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Excerpt

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PRIMITIVE PICTOGRAPHS
AND A PRAE-PHOENICIAN SCRIPT, FROM
CRETE AND THE PELOPONNESE.

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PRIMITIVE PICTOGRAPHS AND SCRIPT

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PRIMITIVE PICTOGRAPHS AND A PRAE-PHOENICIAN SCRIPT
FROM CRETE AND THE PELOPONNESE.

§ I.—CRETAN DISCOVERIES.

IN the absence of abiding monuments the fact has too generally been lost sight of, that throughout what is now the civilized European area there must once have existed systems of picture-writing such as still survive among the more primitive races of mankind. To find such 'pictographs' in actual use—the term is used in its most comprehensive sense to cover carvings on rocks or other materials whether or not actually overlaid with colour—we must now go further afield. Traces of such may indeed be seen on the rude engravings of some megalithic monuments like that of Gavr Innis, on the rock carvings of Denmark, or the mysterious figures known as the *Maraviglie* wrought on a limestone cliff in the heart of the Maritime Alps, to which may be added others quite recently discovered in the same region.

In Lapland, where designs of this character ornamented the troll-drums of the magicians till within a recent period, survivals of some of the traditional forms may still be found to the present day, engraved on the bowls of their reindeer-horn spoons. Of actual rock-paintings perfectly analogous to those of Cherokees or Zulus, I have myself observed an example—consisting of animals and swastika-like figures painted probably by early Slavonic hands on the face of a rock overhanging a sacred grotto in a fiord of the Bocche di Cattaro.

But the perishable nature of the materials on which picture-writing, having for most part only a temporary value, was usually wrought has been fatal to the survival of primitive European pictographs on any large scale. If we had before us the articles of bark and hide and wood of early man in this quarter of the globe or could still see the tattoo marks on his skin we should have a very different idea of the part once played by picture-writing on European soil. As it is, it is right that the imagination should supply the deficiency of existing evidence.

In the areas embraced by the older civilizations such as Egypt, Babylonia and China, a different kind of influence has been at work, by which the void caused by the disappearance of the more primitive materials may in a great measure be filled up. For there the early pictographic elements, such as we

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still find them among savage races, were, in the hands of priestly and official castes, developed into a more complicated and exact system of writing, by which however we are enabled in many cases to trace back the original forms of the object selected. The same development from the simple pictographic to the hieroglyphic or quasi-alphabetic stage might naturally have been expected to have taken place in more than one European area had it not been cut short by the invasion of the fully equipped Phoenician system of writing.

Even as it is however, it must be allowed that there are strong *a priori* reasons for believing that in the Greek lands where civilization put forth its earliest blossoms on European soil, some such parallel evolution in the art of writing must have been in the course of working itself out.

For we now know that in the South-Eastern part of our Continent there existed long before the days of direct Phoenician contact an independent form of culture which already as early as the first half of the second millennium before our era might be regarded as in many respects the equal contemporary of those of Egypt and Babylonia. In view of the extraordinary degree of artistic and mechanical development reached by the representatives of what is now conveniently known as the Mycenaean civilization—at least as early, approximately speaking, as the seventeenth century, B.C.—and the wide ramifications of their commerce, is it conceivable, it may be asked, that in the essential matter of writing they were so far behind their rivals on the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean?

There is moreover a further consideration which tends to make the absence of any system of writing among the Mycenaean peoples still more improbable. At the dawn of history Asia Minor, whether we regard the predominant elements of its population from the point of view of race or of culture, may be said to belong to Europe. Its area from the earliest times of which we have any record was largely in the occupation of the great Thraco-Phrygian race and its offshoots. Its prehistoric remains, as far as we know them from Cyprus to the Troad, fit on to those of a large archaeological area, the continuation of which may be traced over the island stepping-stones of the Aegean to the mainland of Greece, while in the other direction kindred forms extend along the Danubian system to reappear amongst the pile-dwellings of Switzerland and Carniola, the *terre-mare* of the Po valley and even in Ligurian caves. But it is on the Eastern borders of this wide field of primitive culture that recent researches have brought to light the principal seats of the higher form of early civilization conveniently known as Hittite. Living in the Syrian and Cappadocian regions in the immediate proximity of upper Mesopotamia, and almost in the highways as it were of old Chaldean culture, its representatives yet show independent characteristics and traditions, the sources of which seem to be drawn from the North or West. And of these one of the most noteworthy is the possession of an original system of hieroglyphic writing, the relics of which are scattered from the banks of the Orontes to the Western shores of Anatolia. At a later date

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again we find the Greeks of Cyprus and the inhabitants of a large tract of Asia Minor in the possession of syllabic scripts altogether distinct from the Phoenician alphabet.

When it is once realized how largely the early civilization of the Aegean Islands and even the mainland of Greece was evolved out of similar elements to those of Asia Minor, it must certainly seem surprising that on this side no system of writing belonging to prae-Phoenician times should as yet have been clearly ascertained. The geographical contiguity to Anatolia, and the early trade relations which can be shown to have existed between the Aegean Islands and the valley of the Nile would assuredly, it might be thought, have given an impulse to the higher development of whatever primitive form of picture-writing was already to be found amongst the inhabitants of this Mediterranean region. It is impossible indeed to suppose that this European population was so far below even the Red Indian stage of culture as not to have largely resorted to pictography as an aid to memory and communication. And—even if an existing system was not perfected under the influence of foreign example—the race which laid the arts of Egypt and Western Asia under such heavy contribution was at least capable of borrowing and adapting a system of writing.

It is true that Schliemann's great discoveries at Mycenae produced nothing that could be safely interpreted as a form of script. The objects seen in the field of many of the ordinary Mycenaean gems—the so-called 'island-stones'—are simply inserted as the space left by the principal design suggests, and are primarily of a decorative character—and due to the *horror vacui* of primitive art. Nevertheless, especially when we see a part standing for a whole—as a branch for a tree or the head of an animal for the animal itself—it may be fairly said that many of these gems do bear the impress of people familiar with the expedients of primitive picture-writing, such as we find it still in so many parts of the world. The lentoid and amygdaloid gems in question did not, as we now know, serve the purpose of seals, but were simply ornamental beads worn round the wrist or neck.¹ Like the oriental periapts, however, worn in the same manner at the present day, they may often have been intended to serve as amulets or talismans; and both the principal type of the intaglio and the smaller or abbreviated forms introduced into the field may have possessed something beyond a mere artistic significance. Still more is this likely to have been implied in the case of the engraved designs on the besils of the gold rings from the Mycenaean graves which seem actually to have served the purpose of signets. It certainly is not unreasonable to suppose that in this case some of the smaller objects in the field may have had a conventional religious meaning, and that they were in fact ideographs taken from a recognized hieroglyphic code. The bulls' heads and lions' scalps, the ears of corn and double

¹ See Tsountas, *Ἀνασκαφαὶ τάφων ἐν Μυκῆναις*. Ἐφ. Ἀρχ. 1888, p. 175. There are probably, as will be seen below, some exceptions

to this rule in case of some Cretan lentoid gems presenting groups of symbolic figures.

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axe certainly suggest that we have here to deal with symbols of divinity, perhaps standing for the divinity itself, or ideas of cult and sacrifice,—the latter form of symbolism being well brought out by the gold ornaments representing oxes' heads with a double axe between the horns. In the same way, to take an example from the practice of modern savages, a drawing of eyes and beak stood among the Iroquois for the Thunder-Bird or a rayed head for a Spirit among the Ojibwas. The whole of later Greek symbolism may in fact be regarded as a survival, maintained by religious conservatism, from a wide field of primitive pictography. The figure that stands as the personal badge of the names of individuals at times actually appears as the equivalent of the written form of the name, as when a monetary magistrate called Leôn places a *lion* on his dies. The same symbolic script is frequent in the rendering of city names, one of the most interesting examples being found on a coin of Mesembria where the part of the civic legend signifying day is supplied by a *swastika*—the emblem of the midday sun.²

The symbols on the Mycenaean seals are themselves of too isolated occurrence to be used straight away as examples of a hieroglyphic system—though there seem to me to be good reasons for supposing that some at least among them did fit on to such a system. But more recently one or two objects have been found at Mycenae itself and in Mycenaean deposits elsewhere which are calculated more effectually to shake some of the preconceived notions of archaeologists as to the non-existence in Greece of a prae-Phoenician system of writing. The most important of these are the handle of a stone vase apparently of a local material (Fig. 1) found at Mycenae, which has



FIG. 1.—SIGNS ON VASE-HANDLE, MYCENAE.

four, or perhaps five, signs engraved upon it, and the handle of a clay amphora from a chambered tomb in the lower town of Mycenae with three



FIG. 2.—SIGNS ON AMPHORA-HANDLE, MYCENAE.

characters (Fig. 2). Single signs have also been noticed on the handles of two amphoras of the same form as the last found in the Tholos tomb of

² P. Gardner, *Num. Chron.*, 1880, p. 59; Head, *Hist. Num.*, 237.

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Menidi,³ on a three-handled vase from Nauplia⁴ and a stone pestle from Mycenae.⁵ Dr. Tsountas in describing these finds lays stress on their occurrence in two cases in groups of three and four respectively, and reasonably asks whether we have not here to deal with some form of writing. Professor Petrie again has discovered a series of isolated symbols on what he considers to have been fragments of early Aegean pottery discovered by him at Gurob in a deposit which he assigns to the period of the Twelfth Dynasty, and again at Kahun amongst Eighteenth Dynasty relics.⁶

Notwithstanding these indications, however, the last writer on the Mycenaean and early Aegean culture, M. Perrot, sums up the evidence as follows: 'The first characteristic which attracts the historian's notice when he tries to define the prae-Homeric civilization is that it is a stranger to the use of writing. It knows neither the ideographic signs possessed by Egypt and Chaldaea nor the alphabet properly so called which Greece was afterwards to borrow from Phoenicia.' He admits indeed that some of the marks recently observed on the vase-handles bear resemblance to letters, either Greek or Cypriote, but observes that they do not seem to form words, and that they are perhaps nothing more than the marks of the potter or the proprietor, or ignorant copies of Phoenician or Asianic characters. 'As at present advised,' he concludes, 'we can continue to affirm that for the whole of this period, nowhere, neither in the Peloponnese nor in Greece proper, no more on the buildings than on the thousand objects of luxury or domestic use that have come out of the tombs, has there anything been discovered which resembles any kind of writing.'⁷

The evidence which I am now able to bring forward will, I venture to think, conclusively demonstrate that as a matter of fact an elaborate system of writing did exist within the limits of the Mycenaean world, and moreover that two distinct phases of this art are traceable among its population. The one is pictographic in character like Egyptian hieroglyphics, the other linear and quasi-alphabetic, much resembling the Cypriote and Asianic syllabaries.

In the course of a visit to Greece in the spring of 1893 I came across some small three- and four-sided stones perforated along their axis, upon which had been engraved a series of remarkable symbols. The symbols occurred in groups on the facets of the stones, and it struck me at once that they belonged to a hieroglyphic system. They were however quite distinct from

³ Tsountas, *Μηκῆναι* p. 213. One has a sign resembling the Greek Π, the other, ≡ the Cypriote, *pa*, *ba*, or *pha*.

⁴ *Ἀρχαιολογικὸν Δελτίον*, 1892, p. 73. It was discovered by Dr. Stais in a tomb of the *Pronoia*. On each handle was engraved a sign like the Greek Η but with offshoots from the top of the upright strokes.

⁵ *Πρακτικὰ τῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρίας*, 1889, p. 19.

⁶ See below, p. 348.

⁷ Perrot et Chipiez, *La Grèce primitive: l'Art Mycénien*, p. 985. In describing the Knôsian

marks (see below, p. 282) M. Perrot had previously admitted (*op. cit.* 461) that the Cypriote signs may have had an Aegean extension 'during a certain time.' But the subsequent passage on p. 985 retracts this admission as far as the Mycenaean period is concerned. Dr. Reichel suggests (*Homerische Waffen*, p. 142) that the linear designs below the combatants on the silver fragment from Mycenae (*Ἐφ. Ἀρχ.* 1891, Pl. II. 2) are signs of an unknown script. But the figures in question represent throwing-sticks (*J.H.S.* xiii. (1892-3), p. 199, n. 11^a).

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Egyptian in character, and though they seemed to show a nearer approach to Hittite forms it was evident that they belonged to an independent series. My inquiries succeeded in tracing these to a Cretan source. Knowing of the considerable collection of 'island' and other early gems in the Museum of Berlin, I addressed myself to Dr. Furtwängler, mentioning my discovery and asking whether any specimens of the forms and characters indicated existed in the Imperial Museum. In response to my inquiries Dr. Furtwängler very courteously sent me several impressions from similarly formed stones in the Berlin Museum, presenting symbols which fitted on to and supplemented the series that I had already obtained. In this case too the source of the stones, as far as it was known, turned out again to be Crete. The impression of a gem taken at Athens some years since by Professor Sayce and kindly placed by him at my disposal supplied a new piece of evidence, and I found that an unclassified four-sided stone in the Ashmolean Museum, which had been brought back by Mr. Greville Chester from Greece, noted by him as having been found at Sparta but really from Crete,^{7b} was engraved with symbols belonging to the same series as the others.

The evidence as a whole however clearly pointed to Crete as the principal source of these hieroglyphic forms, and I therefore determined to follow up my investigations on Cretan soil. Landing at Candia early in March 1894, I made my way round the whole centre and East of the island,—including the mountainous districts of Ida and Dikta, the extensive central plain of Messarà and the sites of over twenty ancient cities. The number of relics illustrative of the prehistoric periods of Cretan culture that I was thus able to collect was surprisingly great, and in particular the evidence daily accumulated itself of the very important part played by the Mycenaean form of civilization in Cretan story. And, in what regarded the more special object of my quest, my researches were well rewarded by the discovery *in situ* of traces of a prae-Phoenician system of writing in the island, of which two distinct phases were perceptible, one pictorial and hieroglyphic, the other linear and quasi-alphabetic.

From indications obtained at Candia I was led more particularly to investigate the Eastern part of the island and the land which to the borders of the historic period was still occupied by the Eteocretes or indigenous Cretan stock. Here by the site of Praesos, their principal city, has been discovered a remarkable inscription,⁸ which, though written in archaic Greek characters, belongs to an unknown language which we may reasonably regard as the original speech of the Cretan natives before the days of the Greek colonization. This fact by itself renders investigations into the antiquities of this easternmost district of special ethnographic value, and here too may some day be discovered the remains of the shrine of the Diktaean Zeus, mentioned by Strabo as existing in the territory of Praesos.

At Praesos itself, which lies on a conical limestone hill near the modern village of Vavéles I observed, besides its primitive walls of rude horizontal

^{7b} See below, p. 136.⁸ See below, pp. 354, 355.

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and polygonal masonry, fragments of very early pottery, some of which must be classed with the ceramic relics of the first prehistoric city of Hissarlik, while others belonged to the Mycenaean style. I further obtained from a peasant on the spot a prism-shaped stone of the kind of which I was in search, presenting engraved characters (see below, Fig. 29), and subsequently from the same district three other three- and four-sided stones with linear and hieroglyphic symbols (see below, Figs. 22, 26, 38). On the site called Palaekastro, the akropolis of which lies on the easternmost cove of the island, opposite the islet of Grandes, and which represents another ancient city, perhaps Grammion, that was situate between the territories of Praesos and Itanos in the same Eteocretan region, I secured another four-sided stone (see below, Fig. 35), presenting no less than fifteen hieroglyphic symbols. Two other stones of the same pictographic class found in Eastern Crete (see below, Figs. 23, 24) also came into my possession, and I further succeeded in tracing to the province of Siteia, in which the sites of both Praesos and Itanos are included, two interesting examples which I had observed in the collection of the Archaeological Society in the Polytechnion at Athens (see below, Figs. 32, 36). In gems of the ordinary Mycenaean class I found the whole of this Eteocretan district to be specially prolific.

In my search after these minor relics of antiquity, often, it may be remarked, of greater archaeological importance than far more imposing monuments, I was greatly aided by a piece of modern Cretan superstition. The perforated gems and seal-stones, so characteristic of Mycenaean and still earlier times, are known to the Cretan women as *γαλόπετρας* or 'milk-stones,' and are worn round their necks as charms of great virtue especially in time of child-bearing. It was thus possible by making a house-to-house visitation in the villages to obtain a knowledge of a large number of early engraved stones, and though I was not always able to secure the objects themselves, on account of the magic power that was supposed to attach to them, I was in nearly all cases enabled to carry off an impression of the stone. Engraved stones of other types, to be described more in detail below, with pictographic symbols, were procured by me from the neighbourhood of Knôsos and the Messarà district, and others of uncertain provenience were obtained in Candia.

The seal-stones with the linear type of symbols I found to have an equally wide distribution in the island. Two stones from the Praesos district (Figs. 29, 36), of the same angular form as those with the pictographic characters, present symbols of this 'alphabetic' class. They were the first of this type that I came across, and the discovery was the more gratifying that, on the ground of distinct resemblances in outline between simplified forms of some of the hieroglyphs observed by me in the preceding year and certain Cypriote characters, I had already ventured to predict that the pictorial forms would be found to fit on to a linear syllabary like the Asianic.⁹ But

⁹ I made this forecast in a brief announcement of the existence of the Cretan hieroglyphs communicated by me to the Hellenic Society in 1893.

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here such linear characters were actually occurring, and engraved moreover on triangular and quadrangular stones identical with those presenting the pictorial types.

In the case of these quasi-alphabetic forms I was able to ascertain their application to other objects and materials. Of all the remains of ancient cities that I visited during my Cretan journey the most wonderful were those of Goulàs, as the site is at present known, lying on and between two peninsular heights, a few miles away from the sea on the Eastern side of the Province of Mirabello. Its natural haven would have been the port of St. Nicolas, in ancient times the harbour town of Latos, but the remains at Goulàs itself are, so far as I was able to observe them, so exclusively prehistoric that there seems no reason to suppose that it was ever occupied by a later Greek settlement. The remains themselves are stupendous. Wall rises within wall, terrace above terrace, and within the walls, built of the same massive blocks of local limestone in rudely horizontal tiers, the lower part of the walls of the houses and buildings are still traceable throughout. The site had been observed by Spratt,¹⁰ but so incompletely was it known that I discovered here a second and higher akropolis with remains of primitive buildings on the summit, one containing, besides a fore-court, a chamber with *antae* recalling the ground-plan of more than one Megaron of the sixth or Mycenaean stratum of Hissarlik.¹¹ The whole site abounds with primaeval relics, stone vessels of early 'Aegean type,' bronze weapons and Mycenaean gems, of which I secured either the original or the impressions of no less than seventeen examples. In the mass of remains existing above ground, the ruins of Goulàs exceed those of any prehistoric site, either of Greece or Italy, and there cannot be a doubt that we are here in presence of one of the principal centres of the Mycenaean world.

Whilst exploring the remains of this unknown city a most remarkable piece of epigraphic evidence came across my path. A peasant who owned a little cultivated patch below the Northern akropolis, near the ruinous Byzantine Church of Hagios Andonis, pointed out a spot where he had just discovered three ancient relics which he handed over to me. One was a Mycenaean lentoid gem of cornelian, the chief design of which was a two-handled cup, the copy no doubt of a golden original, beside which in the field of the intaglio was a rayed sun and a spray of foliage. The second object was a terracotta ox (Fig. 3) of a type common in late Mycenaean deposits throughout the island, similar examples having been found in the cave of the Idaean Zeus, in that of Psychro in the heart of Mt. Lasethe and in another grotto near Sybrita in company with early bronzes. The third object was a clay cup (Fig. 4) which looked as if it had originally

¹⁰ Spratt (*Travels in Crete*, ii. 129 *seqq.*) wrongly identified Goulàs with the ancient Oleros, the site of which is now known to be at Messeleri (Halbherr), also confusing it with Olous (Elunta).

¹¹ See Dörpfeld, *Troja*, 1893, p. 15 *seqq.* and

Pl. II. VI. A, VI. B, VI. C, and VI. G. From the recurrence of the ground-plan Dr. Dörpfeld rightly observes that the first-discovered foundations VI. A, like the others, rather represent a *Megaron* than a *Temple*.