

THE DOMESTIC REMAINS OF ANCIENT EGYPT.¹

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It is but lately that the varied extent of the history of Egypt has been realized. Viewed through the writings of the Greek historians, Egyptian history was simply a confused tale of strange events, belonging to an ungenial people; they did not sympathise with it, or seek to understand it; and we have scarcely known it but through them. We have not yet got beyond calling Egyptian gods and kings by the Greek perversions of their names. And though Tahuti is not disguised by the name of "the Egyptian Hermes," still Osiris and Nephthys, Cheops and Amenophis, are more often heard than Asiri and Nebhat, Khufu and Amenhotep. But until this Greek veil is cast off, we cannot expect to realize a civilization which differed as much from that of Strabo and Juvenal, as the British chieftain Cunobelin differed from the Cymbeline of the Elizabethan stage.

To the Greek, and to the modern Englishman who trusts him, everything before Psamtik of the twenty-sixth dynasty, in the seventh century B.C., was a mist, out of which only a few heroic figures rose; Sesostris served as the great name to whom all great deeds were attributed, like the Iskander of mediæval romances. The idea of a succession of most different conditions and characteristics, of a continuous art-history, and of developed and proscribed creeds, was lost, by reason of the mere strangeness of the whole people.

We need to become imbued with the spirit and feeling of a nation, before we can comprehend it; we ridicule what we do not understand, and despise that we cannot perceive. That a true sense of Egyptian art and ideas is

¹ Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, Nov. 2nd, 1882.

so little felt in England is, perhaps, largely due to the caricatures of it that are placed before our eyes continually.

In one of the latest compilations published, there is scarcely a head such as the poorest Egyptian artist would have drawn; and the illustrations are of the pseudo-Egyptian style, like that of the great French expedition plates, or the popular sphinx letterweight. It is to the originals in museums, and to photographs of other remains, that we should turn for correct examples.

Though the long extent and chequered vicissitudes of Egyptian history are now being read from the monuments, yet a stratum of it is as yet scarcely touched, that of domestic remains. The brilliancy of the workmanship, and the interest of the written history of Egypt, on its temples and palaces, have attracted the whole attention of the literary explorers who have worked in the country. The remains of ordinary life have scarcely been noticed, and the conditions of the bulk of the population have been nearly unknown.

To realise more distinctly the sequence and variety of the changes in Egypt, we may compare it with a country whose developments are most familiar to us. Italy shows a near parallel to Egypt in its art history, and a resemblance in not a few of its political changes. The scale of its chronology, too, is not dissimilar; and if we say that each of the parallel epochs that we note, occur in Egypt about 2000 or 1500 years before they occur in Italy, it will give a general clue, that will not outstep the most moderate requirements of the antiquity of Egyptian civilization. In describing the domestic remains then, we will briefly observe the broad resemblances in the history of art and government in the two countries.

The first known epoch of each country—that of the first six dynasties in Egypt, and of the Etruscans in Italy—is a period of great works, and of fearless enterprises; which have never been rivalled by later designers. Wide-spread drainage works and dams, needed to make the land habitable and fertile, were the first task of civilization in both lands; and in stonework, the pyramids of Egypt are as much beyond other remains in the boldness of their design as are the rock tunnels of Etruria.

The first epoch was also in both lands essentially an age

of rock tombs and monumental remains ; the people are only known to us through their death ; neither palaces nor dwellings remain ; only tombs and sepulchres, corpses and trinkets, are left to shew their life by the adornments of their death.

The relations of the working classes to the rulers are but little known. It is certain that the great nobles were great not merely by titles, but by possessions ; they owned large agricultural and pastoral farms, with thousands of cattle and hundreds of thousands of birds, breeding and training the domestic animals still tame, and many others now lost to man's control ; and they reclaimed lands from the swamps that then existed ; thus they employed a large number of dependants. Besides this, they carried on all requisite trades on their own resources, and had their private carpenters, boat builders, fishers, potters, coffin makers, goldsmiths, glassblowers, musicians and dancers. Thus a great part of the population, if not all, was organised under the direction of the nobles ; and not unfrequently a man of ability rose in early life from a lower station, probably by patronage, married a noble lady, and took his position among the favoured officers of the court.

There is no village yet known of this age, and it seems probable that the inhabitants lived in the farms, on mounds above the high Nile, as at present. The ancient sites would therefore be beneath the present surface of deposited Nile mud ; and perhaps by trenching into the village mounds about Memphis, we might open up one of the primæval settlements. But up on the hills there are remains of the working classes, which have been hitherto unnoticed. In the mounds of masons' waste, which were thrown out around the pyramids of Gizeh during their erection, there are, besides string, wood and charcoal, many pieces of the pottery of the fourth dynasty ; the best of this is of excellent quality, and the coarser ware is sound, though rough. The subject of Egyptian pottery is too wide to discuss now, and I hope before long to treat of it as a whole. Another most interesting relic of the working classes is the large barrack behind the second pyramid. This I uncovered in parts, and found there ninety-one galleries built of rough stone ; each gallery

about ninety feet long, nine and a half wide, and six or seven feet high. Their total length being over a mile and a half, these would suffice to house about four thousand men. The walls are about four feet thick, plastered with hard Nile mud and stone dust; there is a well laid floor of the same, and the roofing was probably of thatch, with mud plastering like modern Egyptian roofs.

In this first period wars were almost unknown; and only occasional troubles with neighbouring tribes diverted the national labour from monumental work.

The most important difference in these earliest ages in Egypt and Italy is that the Egyptian sculpture was at its highest point in this period; the earlier the remains the finer the art in Egypt: whereas in Italy, Etruscan sculpture, though often very lifelike, is inferior to later work.

After this first and glorious age came a dreary time, during which social wars in Egypt, from the seventh to the eleventh dynasties, preceded the great foreign invasion of the Hyksos, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth dynasties. In Italy, however, the great Gallic invasion preceded the social war. But though the political order is thus different, the art history has some resemblance in its separation from earlier work, and its beginning the style which continuously developed into the best known period.

The flourishing but brief epoch of the twelfth dynasty, in the midst of this confusion, is remarkable for its novelty and its diversity from the old style. The statues are like those of later times, though more elegant. Pillars and columns are decorated and reckoned as an essential feature of design; and the ruling ideas of work have passed for ever from wood and rock, to the more strictly architectural notion of building. All the earlier works were hewn in rock and carved in wood, or were imitations of such labours; at Beni Hassan, on the contrary, though the tombs are rock-hewn, the features shew them to be designed from buildings; the clustered columns, the abaci, and the beams they support, though all in one piece, are evidences that hewn stone building was the ideal before the designer's eye.

After this long period of confusion, from the seventh to the seventeenth dynasty, in which but one bright

interval appears, there opens the great era of foreign conquest and richly ornamented art, like that of the Roman Empire. The eighteenth dynasty introduces a richness, yet purity of decoration, with a trace of the old severity in it; which, in its glorious transition, is strikingly like the work of the early Empire under the Twelve Cæsars. It was a period of rapidly increasing wealth and power, of the establishment of regular foreign trade, and of the erection of splendid buildings, as much distinguished by their taste as by their size. The character of the works that are left to us is also very similar to those of the first century in Italy; they are not very numerous, but are of every variety. Temples are for the first time preserved to us, ruined, yet unaltered by later work; monuments and tombs are not so numerous as in later times; and if Italy has an unchanged town in Pompeii, so has Egypt an unchanged town of this period at Tel el Amarna, quite pure from remains of succeeding ages; unaltered, and arrested in history, not by a natural, but by a religious revolution. The site of this town of King Khuenaten is preserved owing to its having been built on the desert, so that cultivation, and Nile inundations, have not interfered with it; and there now stand the long streets of ruined houses, with heaps of broken pottery in them, as they were left when the city was deserted before the Hebrew exodus. The finest houses remaining of this, or indeed of any period, are at Memphis. There a large quarter of the ancient city has been but little demolished, owing to the massiveness of its walls; and houses may still be seen with their three stories marked out by the holes for the flooring beams.

The most imposing period in the history of both Egypt and Italy was the time of the greatest foreign wars, and the most extended dominion; under Ramessu the Second in one, and Trajan in the other land. About the nineteenth dynasty is also shewn a taste for foreign objects and names; much like the fashion in Rome during the Empire, when Caracalla was named from his Gallic cloak, and Elagabalus from his foreign worship of the stone—El Gabal. Of this period a fine piece of popular building remains in the enormous barracks for the garrison which Ramessu II maintained around his palace at Thebes.

The arrangement of this is most clearly seen by looking down from the precipices of the Theban hills upon the temple-strewn plain below. Around both sides and the back of the great palace known as the Ramesseum is then seen a mass of brickwork, which must have enclosed it on all sides but the front. This is mainly ruined now, but the parts still perfect shew it to have been a series of arched galleries or tunnels of brickwork. These tunnels are of considerable length, and twelve feet two inches to twelve feet nine inches wide; the arch nine feet high (parabolic) and the walls about seven feet in height; but none of them clear of rubbish. The thickness of the arch is twenty-nine inches in four courses; and it is perforated along the crown by round holes at intervals of twenty feet. The arrangement of these galleries around the Ramesseum shews them to be about coeval with it; and the age is put beyond doubt by Lepsius finding the bricks stamped with the name of Ramessu II. One of the best authorities agrees that they are of this period, but supposes them to be store-houses. We know, however, that a large garison was stationed here; as fragments of jars are commonly found here, with an inscription stating that they held wine sent for the soldiers of Ramessu II. The frequent openings all along the roof are exactly what would be needed for dwelling places; but not for store houses, as they would need protection. These galleries then were almost certainly the dwellings of the soldiers, who had carried the victorious arms of Ramessu from Donkola to Asia Minor.

If Ramessu II of the nineteenth dynasty may be called the Trajan of Egypt, at about an equal interval we meet its Aurelian in Ramessu III, who opened the twentieth dynasty. Between the two, decadence is clearly seen to be setting in, art is slowly perishing, and form being substituted for life. At the same time building is commoner, and this (like the second century in Italy) is the most abundant epoch for temples, palaces, and public works; though all are tainted with the sign of decay. After Ramessu III foreign possessions were rapidly lost, art as rapidly decayed, there was no temporary revival by a new force (as under Constantine) and the sun of this effete era sunk into the darkness of the Egyptian papacy.

Though this was not a time prolific in public works, yet—as in Italy in the decline—there is a greater abundance of tombs and remains of private life, combined with a more florid decoration, than in any other period.

The rise of the papacy—the twenty-first dynasty—in Egypt, is somewhat like that of the temporal power in Papal Italy. We have, in both cases, the high priesthood of a recognized national religion, gradually becoming more powerful, until it was able to establish itself on the throne. The national religion, that of the King of the Gods, Amen Ra, had also had its reverses. It was unknown apparently in the earliest days of Egypt, or at most but local; it then rose into power, and flourished unopposed for some time; was then cut down for a single reign by Khuenaten—the Julian of Egypt—and finally triumphed in a form which was probably a temporized and altered copy of its original, the rites of many other divinities being combined with this worship. Amen disposed mankind to a love of discipline and abhorrence of evil. Justice is subject to him, the gods acknowledge the majesty of the great inscrutable; and every other god was but little else than a personification of some attribute of him, the god of gods.¹ In all this it is hard to tell, except by names, whether we are hearing of the worship of Amen and his subject gods, in the papacy of Egypt, or of so-called Christianity with its saints, in the papacy of Italy.

After this, in the twenty-third to twenty-sixth dynasties, there entered the renascence of Egyptian art. The older styles were copied, and the form of the names closely imitated those of ancient times, or were even identical. There is, however, the somewhat too elaborate and fine a finish, and the lack of traces of archaism, which enable us to detect the difference; just as in the Italian renaissance. Such a revival shows us that the old system, which had hitherto continuously developed, was dead; that the style and titles of the kings, which had increased in complexity, were dropped as vulgar, or, at least, not classical, and elegant simplicity was imitated. Thus, it seems likely that this period, distracted by foreign invasion and changes of government, was where the living language

¹ See Ebers, in Baedeker's *Egypt*.

finally parted company from the official and monumental, as Italian finally separated from Latin in the dark ages.

The political history of this time is, to say the least, dubious; for authorities are divided as to whether the twenty-second dynasty was native or foreign. The Assyrian invasions, during the renascence, in the twenty-fifth dynasty, were somewhat like the French conquests in Italy; not lasting, or of much influence on the character of the country. The Persians, who formed the twenty-seventh dynasty, were far different in their grasp, which was not broken till Alexander, to the delight of the Egyptians, destroyed the foreign yoke: a parallel to Napoleon breaking the Austrian yoke, which had so heavily rested on Italy.

A new order of things arose after the thirtieth dynasty, the last thus reckoned. Egypt was profoundly altered by the introduction of foreign ways; her art is Grecianised until it is quite unlike that of any preceding period; and it is of this time, with its smooth and smirking faces, its fussiness of detail, and its absence of dignity, that we are unhappily best acquainted in England, owing to the better preservation, and greater number, of its remains. And Italy in the parallel period, that of the present day, appears to be probably modified more than in any past epoch.

The historians of future ages will see in the language of Rome exactly the phenomenon that meets us in Egypt: one monumental language, unchanged, except by fashion, during a period of over two thousand years; unclassic during a dawning period, but nevertheless the same. One alphabet, one grammar, one dictionary, will suffice to read every public monument throughout its history; and also all lesser documents, before the changes in the popular language carried it beyond the scope of the original form, and thus provoked a renaissance by the recoil of the separation. This will illustrate also how little we should look on the people as the same at all times, merely because their ancient language was publicly maintained unimpaired; Coptic and Italian are the natural and popular development of Egyptian and Latin, which was steadily going on, while, to the superficial glance, change was scarcely apparent, or still less, professed.

This historical comparison, though necessarily inexact in detail, is nevertheless so close in many points, as to be a sort of key to the memory ; and it will have done its duty, if it brings clearly before the mind the great changes that have passed over the country. And as modern Italians are not old Romans, and still less Etrurians, so the Egyptians of Greek times were not the men of the eighteenth, and still less of the fourth, dynasty.

Of the Greco-Roman period, to which we have now descended, it may safely be said that we only know its superficial history. Of the condition of the mass of the people we know but little, though more than we can glean about an earlier time. Because Greek civilization flourished in Alexandria, it is too often supposed without question that the country was very civilized at that date. This is probably far from the truth. At Gizeh I have had the opportunity of studying a large site on the east of the Great Pyramid, probably of Greek date ; not that it could be settled to be of that age by any trace of Greek work found in it ; it might be of any date for aught there is to shew of its remains. But as the houses are founded on the top of the ruins of a temple of Petukhanu (built about 1,000 B.C.), they are not probably before the time of Greek influence in Egypt ; and the village cannot be later than early Roman times, as a deep, sepulchral stone-lined well, for burial, was sunk through the site, after the village was deserted. In this village metal is scarcely ever found ; rude and clumsy stone hammers and corn rubbers, often made out of fragments of earlier works, are the common articles, and flint scrapers and flakes are also found. The houses are all built of crude bricks, the walls being generally very thick and substantial, and lasting in good condition till now ; the arrangement of the buildings was entirely ruled by the lines of ancient tombs which covered the ground, and which served as a backbone for the groups of houses. The remains of this site, like many others in Egypt, are fast disappearing ; the Arabs having found that the nitrous earth is a fertiliser to the land, each spring sees lines of camels and donkeys driven up from the plain below, to carry off loads of earth, which their masters dig out from between the walls of the houses. The bricks,

it is true, are not carried off, but thus denuded and freely exposed to sun, wind, and occasional rain, and undermined for earth, they crumble away, even in such a climate, and return to their original incoherent mud. Thus perishes the unwritten history of Egypt.

In examining the village (which I walked over almost every day for nine months, the tomb that I lived in being in the cliff just under it) the apparent poverty of the inhabitants was striking. Not only was there no metal to be found, but scarcely any imported article whatever. The pottery was nearly all rough local ware, with but little from other districts. Labour was evidently cheap, by the abundance of well made mud bricks; but the condition of the people seems to have been precisely what we see to this day in Egypt, in parts that are a little out of the European track. Money and metals are very valuable in relation to labour and food, and anything that cannot be produced on the spot is a luxury. A fireplace that I cleared out in one of the houses, shewed the hand to mouth way of living; the ashes seemed to have been left to accumulate indefinitely, as I cleared away two feet depth of them; all were fine light white ash from the burning of weeds and dried manure, the modern fuel of Egypt; there was not a scrap of hard wood in the whole, and when I afterwards shew some of the unburnt pieces of vegetation to my Arab servant, he recognised it as the *halfa* and *sad*, still common by the wayside. The fireplace was made of a half round back of bricks, plastered over with a facing of mud; and illustrating the patchwork sort of life, I observed that the back had been repeatedly heightened by more bricks and more mud facing, probably added as the rubbish grew up on the floor, and the ashes accumulated on the hearth. As in modern Egyptian towns and villages, there was no clearing up there, no road cleaning, everything went on accumulating, until the houses were buried in the refuse of daily life, and the chaff and sand blown about in every breeze.

A curious point is the strict idea of property, shewn by each house being built up separately, without using the walls of the neighbours, each fresh wall being just separated from the others by a space enough for a man

to stand in ; this was not intended for a passage, as it is only thirteen inches wide in some cases, and always blocked across at the end, and without any doorways opening into it. This looks as if the building had been done by strangers settling there, and not by a developing family. The granaries are also noticeable ; two of the houses having several small chambers without any door ; and in one of them the chambers have brick domes built over them, so as to enable the top to be used, probably as the bed place and divan or seat of honour, as in modern houses. These must have been for stores, and are of such a size as to hold not only the harvest of a numerous family, but also the dried fodder for cattle, largely used in Egypt at the present day. A peculiarity in the building is the use of a layer of bricks set diagonally beneath most of the walls ; as the holes are filled with mud mortar, and the soil is very dry, this cannot have been for drainage holes, and the object of it is not clear. The ancient tomb wells, which had been rifled, were found to be troublesome and dangerous, as at present, so that a wall was built around them sometimes, as in the house at the top of the accompanying plan.

Besides this there is also another and poorer site at Gizeh, just on the north of the Great Pyramid, that belongs, I believe, to Roman times. Here even stone hammers are scarce, and the pottery is coarser, no metal is to be found, and flint flakes were the commonest tools. The houses seem to have been the merest shanties, which have quite disappeared in the course of time, and heaps of pottery, bones, and dust are nearly all that remain.

With the late Roman, or early Christian times, there appears a bettering of the condition of the country people. The villages shew a fine and imported class of pottery in common use, and glass is very general. Baked bricks and lime mortar also supplant crude bricks and mud. This is perhaps due to the settling of Roman garrisons, with regular habits, among the people. There is an interesting chain of such camps along the edge of the desert near Gizeh. First, at a mile north of Abu Roash, is one that was probably the site of a monastery, as we learn from the name Deir now attached to the ruins. Here is a site partly bounded by a square wall of stone, with many

baked brick walls within the area : fine pottery and glass cover the ground, and several blocks of building stone, some of large size. There is also Arab pottery here, shewing that the site was inhabited after Roman times, and thus bearing out the monastery tradition.

Three and a half miles south of this on the desert edge, is Kom el Ahmar, or the red mound, a very similar site, but without a wall or regular outline.

Three and a half miles south of this again, after passing the Gizeh pyramids, is a camp called Gebel Kibli, of regular square form, two hundred and ninety feet each way, but without any boundary walls remaining. Here I found a quantity of coloured glass, purple, yellow, blue, green, and white ; this was all lying in one place, and may be the smashings of the windows of an early church. Another interesting little feature here is a small outpost up on the top of the adjacent desert hills, above the camp, from which the Roman sentry could watch for marauders raiding out of the desert. There remains a scrap of wall, a bank of an enclosure, and some bits of their water jars, on this little look-out which commands the desert for miles. In modern times the top of the Great Pyramid was used as a post of observation in the same way to check the Bedawin ; and the draught-boards of the Arabs cut in the stone remain to shew of their weary watches.

Three miles south of this camp of Gebel Kibli is a fine piece of brick wall with round bastions, and a bank parallel to it at five hundred and fifty feet distance, evidently Roman, near Zauiyet Sidi Mislîm ; and I was told that much pottery was found near it. It is just at the end of a causeway across the Nile valley, and has a large pond beside it.

Further south of this there may be a site at three miles off by the great pool of Abusir ; but it is certain that at three miles beyond this, in the village of Bedrashen, on the site of Memphis, are fine walls and arches of baked brick and cement, with a large cemented floor. The chain of stations at about equal distances, appears to have been founded about the fourth century to resist incursions from the desert.

Such are the domestic remains of Egypt in some sites that I have had the opportunity of examining ; but all

over the country there are villages, generally of Græco-Roman and early Coptic times, heaped with pottery and remains, ten, twenty, perhaps forty or fifty feet thick, to which no attention has yet been paid. Both these, and still more the earlier houses of Memphis and Tel el Amarna, need excavating with intelligence and care ; noting the details that are wholly lost when Arab diggers are set to work in the usual way without supervision. And the chance of opening a site of the earliest dynasties would make it well worth while to cut into the village mounds that so thickly cover the Memphite district, the earliest scene of man's architectural labours. Though there is not a country round the Mediterranean that is not promising as a field of research ; yet Egypt, for the antiquity of its remains, their historic interest, and the facilities for work, has a supreme attraction.