

THE TREASURES OF ASINE:

NEW RECORDS OF MANY AGES IN EARLY GREEK CIVILISATION.



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In our last issue we gave an illustrated account of the remarkable discoveries at Dendra, near Asine, made recently by the Swedish archaeological expedition under Professor Persson, of Upsala

The initiative for the whole enterprise was taken by the Crown Prince of Sweden, who has constantly devoted his warmest interest to the matter, and, besides, during part of the autumn campaign of 1922, took an active part in the work himself at the scene of operations. Since then, two expeditions have carried on the investigations—still under the leadership of Professor Axel W. Persson and the writer—partly during the spring and early summer of 1924, and partly during the present year.

We have just now completed a four months' campaign, which has been richer in results than all the preceding put together. The programme which this last expedition set itself—and also succeeded in carrying out—may be summarised in the following words: to bring the investigations at Asine, at least for the time being, to such a point that the results of all the past years might be definitely published. This implied, firstly, completing the excavations in a number of localities spread over the extensive district where the previous expeditions had been working; and secondly, of still greater import, investigating in the most thorough and exhaustive way possible the "lower

city," situated below the Acropolis. That this concealed marvellous things we had already observed in the autumn of 1922, and the 1924 campaign showed even more clearly that here was to be won the most important result of the Asine researches. But we will return to this when we have made a rapid survey of the most important of the other scenes of operations for the year.

We had begun the investigation of three terraces at the summit of the Acropolis already four years ago. These, in spite of their ruined condition, soon proved to be of remarkable interest. They have now been completely gone through, and from this it has been found that they really form the most noteworthy localities here at the summit of the citadel. Two of these constructions date back with their foundations and tombs to pre-Mycenean time, and are thus contemporary with the older parts of the "lower city." On the third, again, we laid open a complex of two house foundations of the Geometrical Age (1200 to 700 B.C.), situated directly above the ruins of a house of the Mycenean Age (1600 to 1200 B.C.). For the burning question of the relation between these two epochs of culture, this find has naturally a certain value, but here comes in the fact that the dwellings of the Geometrical Age are as unknown in the matter of their planning and construction as the burial customs of the same period are well known and studied.

Under such circumstances, we did not think it necessary during this expedition to devote any further attention to the great Geometrical necropolis on the south-easterly slope of Barbuna Hill, where already in 1922 we had investigated a few graves, especially rich in ceramics. But about 325 yards farther north on the same hill lies another necropolis, consisting of rock-cut sepulchres of the Mycenean Age. During the two previous campaigns, we dug out five of the twenty-six tombs which we could ascertain from our observations of the hillside, and made exceptionally rich finds, from both a scientific and material point of view, which tempted us to continue.

Further, two graves more have been emptied of their contents this time. The one, a typical oval chamber, reached by an unusually broad and imposing passage, contained a rich assortment of ceramics, and yielded besides some valuable indications concerning the burial methods of the time. The other grave was a surprise. The passage showed itself to be a blind alley in the rock without any chamber, evidently due to another species of rock being met with, too hard for the tools of the time. Instead, a niche had been hewn out of one wall of the passage, and there we found a very much decomposed skeleton,

together with a few vases of the later Mycenean Age.

This tomb was thus somewhat of a disappointment. As a recompense, we may note from this last campaign the discovery of a hitherto unknown Mycenean necropolis, also situated on Barbuna Hill, but upon its northern slope, and only a couple of hundred yards from the one found earlier. A systematic exploration of the ground has so far led to the discovery of twenty-five tombs, but beyond all doubt these form only a small part of the total number. The discovery naturally furnishes an important contribution to the knowledge of the prehistoric topography of Asine, and shows, further, that our field of exploration, Barbuna Hill in particular, may still conceal a diversity of surprises.

Two burial grounds placed so close to each other as these, from one and the same period of culture, might denote a certain, if yet unimportant, chronological difference between them, but may also be due to their being intended for different classes of people in the Mycenean community of Asine. To find a possible answer to these questions, a tomb in the new necropolis was examined. This was also found



INCLUDING A JUG CONTAINING HUNDREDS OF GOLD AND GLASS BEADS—RELICS OF SOME LONG-DEAD BEAUTY: BRONZE AND TERRA-COTTA VESSELS FROM A ROCK-CUT SEFULCHRE IN THE MYCENEAN NECROPOLIS NO. 1 AT ASINE.

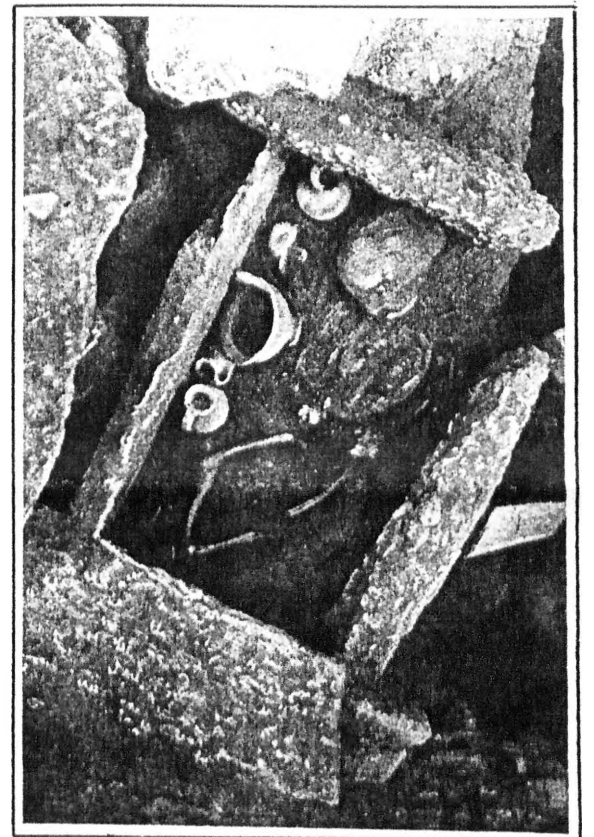
In the little bronze jug (third from the left in the upper row) were about 650 beads, some 250 of gold and the rest made of glass paste. They had formed four neck and breast ornaments, and the threads on which they were strung were still partly preserved.

University—an enterprise initiated by the Crown Prince of Sweden, who has taken an active part in it. We now illustrate the equally striking results of the excavations at Asine itself, as described here by Dr. Frödin, another member of the expedition.

FOR a number of years Swedish archaeologists have been engaged in extensive excavating operations at Asine, in Argolis, and the site of these investigations, as well as the result of the first two campaigns, has already been described in this paper (Jan. 13, 1923) by the eminent expert on Greek prehistoric times, Mr. A. J. B. Wace, former Director of the British School of Archaeology at Athens, now Deputy Keeper of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.



SCULPTURE OF THE MYCENEAN AGE (1600 TO 1200 B.C.): A PAINTED TERRA-COTTA HEAD FROM THE "LOWER CITY" AT ASINE. (HEIGHT, ABOUT 6½ IN.)



TELLING OF A MOTHER'S GRIEF NEARLY 4000 YEARS AGO: A CHILD'S GRAVE OF THE MIDDLE HELLADIC AGE (2000 TO 1600 B.C.) IN THE "LOWER CITY" AT ASINE—SHOWING FOUR VASES AND A SHELL BESIDE THE LITTLE SKELETON.

to date back from the later Mycenean Age, but was of a pronounced simple character. The burial chamber, very insignificant in dimensions, contained the remains of only a single skeleton, and a couple of inconspicuous vases. The whole gave the decided impression of a poor man's grave.

But to draw conclusions for the whole necropolis from this one specimen would certainly be hasty. Before generalising, it would be necessary to empty a further number of tombs, and we had not the time to spare. This is to be regretted, since, with regard to its construction, this rock-cut sepulchre is of a distinctive type; for, while as a rule the longer or shorter passage leading to the burial chamber is hewn horizontally through the rock, this one descends step by step to the bottom level of the chamber. Such an arrangement has been noted in only a few cases on the Greek mainland. That this deviation from the rule should be made here is due most probably to a local condition; the extremely slight rise of the slope. But now we will leave these outer parts of the Asine field, and turn instead to its centre, the "lower city," where the incomparably most important work of the year has been carried out.

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DID A NEW RACE REACH GREECE ABOUT 2000 B.C.? EVIDENCE FROM ASINE.



TUNNELLING A HILLSIDE TO EXCAVATE AN EARLY GREEK CEMETERY: THE PASSAGE INTO A ROCK-CUT SEPULCHRE IN THE MYCENEAN NECROPOLIS NO. 1 AT ASINE.



PERHAPS CONTAINING THE ANSWER TO A "BURNING QUESTION" AS TO THE RACIAL HISTORY OF EARLY GREECE: THE "LOWER CITY" AT ASINE SEEN FROM THE ACROPOLIS.



BURIED OVER 3500 YEARS AGO: A SKELETON (WITH DRAWN-UP KNEES AND A VASE IN THE HANDS) IN A GRAVE OF THE MIDDLE HELLADIC AGE (2000 TO 1600 B.C.) IN THE "LOWER CITY."



WHERE OVER 200 GRAVES WERE FOUND REPRESENTING VARIOUS EPOCHS AND MODES OF BURIAL: MIDDLE HELLADIC GRAVES IN THE "LOWER CITY" AT ASINE.

The excavation of the "lower city" at Asine, as described by Dr. Frödin on page 548, revealed records of successive ages of Greek civilisation. "Great parts of the pre-Mycenean town," he writes, "now lie exposed, extensive house foundations from the Middle Helladic Age (2000 to 1600 B.C.). . . . It might also be called a 'city of the dead.' Between, under, and above the house walls, graves lay strewn, in number at least 200, representing the most varied modes of burial and epochs of time: the pre-Mycenean, the Mycenean, the Geometrical, the Hellenistic, perhaps also the early Christian. The material is so overwhelming

that for the present it can hardly be surveyed in its entirety. Its value is certainly exceptional, both from a purely archaeological, as well as an anthropological, point of view. . . . Numerous skulls and extremity bones . . . are now on the way to Sweden. It is to be hoped that an exhaustive analysis of this material will furnish a definite answer to the burning question as to whether the beginning of the Middle Helladic Age of culture is marked by the arrival of a new race of people to the Greek mainland." That is a question which chiefly concerns the anthropologist.

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During the autumn of 1922 and the spring of 1924, a square test pit was dug. In decimetre-thin layers the earth was taken up and sifted. Metre

of its length, more than 100 yards, terminated at the eastern end, near the steep rocky cliff of the Acropolis, by a strong tower to defend the great city gate, which is now also unearthened.

In order to get our bearings in the central parts of the town, we had already staked out, at the beginning of the campaign, a long trench, stretching in a south-east-north-west direction from the steep heights of the Acropolis down to the angle, marked by a fortification tower, between the northern and the western parts of the city wall. This trench, two metres wide, which reached a length of about 125 metres (about 135 yards), came to touching one side of the previous year's test pit; and pretty soon, as we penetrated down into the thick cultural layers, the town was laid bare, as it were, before our eyes. It became quickly evident that two different parts of our profile cutting required enlarging; first, its upper end, then the whole of its lower stretch, and gradually this led to an area of about 5000 square metres of the

should be accessible, however, these constructions, interesting in themselves, had to be removed—naturally after due measurements and photographs had been taken. In one case, however, we considered ourselves bound to make an exception; namely, a bath establishment from the Roman period, exceedingly well preserved, not only in the upper parts, with, for instance, basins for hot and cold water still partly lined with marble, but also—and this should be specially mentioned—concerning its subterranean section, the hypocaust, which is so well preserved, even to the minutest detail, that it could be put to use to-day.

Under this town come the remains of the Geometrical Age, consisting mainly of cultural layers only, but in some places also of foundations of houses in a fair state of preservation. Again we were then able to note the absence of settlement during classical and archaic times. Underneath the deposits of the Geometrical Age are found the remains of the Mycenaean Age, and it is just the authentication of these last-

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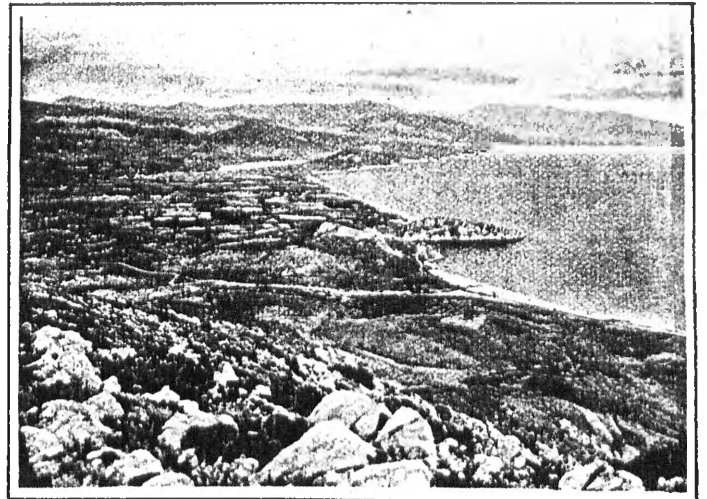


THE GEOGRAPHY OF ASINE: A MAP SHOWING THE ACROPOLIS AND "LOWER CITY," AND THE POSITION OF THE THREE ANCIENT CEMETERIES ON MOUNT BARBUNA.

upon metre we examined the cultural layers in this way. One town site after the other was brought to light, and a transverse cut was thus made through the many-thousand-year-old history of Asine. Although the section examined comprised merely an area of 150 square metres, the results obtained there were so sensational that the 1926 expedition acquired for its principal task the thorough examination of the "lower city," and, after four months of uninterrupted and intensive work with a squad of forty or fifty men, this has now completely changed its appearance. Its outer borders now lie exposed, since the magnificent wall bounding the plain on the north, dating from the Hellenistic Age, is laid bare for the whole

"lower city"—representing its most productive parts—being dug over, partly right down to untouched bottom layers or to the solid rock.

Naturally, there can be no question of giving a more detailed report here of such an extensive investigation, so I shall confine myself to certain general observations. Immediately beneath the surface layer we brought to light the remains of the last period of Asine's prosperity, the Hellenistic-Roman town with its streets and houses. In order that the far more important underlying layers



"ASINE FARTEST IN THE BAY": THE SCENE OF GREAT DISCOVERIES—SHOWING THE ACROPOLIS AND "LOWER CITY" ON THE PROMONTORY (MIDDLE DISTANCE), WITH PART OF MOUNT BARBUNA (FOREGROUND) AND THE GULF OF NAUPLIA.

"Asine farthest in the bay" is mentioned by Homer (*Iliad* II., 560) in his enumeration of the Greek host against Troy. Walter Leaf's translation of the passage reads: "And they that possessed Argos and Tiryns of the great walls, Hermione and Asine that enfold the deep gulf. . . these were led of Diomedes of the loud war-cry . . . and with them eighty black ships followed."

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named that constitutes the most important results of this year's campaign. Hitherto, practically all traces of Mycenaean settlement had been wanting—so much more inexplicable since the Mycenaean necropolis indicated the existence of one of considerable dimensions. But now, particularly in the northern—or lower—part of the "lower city," we have laid bare large Mycenaean buildings belonging to at least two different stages of this period of culture.

Probing between these house foundations testified that underneath are layers no less fruitful and significant from the pre-Mycenaean Age; but the Mycenaean structures naturally precluded any deeper probing here. In the upper parts of the "lower city," however, no such obstacles were presented to our spades. Here great parts of the pre-Mycenaean town now lie exposed, extensive house foundations from the Middle Helladic Age (2000 to 1600 B.C.), some of them with a strange, highly intricate foundation plan; and along with this, remains of a building of an oval, or perhaps rather apsidal, form, dating from the Early Helladic Age—in other words, from the third millennium before Christ, the most ancient Bronze Age in this part of Greece.

But it is not only thousands of years of life and living which have thus risen up before our eyes here in the "lower city" of Asine. It might also be called a "city of the dead." Between, under, and above the house-walls, graves lay strewn, in number at least two hundred, representing the most varied

modes of burial and epochs of time: the pre-Mycenaean, the Mycenaean, the Geometrical, the Hellenistic, perhaps, also, the early Christian. The material is so overwhelming that for the present it can hardly be surveyed in its entirety. Its value is certainly exceptional, both from a purely archaeological, as well as anthropological, point of view. Particularly is it so in the last-named, for no expert investigation, at any rate of pre-Mycenaean skeletal remains from the Greek mainland, has yet been made. But numerous skulls and extremity bones, carefully overlaid with plaster of Paris, are now on the way home to Sweden. It is to be hoped that an exhaustive analysis of this material will furnish a definite answer to the burning question as to whether the beginning of the Middle Helladic Age of culture is marked by the arrival of a new race of people to the Greek mainland, a hypothesis much cherished by certain archaeologists, which will still remain a hypothesis so long as it is treated as a purely archaeological question.

Finally, there would be much to say of our other finds, especially of the great amount of ceramic material which gradually, as the months rolled by, heaped itself in our storehouse, and towards the close threatened to burst its walls. The full extent of our finds impressed us most during the packing. About 300 boxes, cases, and barrels were filled, and are now on their way to Sweden, where later on the study and classification will take place.

That the finds this time—as well as those from the first two campaigns—have been allowed as a

loan to leave the country, is something absolutely exceptional, since the laws of Greece, as is well known, forbid the export of such objects. Yet once again a special decree has been made for the benefit of Sweden. For this courtesy we have to thank, in the first place, the late Dictator of Greece, General Pangalos, who also showed his particular interest in the Swedish Asine researches by the personal visit he paid to our field of investigation on June 11 this year.