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F. H. Marshall

Excerpt

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DISCOVERY IN GREEK LANDS

CHAPTER I

THE EARLIER PREHISTORIC PERIOD (BEFORE 1000 B.C.)

GREEK legend had much to say about the earliest history of Crete, the long island which lies off the southern coast of Greece. The outstanding figure is Minos, lord of Knossos, for whom the cunning artificer Dædalos made the labyrinth, rendered famous by the cruelties of the bestial Minotaur, the courage of Theseus, and the clue of the devoted Ariadne. On the other hand, the historians of Greece found something more substantial than legend in the fame of Minos. To Thucydides he is the first possessor of a navy, master of most of the Ægean islands, destroyer of the scourge of piracy. Aristotle held the same opinion of him. Herodotus attributed a maritime empire to this king, and added that he met his death in an expedition to Sicily.

It is upon Knossos that such wonderful light

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has been thrown in recent years by the discoveries of Sir Arthur Evans, and these discoveries will first of all be briefly described. It will, however, soon become clear that Knossos is far from standing alone in this newly discovered world. In Crete itself several other sites showing the same civilization have been laid bare, while the Ægean island of Melos and the mainland of Greece have yielded remains of a similar character. In this sketch the term "Minoan" will be used to describe the civilization indicated by the remains discovered at Knossos and elsewhere, in so far as these belong to the period prior to the destruction of the great palace at Knossos, about 1450 B.C. In the period immediately succeeding, when (as will be shown) the centre of Ægean civilization is shifted to the mainland of Greece, the term "Mycenæan" will be used instead.

Knossos, the centre of the empire of Minos, lies about three and a half miles inland from the town of Candia on the northern coast of Crete. Sir A. Evans's excavations have shown that at least two palaces were built upon this site. Of the first, probably constructed about 2000 B.C., comparatively few traces remain. The second, dating most likely from between 1900 and 1700 B.C., was remodelled in the succeeding centuries,

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and was destroyed about 1450 B.C., probably, though not certainly, by invaders from without. As few traces only remain of the earlier palace, it will be well to confine ourselves to a very brief description of the light thrown by the later palace upon the character of Minoan civilization. The palace was built round a spacious oblong court, the north-eastern quarter consisting of store-rooms and offices (*e.g.* a room with an olive-press). On the south-eastern and western sides are dwelling and state-rooms, the most interesting of which is a small audience chamber with a high-backed throne of gypsum. In the south-eastern quarter is a series of large reception-rooms or "*megara*," the most important of which have been named by Sir A. Evans the Hall of Double Axes, the Hall of Colonnades, and the Queen's Megaron respectively. A striking feature of these halls is the system of lighting, by means of a light-well or shaft left open to the sky at one end of the room. Behind the western palace buildings is a remarkable series of store-rooms or magazines, which open upon a long corridor. In these were found numerous great jars (*pitthoi*), almost as high as a man, while the floors are honeycombed with pits, or cists, apparently used to contain treasure. One of these rooms is shown in Fig. 1. Fresco

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painting reached a high pitch of proficiency at Knossos. A singularly beautiful example shows a boy gathering crocuses, another a stalwart cupbearer, a third a boy and a girl leaping over the back of a bull. This last illustrates what seems to have been a favourite form of Minoan sport, for it is often represented on objects found on Minoan sites. Outside the northern gate of the palace is an open rectangular paved space some thirty by forty feet, with tiers of steps on the east and south sides, apparently for the accommodation of spectators. Between the steps is a bastion, perhaps a royal box. It has been conjectured that boxing contests or ceremonial dances took place in this arena.

Minoan religion has a sidelight cast upon it by the discovery in the western part of the palace of a series of objects in faïence connected with cults. Two figures of a snake-goddess are especially interesting. One, about fourteen inches high, has snakes on her arms and round her hips; another, about eight inches high to the neck, dressed in an elaborately flounced costume, is represented as holding snakes in her extended hands. See Fig. 2, where the head and left arm are restorations.

In the period of the earlier palace the Minoans had a system of picture writing. In the later

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FIG. I.—STORE-ROOM AND PITHOI AT KNOSSOS

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FIG. 2.—SNAKE-GODDESS FROM KNOSSOS

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palace numerous clay tablets have been found, incised with a form of linear writing. In neither case has the script been interpreted, although in the later writing a numerical system has been noted by the discoverer.

Such is a very summary description of these Minoan palaces. For Minoan history, however, the pottery discovered is all-important. It is this which has enabled Sir A. Evans to divide the civilization revealed into three main periods, each of which is again subdivided into three. This division is here given in tabular form, together with the leading characteristics of the various classes of pottery.

APPROXIMATE DATE	DIVISION	TYPE OF POTTERY
1. 2800-2600 B.C.	Early Minoan I.	{ Unpainted wares, rough or polished. A little dark ware with white-filled incisions. Hand-polished ware continued. Sometimes a lustrous red-black slip is substituted, occasionally covered with geometric ornament in cream-white pigment. The light-ground vases frequently have geometric decoration in dark pigment.
2. 2600-2400 B.C.	Early Minoan II.	
3. 2400-2200 B.C.	Early Minoan III.	
4. 2200-2100 B.C.	Middle Minoan I.	{ In this period there is an abrupt transition from simple geometric ware to elaborate monochrome and polychrome vases (Fig. 3).
5. 2100-1900 B.C.	Middle Minoan II.	
6. 1900-1700 B.C.	Middle Minoan III.	

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APPROXIMATE DATE	DIVISION	TYPE OF POTTERY
7. 1700-1500	B.C. Late Minoan I.	In this period the monochrome style becomes general. Naturalistic motives predominate, which in later examples degenerate into conventionalism.
8. 1500-1450	B.C. Late Minoan II.	
9. 1450-1200	B.C. Late Minoan III.	

To illustrate the elaborate pottery of the Middle Minoan period, three cups of the brightly coloured ware known as Kamáres are here figured (Fig. 3). These particular examples are from Phæstos, but the ware takes its name from the Kamáres cave on the southern slopes of Mount Ida, where it was first discovered. This cave was further explored by members of the British School at Athens in the spring of 1913. Many fresh specimens of pottery were obtained, but they do not add materially to our previous knowledge. It is probable that the cave was used as a sanctuary, and that the remains are those of offerings. The Kamáres fabric is distinguished by its wonderful delicacy, while the effective character of the decoration, though not its brilliant colouring, may be judged from the illustration. A specimen of the fine pottery of the Late Minoan I. period, the period when the great palace at Knossos was at its height, shows the predominating plant and aquatic elements of this epoch. The three vases figured

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FIG. 3.—KAMÁRES WARE FROM PHÆSTOS

FIG. 4.—LATE MINOAN I. WARE FROM PALÆKASTRO

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FIG. 5.—'HARVESTER' VASE FROM HAGIA TRIADA

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were found at Palækastros in East Crete (Fig. 4).

A remarkably well-preserved Minoan town has been excavated by the Americans at GOURNIÁ, on the north-east coast of the island. Built on a ridge about a quarter of a mile from the sea, the town, mainly of the first Late Minoan period, consists of an acropolis, or citadel, with a palace upon it, and of a lower town which occupies the slope. The most remarkable feature is presented by the houses, which on an average have six to eight rooms. The main door is level with the street and opens upon a paved ante-chamber, from which several doors lead into the ground-floor rooms. There was an upper storey and (generally) a basement connected with a back-door on the hill slope.

Near the mid-southern coast of Crete lies the town of PHÆSTOS, some 300 feet above the plain. Here Italian excavators have found two large palaces, the earlier dating from about 2200 B.C. and lasting on to about 1700 B.C., the later, which is on the same site, falling between 1700 and 1500 B.C. Thus they roughly correspond in date to the Minoan palaces at Knossos already described. The later palace at Phæstos has a large central court, some 175 by 150 feet, approached by an imposing flight

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of steps. The court is surrounded by columns alternately round and square, with royal apartments, baths and other chambers opening from it. As a whole, few objects of importance have been found in these palaces, but in 1908, on a level dating from about 1800 B.C., a remarkable terra-cotta disk some six inches in diameter was discovered. It is impressed with pictographic characters arranged in the form of a spiral. Various attempts at the decipherment of this unknown script have been made, but with little success. All that can be said with any confidence is that the writing is most likely of a syllabic character, *i. e.* each pictogram represents a syllable and not a letter, and that the origin is to be sought in Asia Minor rather than in Crete.

Between Phæstos and the sea a royal villa has been excavated at HAGIA TRIADA. This villa belonged to the lords of Phæstos, and attained the height of its prosperity between 1700 and 1500 B.C. It has yielded a remarkable series of objects of artistic interest. There are vases of carved steatite, originally overlaid with gold leaf. One shows a singularly spirited procession of men carrying long pronged implements; they march two abreast, headed by a priest in a curious cope. One of their number carries an Egyptian sistrum, or rattle. The procession is

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fairly clearly of a religious character, but no satisfying explanation has hitherto been given. It is usually known as the Harvester Vase, and the interpretation thereby implied is at least as plausible as any other (see Fig. 5). Another vase, less fine in execution, shows a series of boxing scenes and bull-contests arranged in friezes. A third has a relief of warriors with huge shields of ox-hide and two figures of remarkable spirit, perhaps a chieftain addressing his subordinate officer. There are several good frescoes, including one representing a cat stalking a pheasant, clearly under Egyptian influence. A limestone sarcophagus, of a later date (about 1400 B.C.), is decorated with paintings depicting persons bearing offerings to what is probably the tomb of a dead man, a priestess pouring a libation, and the sacrifice of a bull. The short ends are occupied with chariots. All the scenes may have relation to the person buried in the sarcophagus.

Another Minoan town in Crete which deserves mention is PALÆKASTRO, in the eastern part of the island, excavated by members of the British School at Athens between 1902 and 1905. An early town from which some of the brightly coloured pottery called Kamáres (cf. Fig. 3) has been obtained, was destroyed about 2000 B.C.

The place, however, reached its greatest

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prosperity in the period from about 1500-1450 B.C., and it is to this period that most of the pottery belongs (cf. Fig. 4). The most noteworthy vases are large funnels, or "fillers," with marine subjects painted on them, and some carved ivory plaques. At Petsofá, near Palækastros, a group of terra-cotta figurines, probably votive, has been found, representing animals, human limbs, and men and women, the last in some cases wearing hats of a remarkably modern type. The date of these terra-cottas is probably between 1900 and 1700 B.C. Zakro, about eight miles south of Palækastros, has yielded a large number of interesting Minoan clay sealings.

It has been already said (p. 2) that Minoan remains have come to light in places outside Crete. The island of Melos has furnished such a site in *PHYLÁKOPI* on the north-east coast. This place was excavated by members of the British School at Athens between 1896 and 1899, and again in 1910-11. There are marked traces of intercourse between Melos and Knossos, though it is clear that the site of Knossos was occupied at a far earlier date than that of Phylákopi. Three cities are distinguished on the latter site, but the second and the third show most connection with Crete. One feature of this Melian city is not shared by Knossos,