



THE DAWN OF GREEK ART IN CRETE:

WONDERFUL DISCOVERIES DURING THE NEW ITALIAN EXCAVATIONS.



By Dr. DORO LEVI, of the Italian School at Athens.

DURING the spring of this year the Italian Archaeological Mission in Crete has resumed its explorations on the Hill of Hagios Ilias, the solitary summit which rises above the south-western slopes of the Lassithi Mountains, nineteen miles east of Knossos. The site had been explored many years ago by Professor Federico Halbherr, the director of the Italian Mission, who found a remarkable collection of steatite seals and a great quantity of sherds belonging mostly to big jars, which were ascribed to the beginnings of the Geometric style and to the dawn of Greek civilisation.

This period forms, indeed, one of the most fascinating gaps in our archaeological knowledge. After the first destruction of the great Cretan palaces, at the end of the fifteenth century B.C., the centre of gravity of Minoan power was removed from the island of Crete to its continental strongholds—that is, to Tiryns and to Mycenæ; but at least two more centuries divide these events from the generally accepted date of the Dorian invasion. Who, then, were the first Greek race that dared to push as far as the island of Minos? The dialectal traces and classical traditions agree in pointing to the pre-Dorian inhabitants of Peloponnesos, who were the Homeric Achæans.

Descendants of these first invaders of Crete were probably those Arcadian tribes which, as several pieces of literary evidence prove, were still dwelling in Crete during the classical and the Hellenistic periods. The recent discoveries of numerous coins and of some inscriptions assure us that the irrigated and well-fortified spur of the Lassithi Mountains was their refuge against every assault of the Dorians, just as the Arcadian mountains had preserved their ancestors in the very heart of Peloponnesos.

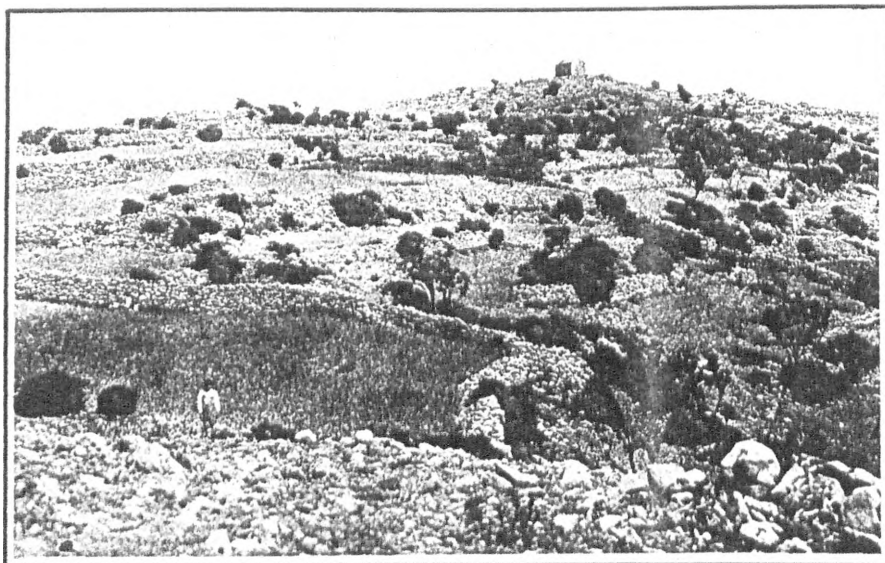
On the top of the hill of Hagios Ilias stood a small quadrangular fortress, with four circular towers which strengthened its four corners; the largest side was no longer than about sixty-five feet. This fort is in itself a proof of the agitated and turbulent times that followed the peaceful Minoan power, which left its palaces and towns almost undefended.

The majority of the private houses of the town, which covered the green slope of the east side of the hill, were (like the fort) found in a damaged condition; nevertheless, we were able to obtain a good idea of their comfortable apartments, with several big rooms twenty-three to twenty-six feet long. The houses were often connected by small, steep, paved roads.

The Necropolis, on the contrary, was situated on the bare and windy western slope of the hill; and the principal group of tombs, which had suffered least from the plough, were on a terrace, with an easy descent, at some minutes' distance from the summit of the hill. Its most apparent characteristic was the mixture of two different forms of burial—cremation and inhumation—which betray the contact of two different civilisations: on the one hand, the invading Hellenic culture; and on the other, the extinct Minoan.

The custom of cremation was represented, above all, by more than 160 single *pitthos*-tombs—that is, the burnt bones were collected in a rough clay urn, generally in the shape of a cylindrical kitchen-pot, which was itself covered by a larger *pitthos*, or jar, turned upside down, with simple relief or incised decorations at the mouth. Sometimes the richest tombs, instead of a clay urn, had a bronze basin, which in two cases was placed over an iron tripod. The jar was protected all around by a circular support-wall of small stones, and covered all over probably by a little heap of earth, which gave to the grave its aspect of a diminutive tumulus. The sepulchral furniture was rather poor; inside the urn there was always at least one, but often several, small vases, pear-shaped

or spherical, of the type of the Proto-Corinthian *aryballoi* and *bombylioi*. Outside the urn, underneath the jar or between the jar and the support-stones, was a little *oinochoe*, and often some other vases of different shapes. The ornaments and the utensils, on the contrary, were never put inside the grave, and were generally found in a layer of burnt earth and ashes between the tombs or in some simple rectangular structures of stone slabs driven vertically into the ground, and evidently used as crematory kilns.



ONCE THE HOME OF THE FIRST GREEK INVADERS OF MINOAN CRETE: THE SUMMIT OF HAGIOS ILIAS, AND ITS EASTERN SLOPES, THE SITE OF THE TOWN BUILT BY THE ARCADIAN COLONISTS.

But this kind of grave was not always simple, for sometimes many of them were collected into a larger built structure. The most imposing of these was dug complete out of virgin soil at the south corner of the terrace. It is a big *tholos*-tomb, or a large circular room, about twelve feet in diameter, with a dome of projecting rows which terminates, at a height of about ten feet, in a huge round slab. All around this, on the even floor of the terrace, was a circular paved area corresponding to the ground of the room underneath; and a short walled corridor (*dromos*) formed the entrance of the tomb, which was almost perfectly preserved.

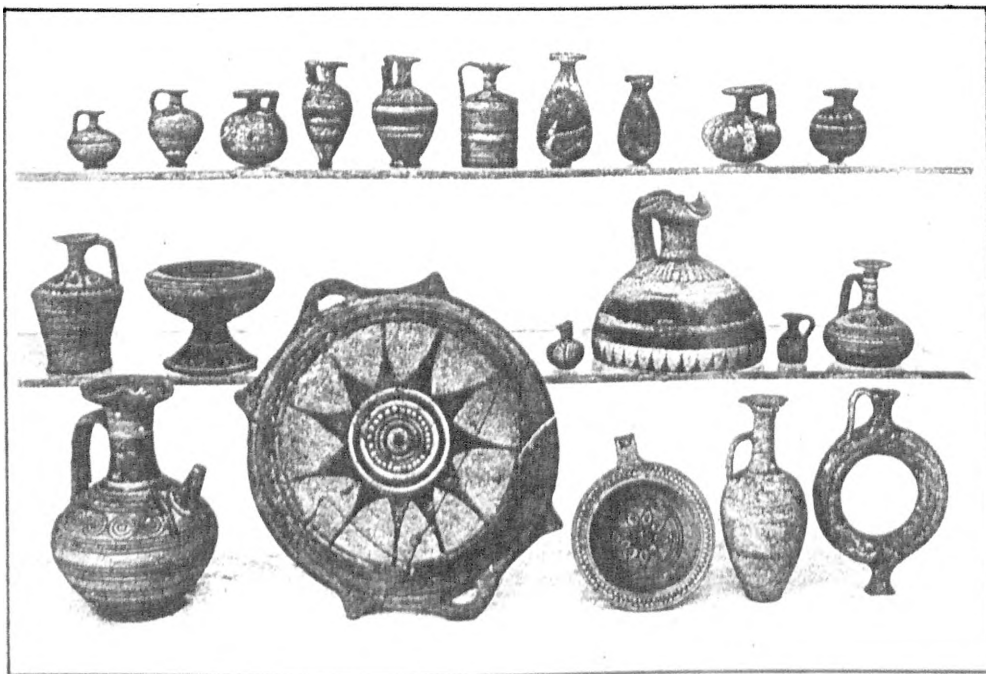
At the west end of the terrace, finally, were discovered three other small *tholoi*; but they contained inhumated corpses instead of burnt bones, although the articles of furniture were exactly the same as all the others found in the Necropolis.

The metal objects found—a few of gold and silver, and many of bronze and iron—are for the most part weapons, utensils, or ornaments, such as pins, clasps, pincers, ear-rings, finger-rings, and so on. Especially interesting are two bronze *lebetes*, one with the central part representing a lion's head, and the fragmentary second one engraved with feeding griffins all round the rim. Of great artistic value also is a small faience vase decorated with two rows, incised and incrustated, of animals feeding and running. Other examples of faience are a dog lying down and two scarabs.

But without doubt it was the pottery that provided the richest and most conspicuous harvest. Hundreds and hundreds of clay vases have been preserved, of every shape and variety, from the biggest jars to the smallest phials, and decorated with every kind of ornamentation, from elementary types reminding us of the Mycenaean and Sub-Mycenaean style, through the dry and rigid designs of the decadent Geometric period, to the coloured and exuberant series of flowers and animals of the orientalising Proto-Corinthian and Corinthian vases, and, in the best examples, even to the vivacious life-scenes preluding the Proto-Attic style.

Among the best specimens may be mentioned a big conical urn which represents Artemis Persica, the Oriental Mother Goddess, holding in each hand a "Tree of Life," and flanked by her two sacred birds; some large spherical basins, derived evidently from metal models, with floral designs, and serpent-bodies ending in lion-heads, or with two *couchant* lion-bodies joined together with one head in front. The basins have generally three volute, or ear-shaped, handles, or plastic ones in animal or human shapes. One of them has three griffin heads and breasts in relief, with painted wings, and between them

some ducks, a lion, and a peculiar sphinx with a three-pointed hat. Two beautiful *oinochoai* of Rhodian style, with open trefoil mouth, have rows of lions, antelopes, griffins, and ducks. Another spherical jug, with lions pursuing antelopes in white on a dark background, shows on the high cylindrical neck a very graceful love scene—a boy caressing a girl on the chin. An excellent specimen of plastic work is a *couchant* and roaring lion, holding with his claws a small bowl into which the water spouted from a hole in the breast. Other vases imitate the shape of a bird, of an owl, of a horse, or even of a rough feminine figure, declaiming with uplifted arms. Lastly, we can but mention countless other pots, jugs with a neckspout, elegant *lekythoi*, flat-bottomed *oinochoai* with trefoil lips and lids, glasses, bowls, lamps, flat and round, or ring-shaped *askoi*, *bombylioi*, pear-shaped or cylindrical *aryballoi*, *alabastra*, *kothones*, and so on. Besides the vases were found several other clay objects, some small figures of geese, of doves, of bull-heads, and some rough human idols, in adoring attitude or playing on a small lyre.



TYPICAL OF THE RICH HARVEST OF GREEK POTTERY FOUND AT HAGIOS ILIAS: EXAMPLES FROM MANY HUNDREDS OF VASES OF EVERY SHAPE AND VARIETY, INCLUDING TWO FLAT-BOTTOMED, ONE RING-SHAPED, AND ONE WITH A NECK-SPOUT.

Photographs by Courtesy of Dr. Doro Levi.

It contained a large stone sarcophagus, whose cover, found leaning against the wall, had in ancient times been broken into two pieces, numerous urns identical with those of the *pitthos*-tombs, and each one enclosing the bones of a burnt body, and several other vases, altogether amounting to over 250. Metal objects, on the contrary, were very few. Two other similar but smaller graves had, unfortunately, been damaged by the falling of the ceiling.

The lively and brilliant art of this little town, lost in the heart of Crete and entirely surrounded by the earliest poor and rough Dorian settlements, cannot fail to awaken our admiration and our wonder, and stimulate our desire for deeper knowledge; nor can it fail to spur our efforts to explore further the ancient homes of these adventurous Greek tribes, endeavouring thus to lift the curtain of mystery that still veils the dark origins of the glorious Hellenic civilisation.

WHEN GREEK MET MINOAN IN CRETE: A WAR PERIOD; URN-BURIALS.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY COURTESY OF DR. DORO LEVI, OF THE ITALIAN SCHOOL AT ATHENS.



SHOWING (IN RIGHT FOREGROUND) SOME OF THE 160 *PITHOS* (URN) TOMBS DISCOVERED: EXCAVATIONS AT HAGIOS ILIAS, WITH THE BLEAK LASSITHI MOUNTAINS BEYOND.



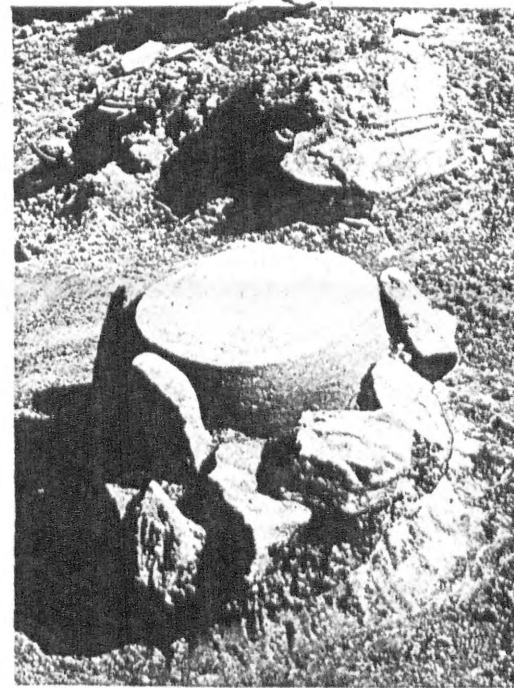
EVIDENCE OF WARFARE AFTER THE PEACEFUL MINOAN AGE IN CRETE: ONE OF THE ROUND-CORNER TOWERS OF THE FORT ON THE SUMMIT OF HAGIOS ILIAS.



URN-BURIAL IN ANCIENT CRETE: A TYPICAL *PITHOS* (SEPULCHRAL URN) CONTAINING VASES AND CREMATION ASHES.



CONTAINING VOTIVE VASES FOUND IN A TOMB CLOSE BY: A STONE REPOSITORY EXCAVATED AT HAGIOS ILIAS.



"PROTECTED ALL ROUND BY A CIRCULAR SUPPORT-WALL OF SMALL STONES": A PERFECTLY PRESERVED *PITHOS* TOMB (URN BURIAL).



ABOVE THE LARGEST *THOLOS* (CHAMBER) TOMB FOUND AT HAGIOS ILIAS: A CIRCULAR PAVED COURT, SHOWING THE HOLE OVER WHICH WAS PLACED A STONE SLAB FORMING THE TOP OF THE VAULT.



WITH A PILE OF BROKEN VOTIVE VASES, AS FOUND ON THE REMOVAL OF STONES FROM THE FALLEN CEILING: A SMALL *THOLOS* TOMB EXCAVATED AT HAGIOS ILIAS.

The remarkable discoveries by Italian archaeologists in Crete, described by Dr. Doro Levi in his article on the opposite page, were made within twenty miles of Knossos, the site of the great Minoan capital brought to light by Sir Arthur Evans, whose latest results were illustrated in our issues of October 25 and November 8. As Dr. Levi points out, the Italian researches throw fresh light on the obscure period of transition between the Minoan Age and the Greek colonisation of Crete. He believes that the first Greek invaders were Arcadians, descended from the Homeric Achæans who inhabited the Peloponnesos before the Dorian invasion.

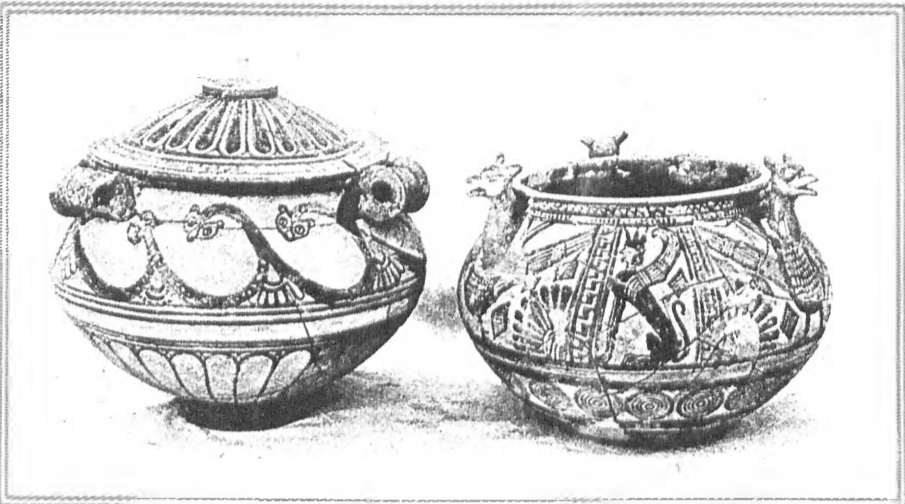
The presence of a fort on the summit of Hagios Ilias indicated a time of warfare, in contrast to the peacefulness of the preceding Minoan era, when there were practically no defences. Dr. Levi also notes that the two forms of burial—cremation and inhumation—found at Hagios Ilias indicate the contact of two different civilisations, Minoan and Greek. Cremation was represented in *pithos* (urn) tombs, while in the more elaborate *tholos* (chamber) tombs were found both urn-burials and inhumated corpses. Some remarkably well-preserved specimens of urn-burials are illustrated in the above photographs.

A GREAT DISCOVERY OF CRETAN VASES: "HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY COURTESY OF DR. DORO LEVI, OF THE ITALIAN SCHOOL AT ATHENS.



FROM THE IMMENSE HOARD OF POTTERY FOUND AT HAGIOS ILIAS: A LARGE DECORATED URN.



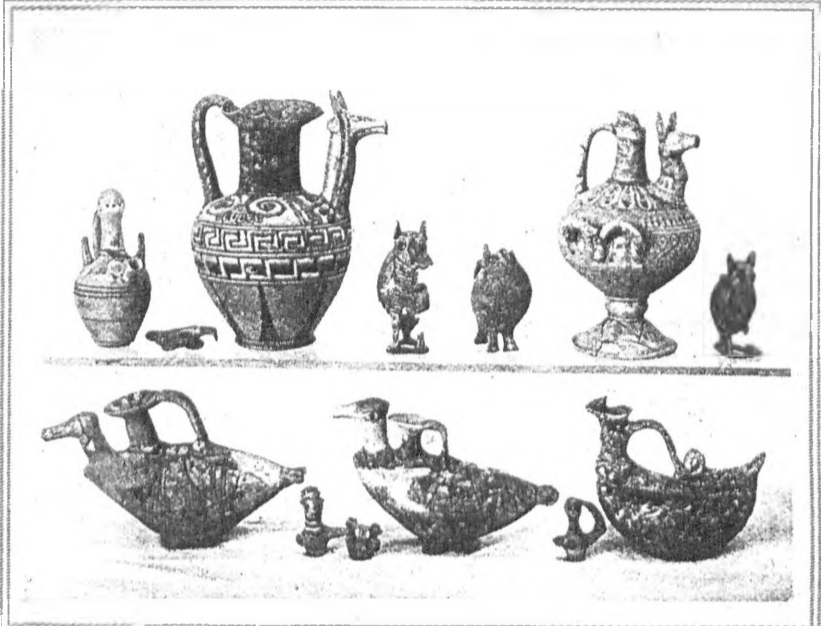
TWO LARGE BASINS: THE LEFT ONE DECORATED WITH LION-HEADED SERPENTS AND HAVING A LID; THE RIGHT, WITH GRIFFIN HEADS IN RELIEF AND A PAINTED SPHINX.



WITH ARTEMIS PERSICA, HOLDING A "TREE OF LIFE" IN EACH HAND, AND SACRED BIRDS: A LARGE URN.



HOLDING BETWEEN ITS PAWS A BOWL INTO WHICH WATER SPOUTED FROM A HOLE IN THE ANIMAL'S BREAST: A REMARKABLE FIGURE OF A LION, COUCHANT AND ROARING, FROM HAGIOS ILIAS, IN CRETE.



INCLUDING REPRESENTATIONS OF HORSES' HEADS, OWLS, AND OTHER BIRDS, AND SMALL HUMAN FIGURES (ONE PLAYING A LYRE): EXAMPLES FROM A WONDERFUL STORE OF POTTERY IN EVERY SHAPE AND VARIETY.



DECORATED WITH A LIFE-LIKE PAIR OF LOVERS AND (BELOW) LIONS CHASING ANTELOPES: A ROUND LONG-NECKED JUG.



ONE OF THE FEW METAL OBJECTS DISCOVERED AT HAGIOS ILIAS: A BRONZE LEBES (BOWL) DECORATED WITH A LION'S HEAD IN THE CENTRE.



DECORATED WITH LIONS, ANTELOPES, GRIFFINS, AND DUCKS: A BEAUTIFUL OINOCHOE (WINE-JAR) IN RHODIAN STYLE.

We illustrate here some of the most remarkable discoveries made at Hagios Ilias, in Crete, as described by Dr. Doro Levi on page 1204. "It was the pottery," he writes, "that provided the richest and most conspicuous harvest. Hundreds and hundreds of clay vases have been preserved, of every shape and variety, from the biggest jars to the smallest phials, and decorated with every kind of ornamentation, from elementary types reminding us of the Mycenaean and sub-Mycenaean style, through the dry and rigid designs of the decadent Geometric period, to the coloured and exuberant series of flowers and animals of the orientalising Proto-Corinthian and Corinthian vases, and, in the best examples,

even to the vivacious life-scenes precluding the Proto-Attic style. Among the best specimens may be mentioned a big conical urn which represents Artemis Persica, the oriental Mother Goddess, holding in each hand a 'Tree of Life' and flanked by her two sacred birds. . . . Two beautiful oinochoai of Rhodian style, with open trefoil mouth, have rows of lions, antelopes, griffins, and ducks. Another spherical jug, with lions pursuing antelopes in white on a dark background, shows on the high cylindrical neck a very graceful love scene, a boy caressing a girl on the chin." The other objects illustrated above are also described in Dr. Levi's article.