing the services of Mr. Duncan Mackenzie, who had done good work for the British School in Melos, to assist me in directing the works. From about eighty to one hundred and fifty men

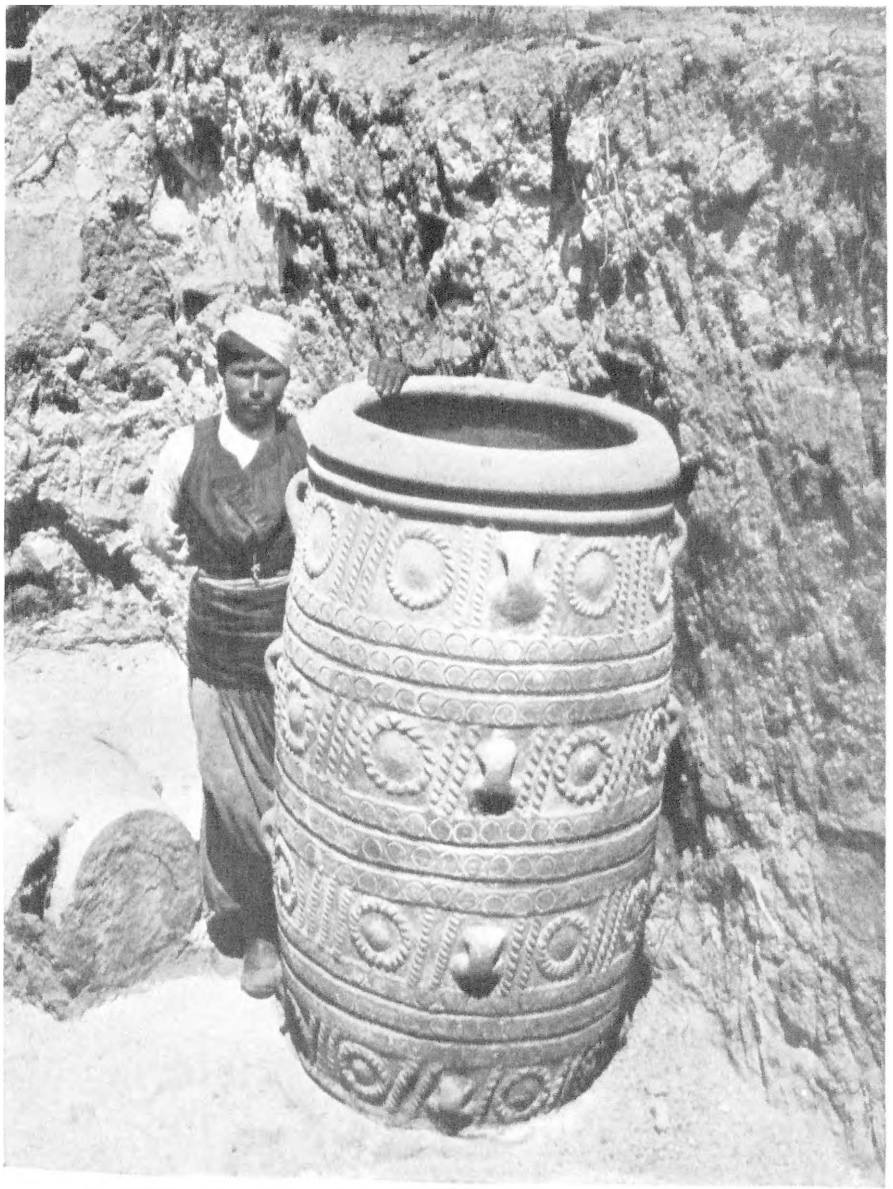


Fig. 3. Large Clay Store Jar.

were employed in the excavation which continued till the heat and fevers of June put an end to it for this season.

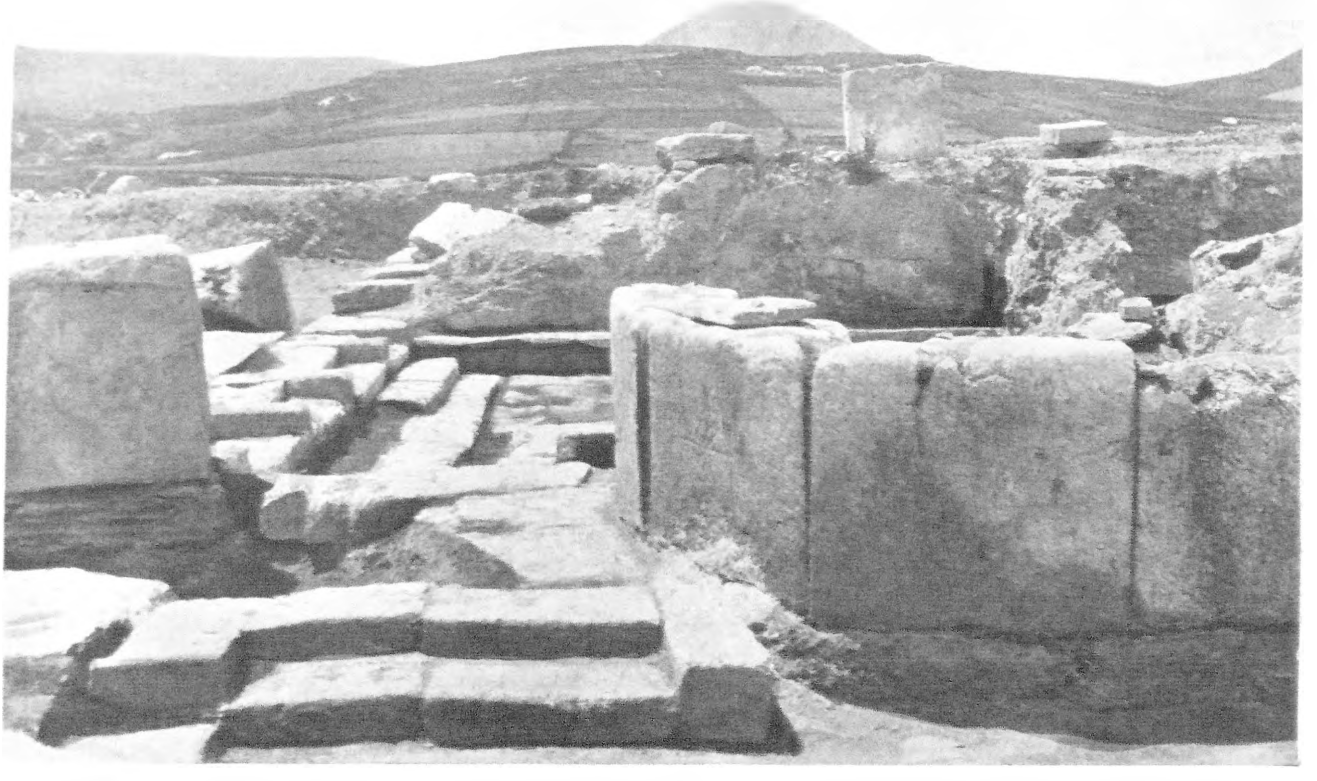
The result has been to uncover a large part of a vast prehistoric building—a palace with its numerous dependencies, but a palace on a far larger scale than those of Tiryns and Mycenæ. About two acres of this has been unearthed, for by an extraordinary piece of good fortune the remains of walls began to appear only a foot or so, often only a few inches, below the surface. This dwelling of prehistoric kings had been overwhelmed by a great catastrophe. Everywhere on the hill-top were traces of a mighty conflagration; burnt beams and charred wooden columns lay within the rooms and corridors. There was here no gradual decay. The civilisation represented on this spot had been cut short in the fulness of its bloom. Nothing later than remains of the good Mycenæan period was found over the whole site. Nothing even so late as the last period illustrated by the remains of Mycenæ itself. From the day of destruction to this the site has been left entirely desolate. For three thousand years or more not a tree seems to have been planted here; over a part of the area not even a ploughshare had passed. At the time of the great overthrow, no doubt, the place had been methodically plundered for metal objects, and the fallen *débris* in the rooms and passages turned over and ransacked for precious booty. Here and there a local Bey or peasant had grubbed for stone slabs to supply his yard or threshing-floor. But the party walls of clay and plaster still stood intact, with the fresco painting on them, still in many cases perfectly preserved at a few inches depth from the surface, a clear proof of how severely the site had been let alone for these long centuries.

Who were the destroyers? Perhaps the Dorian invaders who seem to have overrun the island about the eleventh or twelfth century before our era. More probably, still earlier invading swarms from the mainland of Greece. The Palace itself had a long antecedent history and there are frequent traces of remodelling. Its early elements may go back a thousand

years before its final overthrow, since, in the great Eastern Court, was found the lower part of an Egyptian seated figure of diorite, with a triple inscription, showing that it dates back to the close of the XIIth or the beginning of the XIIIth Dynasty of Egypt; in other words approximately to 2000 B.C. But below the foundation of the later building, and covering the whole hill, are the remains of a primitive settlement of still greater antiquity, belonging to the insular Stone Age. In parts this "Neolithic" deposit was over twenty-four feet thick, everywhere full of stone axes, knives of volcanic glass, dark polished and incised pottery, and primitive images such as those found by Schliemann in the lowest strata of Troy.

The outer walls of the palace were supported on huge gypsum blocks, but there was no sign of an elaborate system of fortification such as at Tiryns and Mycenæ. The reason of this is not far to seek. Why is Paris strongly fortified, while London is practically an open town? The city of Minos, it must be remembered, was the centre of a great sea-power, and it was in "wooden walls" that its rulers must have put their trust. The mighty blocks of the Palace show, indeed, that it was not for want of engineering power that the akropolis of Knossos remained unfortified. But in truth Mycenæan might was here at home. At Tiryns and Mycenæ itself it felt itself threatened by warlike Continental neighbours. It was not till the mainland foes were masters of the sea that they could have forced an entry into the House of Minos. Then, indeed, it was an easy task. In the Cave of Zeus on Mount Ida was found a large brooch (or *fibula*) belonging to the race of northern invaders, on one side of which a war galley is significantly engraved.

The Palace was entered on the south-west side by a portico and double doorway opening from a spacious paved court (Fig. 1). Flanking the portico were remains of a great fresco of a bull, and on the walls of the corridor leading from it were still preserved the lower part of a procession of painted life-size figures, in the centre of which was a female personage, probably



Four Entrances opening on E. Court. Stone Bench with Pilasters. Gypsum Blocks of Corridor with Incised Symbols.

FIG. 4.—Ante-Chamber to Throne Room.
Seen from its Northern Entrance.

FIG. 5.—Throne Room from Ante-Chamber.

a queen, in magnificent apparel. This corridor seems to have led round to a great southern porch or *Propylæum* with double columns, the walls of which were originally decorated with figures in the same style. Along nearly the whole length of the building ran a spacious paved corridor, lined by a long row of fine stone doorways, giving access to a succession of magazines. On the floor of these magazines huge store jars were still standing, large enough to have contained the "forty thieves" (Fig. 2). One of these jars, contained in a small separate chamber, was nearly five feet in height (Fig. 3).

Here occurred one of the most curious discoveries of the whole excavation. Under the closely compacted pavement of one of these magazines, upon which the huge jars stood, there were built in, between solid piles of masonry, double tiers of stone cists lined with lead. Only a few were opened and they proved to be empty, but there can be little doubt that they were constructed for the deposit of treasure. Whoever destroyed and plundered the Palace had failed to discover these receptacles, so that when more come to be explored there is some real hope of finding buried hoards.

On the east side of the Palace opened a still larger paved court, approached by broad steps from another principal entrance to the North. From this court access was given by an ante-room (Fig. 4) to what was certainly the most interesting chamber of the whole building, almost as perfectly preserved —though some twelve centuries older—as anything found beneath the volcanic ash of Pompeii or the lava of Herculaneum. Already a few inches below the surface freshly preserved fresco began to appear. Walls were shortly uncovered decorated with flowering plants and running water, while on each side of the doorway of a small inner room stood guardian griffins with peacocks' plumes in the same flowery landscape. Round the walls ran low stone benches, and between these on the north side, separated by a small interval and raised on a stone base, rose a gypsum throne with a high back, and originally coloured with decorative designs. Its lower part

was adorned with a curiously carved arch, with crocketed mouldings, showing an extraordinary anticipation of some most characteristic features of Gothic architecture. Opposite the throne was a finely wrought tank of gypsum slabs—a feature borrowed perhaps from an Egyptian palace—approached by a descending flight of steps, and originally surmounted by cypruswood columns supporting a kind of *impluvium*. Here truly was the council chamber of a Mycenæan King or Sovereign Lady. It may be said to-day that the youngest of European rulers has in his dominions the oldest throne in Europe (Fig. 5).

The frescoes discovered on the Palace site constitute a new epoch in the history of painting. Little, indeed, of the kind even of classical Greek antiquity has been hitherto known earlier at least than the Pompeian series. The first find of this kind marks a red-letter day in the story of the excavation. In carefully uncovering the earth and *débris* in a passage at the back of the southern Propylæum there came to light two large fragments of what proved to be the upper part of a youth bearing a gold-mounted silver cup (Fig. 6). The robe is decorated with a beautiful quatre-foil pattern; a silver ornament appears in front of the ear, and silver rings on the arms and neck. What is specially interesting among the ornaments is an agate gem on the left wrist, thus illustrating the manner of wearing the beautifully engraved signets of which many clay impressions were found in the palace.

The colours were almost as brilliant as when laid down over three thousand years before. For the first time the true portraiture of a man of this mysterious Mycenæan race rises before us. The flesh tint, following perhaps an Egyptian precedent, is of a deep reddish-brown. The limbs are finely moulded, though the waist, as usual in Mycenæan fashions, is tightly drawn in by a silver-mounted girdle, giving great relief to the hips. The profile of the face is pure and almost classically Greek. This, with the dark curly hair and high brachycephalic head, recalls an indigenous type well represented still in the glens of Ida and the White Mountains—a type which brings

Fig. 6. Fresco of the Cup-bearer
(Original Life-size).

with it many reminiscences from the Albanian highlands and the neighbouring regions of Montenegro and Herzegovina. The lips are somewhat full, but the physiognomy has certainly no Semitic cast. The profile rendering of the eye shows an advance in human portraiture foreign to Egyptian art, and only achieved by the artists of classical Greece in the early fine-art period of the fifth century B.C.—after some eight centuries, that is, of barbaric decadence and slow revival.

There was something very impressive in this vision of brilliant youth and of male beauty, recalled after so long an interval to our upper air from what had been till yesterday a forgotten world. Even our untutored Cretan workmen felt the spell and fascination. They, indeed, regarded the discovery of such a painting in the bosom of the earth as nothing less than miraculous, and saw in it the "icon" of a Saint! The removal of the fresco required a delicate and laborious process of under-plastering, which necessitated its being watched at night, and old Manolis, one of the most trustworthy of our gang, was told off for the purpose. Somehow or other he fell asleep, but the wrathful Saint appeared to him in a dream. Waking with a start, he was conscious of a mysterious presence; the animals round began to low and neigh, and "there were visions about"; "φαντάζει," he said, in summing up his experiences next morning, "the whole place spooks!"

To the north of the Palace, in some rooms that seem to have belonged to the women's quarter, frescoes were found in an entirely novel miniature style. Here were ladies with white complexions—due, we may fancy, to the seclusion of harem life—*décolletées*, but with fashionable puffed sleeves and flounced gowns, and their hair as elaborately curled and *frisé* as if they were fresh from a *coiffeur's* hands. "Mais," exclaimed a French savant who honoured me with a visit, "ce sont des Parisiennes!"

They were seated in groups, engaged in animated conversation, in the courts and gardens and on the balconies of a palatial building, while in the walled spaces beyond were large crowds

of men and boys, some of them hurling javelins. In some cases both sexes were intermingled. These alternating scenes of Peace and War recall the subjects of Achilles' shield, and we have here at the same time a contemporary illustration of that populousness of the Cretan cities in the Homeric age which struck the imagination of the bard. Certain fragments of fresco belong to the still earlier period of Ægean art, which precedes the Mycenæan, well illustrated in another field by the elegant painted vases found by Mr. Hogarth in some private houses on this site. A good idea of the refinement already reached in these earlier days of the Palace is given by the subject of one fresco fragment in this "pre-Mycenæan" style—a boy, namely, in a field of white crocuses, some of which he has gathered and is placing in an ornamental vase.

Very valuable architectural details were supplied by the walls and buildings of some of the miniature frescoes above described. In one place rose the façade of a small temple, with triple cells containing sacred pillars, and representing in a more advanced form the arrangement of the small golden shrines, with doves perched upon them, found by Schliemann in the shaft graves at Mycenæ. This temple fresco has a peculiar interest, as showing the character of a good deal of the upper structure of the palace itself, which has now perished. It must largely have consisted of clay and rubble walls, artfully concealed under brilliantly painted plaster, and contained and supported by a woodwork framing. The base of the small temple rests on the huge gypsum blocks which form so conspicuous a feature in the existing remains, and below the central opening is inserted a frieze, recalling the alabaster reliefs of the palace hall of Tiryns, with triglyphs, the prototypes of the Doric, and the half-rosettes of the "metopes" inlaid with blue enamel, the Kyanos of Homer.

A transition from painting to sculpture was supplied by a great relief of a bull in hard plaster, coloured with the natural tints, large parts of which, including the head, were found near the northern gate. It is unquestionably the finest plastic work

FIG. 7.—Relief of Bull's Head in Coloured *Gesso duro* (Original Life-size).

of the time that has come down to us, stronger and truer to life than any classical sculpture of the kind (Fig. 7).

Somewhat more conventional, but still showing great naturalistic power, is the marble head of a lioness, made for the spout of a fountain. It too had been originally tinted, and the eyes and nostrils inlaid with brightly coloured enamels. A part of a stone frieze, with finely undercut rosettes, recalled similar fragments from Tiryns and Mycenæ, but far surpasses them in execution.

Vases of marble and other stones abounded, some exquisitely carved. Among these was one cut out of alabaster in the shape of a great Triton shell, every coil and fold of which was accurately reproduced. A porphyry lamp, supported on a quatre-foil pillar, with a beautiful lotus capital, well illustrates the influence of an Egyptian model. But the model was here surpassed.

Among the more curious arts, practised in prehistoric Knossos, was that of miniature painting on the back of plaques of crystal. A galloping bull thus delineated on an azure background is a little masterpiece in its way. A small relief on a banded agate, representing a dagger in an ornamental sheath resting on an artistically folded belt, to a certain extent anticipates by many centuries the art of cameo carving. A series of clay seals was also discovered, exhibiting impressions of intaglios in the fine bold Mycenæan style; one of these, with two bulls, larger than any known signet gem of the kind, may well have been a royal seal. The subjects of some of these intaglios show the development of a surprisingly picturesque style of art. We see fish naturalistically grouped in a rocky pool, a hart beside a water-brook in a mountain glen, and a grotto, above which some small monkey-like creatures are seen climbing the over-hanging crags.

But manifold as were the objects of interest found within the palace walls of Knossos, the crowning discovery—or, rather, series of discoveries—remains to be told. On the last day of March, not far below the surface of the ground, a little

to the right of the southern portico, there turned up a clay tablet of elongated shape, bearing on it incised characters in a linear script, accompanied by numeral signs. My hopes now ran high of finding entire deposits of clay archives, and they were speedily realised. Not far from the scene of the first discovery there came to light a clay receptacle containing a hoard of tablets. In other chambers occurred similar deposits, which had originally been stored in coffers of wood, clay, or gypsum. The tablets themselves are of various forms, some flat, elongated bars, from about 2 to 7½ inches in length, with wedge-like ends; others, larger and squarer, ranging in size to small octavo (Fig. 8). In one particular magazine tablets of a different kind were found—perforated bars, crescent and scallop-like "labels," with writing in the same hieroglyphic style as that on the seals found in Eastern Crete. But the great mass, amounting to over a thousand inscriptions, belonged to another and more advanced system with linear characters. It was, in short, a highly developed form of script, with regular divisions between the words, and for elegance hardly surpassed by any later form of writing.

A clue to the meaning of these clay records is in many cases supplied by the addition of pictorial illustrations representing the objects concerned. Thus we find human figures, perhaps slaves; chariots and horses; arms or implements and armour, such as axes and cuirasses; houses or barns; ears of barley or other cereals; swine; various kinds of trees; and a long-stamened flower, evidently the saffron crocus, used for dyes. On some tablets appear ingots, probably of bronze, followed by a balance (the Greek τάλαντον), and figures which probably indicate their value in Mycenæan gold talents. The numerals attached to many of these objects show that we have to do with accounts referring to the royal stores and arsenals.

Some tablets relate to ceramic vessels of various forms, many of them containing marks indicative of their contents. Others, still more interesting, show vases of metallic forms, and obviously relate to the royal treasures. It is a highly

Fig. 8. Clay Tablet with the Linear Prehistoric Script.

significant fact that the most characteristic of these, such as a beaker like the famous gold cups found in the Vapheio tomb near Sparta, a high-spouted ewer and an object, perhaps representing a certain weight of metal, in the form of an ox's head, recur—together with the ingots with incurving sides among the gold offerings in the hands of the tributary Ægean princes—on Egyptian monuments of Thothmes III.'s time. These tributary chieftains, described as Kefts and People of the Isles of the Sea, who have been already recognised as the representatives of the Mycenæan culture, recall in their dress and other particulars the Cretan youths, such as the Cupbearer above described, who take part in the processional scenes on the palace frescoes. The appearance in the records of the royal treasury at Knossos of vessels of the same form as those offered by them to Pharaoh is itself a valuable indication that some of these clay archives approximately go back to the same period—in other words, to the beginning of the fifteenth century B.C.

Other documents, in which neither ciphers nor pictorial illustrations are to be found, may appeal even more deeply to the imagination. The analogy of the more or less contemporary tablets, written in cuneiform script, found in the palace of Tell-el-Amarna, might lead us to expect among them the letters from distant governors or diplomatic correspondence. It is probable that some are contracts or public acts, which may give some actual formulas of Minoan legislation. There is, indeed, an atmosphere of legal nicety, worthy of the House of Minos, in the way in which these clay records were secured. The knots of string which, according to the ancient fashion, stood in the place of locks for the coffers containing the tablets, were rendered inviolable by the attachment of clay seals, impressed with the finely engraved signets, the types of which represent a great variety of subjects, such as ships, chariots, religious scenes, lions, bulls, and other animals. But—as if this precaution was not in itself considered sufficient—while the clay was still wet the face of the seal was countermarked

by a controlling official, and the back countersigned and endorsed by an inscription in the same Mycenæan script as that inscribed on the tablets themselves.

Much study and comparison will be necessary for the elucidation of these materials, which it may be hoped will be largely supplemented by the continued exploration of the Palace. If, as may well be the case, the language in which they were written was some primitive form of Greek we need not despair of the final decipherment of these Knossian archives, and the bounds of history may eventually be so enlarged as to take in the "heroic age" of Greece. In any case the weighty question, which years before I had set myself to solve on Cretan soil, has found, so far at least, an answer. That great early civilisation was not dumb, and the written records of the Hellenic world are carried back some seven centuries beyond the date of the first known historic writings. But what, perhaps, is even more remarkable than this is that, when we examine in detail the linear script of these Mycenæan documents, it is impossible not to recognise that we have here a system of writing, syllabic and perhaps partly alphabetic, which stands on a distinctly higher level of development than the hieroglyphs of Egypt or the cuneiform script of contemporary Syria and Babylonia. It is not till some five centuries later that we find the first dated examples of Phœnician writing.

The signs already mentioned as engraved on the great gypsum blocks of the Palace must be regarded as distinct from the script proper. These blocks go back to the earliest period of the building, and the symbols on them, which are of very limited selection but of constant recurrence, seem to have had a religious significance. The most constantly recurring of these, indeed, is the *labrys*, or double axe, already referred to—the special symbol of the Cretan Zeus, votive deposits of which, in bronze, have been found in the cave sanctuaries of the God on Mount Ida and Mount Dicta. The double-axe is engraved on the principal blocks, such as the corner stones

and door-jambs throughout the building, and recurs as a sign of dedication on every side of every block of a sacred pillar that forms the centre of what seems to have been the inmost shrine of an aniconic cult connected with this indigenous divinity.

The "House of Minos" thus turns out to be also the House of the Double Axe—the *labrys* and its Lord—in other words, it is the true *Labyrinthos*. The divine inspirer of Minos was not less the Lord of the Bull, and it is certainly no accidental coincidence that huge figures of bulls in painting and plaster occupied conspicuous positions within it. Nay, more, on a small steatite relief, a couchant bull is seen above the doorway of a building probably intended to represent the Palace, and this would connect it in the most direct way with the sacred animal of the Cretan Zeus.

There can be little remaining doubt that this vast edifice, which in a broad historic sense we are justified in calling the "Palace of Minos," is one and the same as the traditional "Labyrinth." A great part of the ground plan itself, with its long corridors and repeated succession of blind galleries, its tortuous passages and spacious underground conduit, its bewildering system of small chambers, does in fact present many of the characteristics of a maze.

Let us place ourselves for a moment in the position of the first Dorian colonists of Knossos after the great overthrow, when features now laboriously uncovered by the spade were still perceptible amid the mass of ruins. The name was still preserved, though the exact meaning, as supplied by the native Cretan dialect, had been probably lost. Hard by the western gate in her royal robes, to-day but partially visible, stood Queen Ariadne herself—and might not the comely youth in front of her be the hero Theseus, about to receive the coil of thread for his errand of liberation down the mazy galleries beyond? Within, fresh and beautiful on the walls of the inmost chambers, were the captive boys and maidens locked up here by the tyrant of old. At more than one turn rose a mighty

bull, in some cases, no doubt, according to the favourite Mycenæan motive, grappled with by a half naked man. The type of the Minotaur itself as a man-bull was not wanting on the soil of prehistoric Knossos, and more than one gem found on this site represents a monster with the lower body of a man and the forepart of a bull.

One may feel assured that the effect of these artistic creations on the rude Greek settler of those days was not less than that of the disinterred fresco on the Cretan workman of to-day. Everything around—the dark passages, the lifelike figures surviving from an older world—would conspire to produce a sense of the supernatural. It was haunted ground, and then, as now, "phantasms" were about. The later stories of the grisly king and his man-eating bull sprang, as it were, from the soil, and the whole site called forth a superstitious awe. It was left severely alone by the new comers. Another Knossos grew up on the lower slopes of the hill to the north, and the old Palace site became a "desolation and hissing." Gradually earth's mantle covered the ruined heaps, and by the time of the Romans the Labyrinth had become nothing more than a tradition and a name.

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