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SOME TOMBS IN CRETE OF THE AGE OF MYCENÆ.¹

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In his work, *De Legibus*, Cicero says "that the most ancient way of burying the dead was to commit the corpse to the earth, where it is laid in the lap, as it were, of its mother."² And he quotes with approval the speech put by Xenophon into the mouth of the dying Cyrus:—"When I am dead, my children, do not enshrine my body in gold, or in silver, or in any other substance; but restore it to the earth as soon as possible, for what can be more desirable than to be mixed with the earth, which gives birth and nourishment to everything excellent and good."³

Some funerary urns or fictile sarcophagi recently discovered in Crete would seem to show that while cremation was prevalent at the time of Homer, in the preceding age called that of Mycenæ, only partial combustion of the body and interment of the remains was practised. First, it may be well to quote, in confirmation of Cicero's statement, the judgment of the most recent edition of a work, which has deservedly attained high authority:—"The simple closing up of the body in earth or stone..... is the earliest form of burial of which we have any knowledge.....The Palaeolithic cave-dwellers of France and Belgium buried their dead in natural grottos and

¹ Read in part at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, March 5th, 1891.

² "The earth as a mother receiving man's body under a shelter denied it by the rest of nature." *Ac mihi quidem antiquissimum sepulturæ genus illud*

fuisse videtur, quod apud Xenophontem Cyrus utitur. Redditur enim terræ corpus, et ita locatum ac situm quasi operimento matris obducitur. (l. ii, c. 22).

³ *Cyropæd.* l. viii, c. vii, n. 25.

crevices of the rocks, similar to those in which they lived. The later stone-age people throughout Europe buried in chambered barrows and cairns. The bronze-age people buried in unchambered barrows, or in cemeteries of stone cists set in the ground, often in natural eminences of sand or gravel, or surrounded by circles of standing stones. Cremation was practised side by side with simple inhumation throughout the prehistoric period." (Chambers' *Encyclopædia*, art. *Burial*.)

As regards the ancient Persians of the Zend-Avesta, we read in a passage of the *Vendidad* (*apud* Shrader's *Pre-historic Antiquities of the Aryan Peoples*, p. 345), that "in the case of a man who has died from home two alternatives are possible; either to take the corpse to the dwelling, or the dwelling to the corpse."

Then the authors of the "Life of the Greeks and Romans" say:—"In the earliest times the burial places seem to have been in the houses of the deceased themselves." (Kuhl and Goner, p. 291). In prehistoric or Pelasgic Athens, as it is called, I have myself observed the grave chiselled out of the rock floor of the primitive house, built by a rude population previous to their migration to the hill of the Acropolis, and to the Athens of Grecian and Roman times." Sparta and Tarentum had burial-grounds in the city, in order (as the law of Lycurgus has it) to steel the minds of youth against the fear of death. In other cities the tombs were as near the city as possible. Elsewhere the tradition of house-burial seems maintained in other ways. "In the Campania," says Birch, speaking of a figure he gives from the work on vases by Sir W. Hamilton, "the grave assumes the shape of a *soros* or sepulchral chest, with a pent-house roof, imitating pediments, or roof of a small temple." (*Ancient Pottery*, 2nd edit., p. 162).

On the site of the old necropolis of Delphi, there is a tomb which Thiersch describes as exactly like a house, "the antiquity of its style being shown by the fact that the sides, the door and a window above it, grew narrower towards the top." (See figure 8, Kuhl and Goner, "Life of the Greeks and Romans," p. 100).

In a work on Comparative Philology and Prehistoric Antiquities, recently translated from the German by Mr.

Jevons, of Cambridge, we read. "Various hypotheses have been put forward to bring the Italian and German house-urns into direct connection with each other; borrowing from Italy, and on the other hand, a Teutonic origin for the Italian Antiquities, have both been suggested. However, I consider Lisch's view, that these house-urns are the independent creation of the two peoples, and that they are an expression of the type of European huts inherited from primeval times, as still the most probable." (Shrader, *o. c.*, p. 368).

In Birch's *Ancient Pottery* (p. 446), there is a figure of a *Tugurium Vase*, from Albano, now in the British Museum, which is of the earliest period of Etruscan art. It "is filled with the ashes of the dead, which were introduced by a little door. This door was secured by a cord passing through two rings at its sides, and tied round the vase. The cover or roof is vaulted and apparently intended to represent the beams of a house or cottage. Urns in the shape of cottages, of brown Etruscan ware, supposed to be of the Swiss guards in the service of the Romans, were found near Albano, in 1817."¹

The three coffers, with lids, of which I was able to exhibit five photographs, taken from different points of view, were found some ten years ago in a vaulted tomb excavated in the soft white rock, on the western slope of a hill, to the east of the village of Anoja-Messaritica, between six and seven kilometres from the ancient city of Gortyna, but also not far from the village of Plora, which would recall the name of ancient Pylōros. The chamber, like those in Brittany, is preserved by a long alley or δρόμος, the cell itself or θάλαμος being large and wedge-shaped in the vault, like the regular θόλοι. The height of the arched tomb is about four and a half mètres; the gallery leading to it is about five mètres long, and just high enough for a man to creep in on hands and knees, still the urns must have entered by it. The opening to this gallery was to the west, and was found closed by a dry wall.

The tomb, in which was found the bath-shaped

¹ Fig. of Teutonic hut sepulchral urns at p. 595, 2nd ed. Nothing like the Cretan sepulchral urns, of which I ex-

hibited photographs taken on the spot, can be found in Birch's work.

sepulchral urn, of which I exhibited a photograph and several coloured drawings, is situated on the slope of the hill to the south of Milatos (near the modern Cretan village of that name), some two miles above the ancient city of Μιλᾶτος or Μίλητος, and was accidentally revealed by a plough at work striking on it.

The vault is arched like an oven, and the floor elliptical in shape, the opening being towards the east. The largest diameter from north to south was 2·30 metres, its smallest 2 metres, both measurements having been taken on the level of interment. The peculiar shape of these tombs, common to all southern Europe, is supposed to recall a Phrygian hut, while the ark-shaped coffers would recall the more advanced sort of dwellings used by the inhabitants of that early time. Whether ancient in form, however, like a round hut, or of contemporaneous design, like a square-built house, the receptacle for the dead, was ever made to resemble the home of the living.¹

“The Teutonic huts represented on the triumphal column of Marcus Aurelius are round. So, too, Strabo describes the dwellings of the Belgæ. The primitive form of the Italian hut, again, has been shown by Helbig to be round; and as the ash urns from the necropolis of Alba Longa are obviously intended to represent the round huts of the living, so, too, the prehistoric dome-shaped graves of Mycenæ, Menidi, and Orchomenus, are to be regarded as but reproductions of human dwellings—of the ‘circular tent,’ and ‘semi-subterranean hut of earth.’” (Shrader, p 345).

In this last tomb were found two earthenware urns or sarcophagi, in size and shape like a child's bath, both of which were presented to the museum of the Greek Syllogos at Candia, by the bishop of Vianos. One of these urns, which both within and without is plain and undecorated, is 52 centimètres high, the diameter length at the bottom being 83 centimètres, the width 35 centimètres, thickness of the lip 4 centimètres, of the sides 19 millimètres, length

¹ Other bell-shaped tombs excavated on the hillside like these two recently found in Crete, have been discovered of late years at Mycenæ, at Menidi, at Palamidi near Nauplia, at Spata in Attica, at Vapheion near Sparta, and at

the older Epidaurus. All these tombs belong to the same so-called age of Mycenæ. The round huts, from which the round tombs were copied, may have derived their shape from the round tents of nomad days.

measured at the mouth 1·18 mètre by 45 centimètres at the narrowest width.

The second of the bath-shaped sepulchral urns found in the tomb at Milatos, is richly decorated on the exterior, on one half with lozenge shaped network, in the irregular loops of which are rhomboids each with an eye in the centre; on the other with a wider or more open network of larger irregular lozenges, in each of which is a star with three rays, or an oblong star with four wavy rays or spikes; in the interior a similar and larger wavy lozenge ornament enclosing fishes, four times repeated, with a border of small fan-shaped leaves running round the inner edge. In make this second urn is like the first, only smaller. It is 48 centimètres high, the length at the bottom being 70 centimètres, and the width 39 centimètres. The curved lips of the urn almost conceal from view the four handles, which are characteristic of this kind of urns, and are placed for convenience' sake directly opposite one another.

The measurements of the three four-cornered house-shaped coffers, urns or arks, found in the tomb first described are as follows: first urn, 99 centimètres long by 42 in width; height, without feet and lid cover or roof, 64 centimètres; thickness of the sides from 35 to 38 millimètres. Of the four feet, one at each corner, the only one remaining is 14 centimètres high. The roof or saddle-shaped cover, is perfect and is 17 centimètres high. The top is not a sharp edge, but a flat rim, 95 millimètres wide and 1·045 mètres long. A raised cord or roll border runs round the base of the cover, having six ring-shaped handles, two on each of the longer sides, and one in the middle of each of the narrower ends. The body of the urn itself has a double cornice and is furnished with the same number of half rings for handles in exact correspondence with those of the cover, placed standing out vertically, so that a metal wire or other tie might run through them all, fastening the lower to the higher, each to each in order to secure the cover on the urn.¹

¹ In the *Odyssey* we read, that when Arete gave Ulysses the beautiful chest containing presents, she said to him "Thyself now look to the lid, and quickly

put a chain upon it, lest any one should defraud thee on thy way, when again thou sleepest sweet slumber, going in the black ship." (*Bk. viii. l. 443.*)

The second urn or coffer is smaller than the former, is more simply decorated, and at present without feet, as these have been carried away. It is 54 centimètres high, 80 long and 42 wide, the thickness of the sides at the upper lip being 35 millimètres. Here again two half rings stand up perpendicularly, two on each of the two fronts, and one at each narrow end.

The two coffers described above were, in 1887, placed in the museum of the Greek Syllogos of Candia, thanks to the strenuous exertions of its president, Dr. Chatzidakis; a third was unfortunately broken in pieces as soon as discovered; and a fourth exists only in fragments, and all the efforts made have been fruitless to rescue it for purposes of art and science from the precincts of the church of Anoja in which it is now preserved. Incomplete though this urn is, its measurements can be given, as 61 centimètres high, 43 wide, length of the bottom 89, thickness of the sides 26 millimètres. Two detached feet of this urn are also preserved, and the bottom is pierced by ten holes arranged, seven in a long line and three in a short line across the top end, making a figure like a carpenter's square rule. The bottom of the second bath-shaped urn has a hole in the shape of a horizontal, not vertical channel running along the side; while the first coffer has twelve holes (diameter $1-1\frac{1}{2}$ centimètres), three in a row at each end and six down the middle of the bottom; and the second coffer has ten holes in the bottom, three at each end and four down the middle. These holes are evidently to drain the vase of putrid liquid from the remains buried in it.

Yet another bath-shaped urn or sarcophagus, in form and size like the second or decorated one mentioned above, has been found near the village of Pendamodi and has been bought by the Candian Syllogos, but no information can be obtained by these zealous Greek archæologists as to where it was discovered. It is in perfect preservation, and represents an ark or square box standing on feet, with a pent-house or double slanting roof, terminating at each end of the top or ridge with two projections, which, while they offer a purchase to the hand, are a memorial or remnant of the master beam (*μεσόδμη*) which supported the roof of the primitive house, after the

fashion of which the urn was evidently made. The top of the roof has thus the appearance of a prolonged anvil—wide above and narrow below. The dimensions are, length 96 centimètres, height (from the base of the feet to the upper rim) 74, depth 53, height of the cover 41. The bottom has three holes (diameter 15 millimètres), arranged along the greater length. Here, on this seemingly contemporaneous urn, appears the scale, or triangular overlapping roof-tiling ornament. In the four-cornered coffers at Anoja were found the remains of bones in a very decayed state, so that the discoverers could not determine whether they had been burnt or not, and twelve small earthenware vases painted in the style of Mycenæ. These were of different shapes, but several were of the water-pitcher type, or cruse, with an additional handle right over the mouth. One of these, 7 centimètres high, was seen by Professor Halbherr in a house at Anoja, while another just like it was bought by the Greek Syllogos. Pitchers of this shape are amongst the most common and widely spread of the type known as that of Mycenæ. Schliemann¹ mentions them as being met with at Mycenæ, Nauplia, Menidi, Salamina, Thera, Cnossos and even in Egypt. They have also been found at Spata on the Hymettan side of Athens, and in the necropolis of Ledrai in Cyprus.

What Shrader says at p. 365-6 of his most instructive work may here be quoted to throw light upon a species of sepulchral urns, now for the first time, it would appear, found in tombs of the age of Mycenæ.

“The so-called house-urns which have been discovered in Italy, Germany and Denmark, and which, in spite of many differences of detail, yet resemble one another in the important points, that, says Virchow, ‘As a receptacle for the remains gathered from the funeral pyre, an earthen vessel of the shape of a house was employed, and that this house always possessed a large practicable door which could be closed from without by means of a cross-bar.’

“As for their appearance, Helbig, in his work on the Italian Lake-Dwellers in the Plain of the Po, describes

¹ Tiryns, p. 129-131, French ed.

the Latin *house-urns* of the necropolis of Alba Longa as follows :—‘The urns represent roundish huts, the walls of which we must imagine to be composed of loam, twigs, or other perishable material. The roof seems to have consisted of layers of straw or reeds, and to have been held together by ribs, which in the real house obviously were made of wood. The compluvium characteristic of the later Italian house is wanting. To let light in and smoke out, the doorway seems to have served instead—and also a small triangular sort of dormer-window, which is shown by some of these burial-urns in the front slope of the roof, by others in the back.’

“As regards the German urns also, both those shaped like a bee-hive or an oven, and the real house-urns, Lisch, who first examined these antiquities scientifically, comes to the conclusion that the circular was the original form of these urns. A glance over these urns suffices to make one involuntarily see that in their shapes we have the evolution of the ancient dwelling-house traced before us. The oldest form of house, undoubtedly, is given by the urns from Burg-Chernitz and Rönne, which have the doors in the roof, as is the case frequently in the dwellings of primitive peoples for the purposes of protection against wild-beasts; the occupant entered by means of a ladder, which he pulls up after him, and thus had a defence the more, in the steep, smooth walls. Those round-houses which have the door in the wall, like the urns of Kiekindemark and Klus, are certainly younger. The youngest is represented by the urns from Aschersteben; this house was rectangular, with a tall, steep roof of straw, a striking prefiguration of small country cottages of the present day.”

The decoration of the funerary urns is of the style called geometric, with vegetable motives, and an early attempt at animal delineation, by means of a few simple lines. The colours used are a more or less deep red, and dark chestnut, according to the more or less baked condition of the surface. The ground seems buff or cream colour. The first urn, besides wavy serpentine lines around the field reserved for the efforts of the artist, and straight bands, has for its chief picture, on one side,

three ducks, three fishes, and on the other, a duck, two radiated discs, or star-fish (perhaps meant for the sea hedge-hog), and a long tassel, or four-lined painted leaf dropping down from the upper rim. A large palm, with long stem, with two palmettes springing up from the foot, complete the decoration of one front. The other is simpler, representing palmettes, ducks, a fish, and a radiated ring, all, however, on a larger scale than on the former.

The cover has on one side five ducks ; and on the other, two ducks, three fishes, two star-like figures and a palm-leaf issuing from a long stalk. The two lateral fields at the narrow end show two fishes each, while along the top runs a coloured wavy line.

The two other coffers are decorated in a simpler way, and show but geometric and vegetable designs, as palm-leaves, fan-shaped flowers or buds.

The style of decoration visible on these six urns or sarcophagi I have described, the expert, Dr. Orsi, would attribute to the later stage of Mycenæan ornament, to the third, rather than to the fourth period, when the artist, without knowledge of perspective or background, was endeavouring to represent a lake scene, in which plants, fishes and ducks all appeared together on one horizontal plane in stiff geometric, face to face, precision.

As these newly-discovered Cretan funereal coffers and vases are not large enough to contain the whole body of a man, and are too large to be receptacles for mere ashes, it is surmised that at the Mycenæan epoch such urns were made to receive either the bones alone or else a half-burnt body. Complete combustion of the body seems uncertain at that time, and partial combustion for the sake of preserving the form of the body only exceptional, while embalming was very rare, the variation in the rite of sepulture being due to Oriental influence on the pre-Dorian races of Greece before the time of Homer. If Dr. Orsi's theory be true, that only an initial and partial combustion of the corpse can be admitted in Mycenæan times, we have in these Cretan urns the most ancient *ossilegium* known, but an *ossilegium* without cremation.

The partial burning of the corpse, which, as at

Mycenæ, would seem to have taken place in the grave itself, was most likely in order to better preserve the original appearance of the body of the dead, a motive evidently suggesting the embalmment practised by the Egyptians.¹

¹ To my friend, Dr. Orsi, director of the Royal Museum, at Syracuse, well known for the excavations he has conducted for the Italian government at Locri in Magna Græcia, and at Megara Hyblæa, in Sicily, I am indebted for the technical description of the vases, which I have taken from his elaborate mono-

graph published at the end of last year in the *Monumenti Antichi* of the Royal Academy of the Roman "Lincei," and to another friend and correspondent, Dr. Halbberr, Professor of Greek Epigraphy at the University of Rome, I am indebted for the photographs and coloured illustrations.