

THE CRETAN EXPLORATION FUND.

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High Commissioner of the Powers in Crete.

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THE Cretan Exploration Fund was formed with the object of assisting British Explorers and the British School at Athens to investigate the early remains of the island which from indications already apparent seemed likely to supply the solution of many interesting questions regarding the beginnings of civilization in Greece.

Already in 1894 Mr. ARTHUR EVANS had secured a part ownership (completed last year) in the site of Kephala at Knossos, which evidently contained the remains of a prehistoric building. Excavations, to which the Fund has largely contributed, begun by him in 1900 on this site and continued during the present year, have brought to light an ancient Palace of vast extent, which there is every reason to identify with the traditional House of Minos and at the same time with the legendary "Labyrinth."

The result of last year's excavations was to unearth a considerable part of the western side of this great building, including two large courts, the porticoes and entrance corridors, a vast system of magazines, some of them replete with huge store jars, and a richly adorned room,

[P.T.O.]

where between lower benches rose a curiously carved gypsum throne, on which King Minos himself may have sat in council. The second season's work has uncovered a further series of magazines, the whole northern end of the Palace including a bath-chamber, and an extensive eastern quarter. It was only towards the close of this year's excavations that what appear to have been the principal state rooms first came into view. A triple flight of stone stairs, one flight beneath another, here leads down from an upper corridor to a suite of halls, showing remains of colonnades and galleries. It was at this interesting point that, owing to the advanced season, Mr. EVANS was obliged to bring this year's excavations to a close.

Apart from the architectural results already gained, the finds within the walls of the Palace have been of such a nature as to throw an entirely new light on the art and culture of prehistoric Greece. Partly still clinging to the walls, partly on the floors of the chambers, were found the remains of a whole series of fresco paintings. Among these the full-length figures of the Cup-bearer supply the first real portrayal of a man of the Mycenæan age, while the miniature groups representing court ladies show a liveliness and expression far beyond any work of the kind in contemporary Egypt. Allied to this branch of art are the painted reliefs in *gesso duro*, showing a force and naturalism for which no parallel can be found till the great days of Greek sculpture some ten centuries later. To the remarkable bull's head discovered last year the more recent excavations have added parts of human figures, in which the muscles and even the veins are reproduced with a singular mastery of execution.

The marble mouth of a fountain in the shape of a lioness's head and a triton shell of alabaster, together with many other beautiful stone vessels and architectural ornaments, also evidence the high level already attained in the sculptor's art. Among the minor arts represented is that of miniature painting on the back of crystal and intarsia work of ivory, rock-crystal, enamel and precious metals, of which a splendid example has been found this season in the remains of a royal draught-board. Other finds illustrate the connexions with ancient Egypt and the East. Part of a small diorite statue from last year's excavations bears a hieroglyphic inscription fixing its date about the beginning of the Second Millennium B.C., while a more recently discovered alabaster lid bears the cartouche of the Hyksos King Khyan. A fine cylinder of lapis lazuli, mounted with gold and engraved with mythological subjects, bears witness to the early connexions with Babylonia.

But of all the discoveries made within the Palace of Knossos the most interesting is the accumulated evidence here for the first time afforded that there existed on the soil of prehistoric Hellas a highly developed system of writing some eight centuries earlier than the first written Greek monuments, and going back six or seven centuries, even before the first dated record of the Phœnician script. A whole series of deposits of clay tablets

has come to light, many of the most important of them during last season's excavations, engraved with a linear script, often accompanied by a decimal system of numeration.

That these documents largely relate to the royal stores and arsenals is seen by the pictorial illustrations with which the inscriptions are often accompanied. Others, in which signs representing men and women frequently recur, probably contain lists of slaves or officials. Others again of a different class may, perhaps, ultimately reveal to us fragments of contemporary records or the actual formulas of Minoan laws.

Besides these linear tablets there was discovered a separate deposit of clay bars and labels containing inscriptions of a more hieroglyphic class. Although contemporary with the linear tablets, the script on these is apparently of quite distinct evolution, and in all probability in a different language. The characters answer in fact to the sign-groups already observed in certain seal-stones mostly found in the east of Crète. The hieroglyphs themselves present many parallels to the presumed pictorial prototypes of Phœnician letters.

In addition to the assistance given to Mr. Evans in his work at Knossos, the Cretan Exploration Fund has contributed towards various works of exploration in the island undertaken under the auspices of the British School at Athens. In 1899, the late Director of the School, Mr. D. G. Hogarth, excavated a series of prehistoric houses in the lower town of Knossos. He found in these many remarkable painted vases, showing that a highly developed ceramic art flourished here already before the days of the civilization known as Mycenæan. A large number of similar houses await exploration; in fact the whole plan of the early town could probably be recovered. Mr. Hogarth further successfully explored the great cave of Zeus on Mount Dicta, discovering remains of a prehistoric sanctuary and large deposits of votive bronze figures and other objects, among which the double axe, the symbol of the Cretan and Carian Zeus, was specially conspicuous.

During the present year Mr. R. C. Bosanquet, the new Director of the British School, has carried out an exploration of the site of Praesos, in the easternmost region of Crète, in historic times the chief civic centre of the original Eteocretan element of the island. The remains on the actual site of Praesos proved to belong to the geometrical and later periods. A remarkable inscription was found however, the second of its class, written in Greek characters of the fifth century B.C., but composed in the old Eteocretan language. Two sanctuaries with votive deposits also came to light, and the remains of a large public building of Hellenistic date, which may have been an "Andreion" of the kind in which the Cretan citizens met for common meals.

This season Mr. Hogarth has also been enabled by a grant from the Fund to explore

an ancient site at Zakro in the extreme east of the island. He has there uncovered a small Mycenæan town with well preserved remains of the lower part of the houses and magazines, and a pit containing fine examples of early pottery. But the most important discovery was a deposit of clay impressions of Mycenæan gems and signets containing 150 types, some of them throwing a new light on the early cult of Crete. Among other subjects represented was the Minotaur, which also occurs on a seal impression recently discovered in the Palace at Knossos. Furthermore, some interesting cist-graves were found in caves about Zakro. These yielded incised and painted pottery of the pre-Mycenæan age, including types novel in Crete but familiar in Cyprus and Egypt. The general result has important bearing on the origin and history of Mycenæan civilisation in Crete.

Other interesting sites, already previously secured for British excavation, remain to be explored. The Executive Committee, however, are of opinion that, before devoting any sums towards breaking new ground, a sufficient amount shall be raised to enable Mr. Evans to complete his excavation of the Palace of Knossos, a considerable part of the cost of which has already fallen on the explorer's shoulders. The large scale of the work, on which throughout the whole of last season two hundred workmen were constantly employed, makes it necessarily costly, and in this case, in addition to many other incidental items of expenditure, a great deal has to be done towards the conservation, and in some cases even the roofing-in of the chambers discovered. It is estimated that a sum of between one and two thousand pounds will be necessary for the adequate completion of this important work. The unique character of the results already obtained is, however, so widely recognised that the Committee confidently trusts that no financial obstacles will stand in the way of this consummation.

Subscriptions will be received and acknowledged by MR. GEORGE MACMILLAN, St. Martin's Street, London, W.C., or may be paid to the account of the CRETAN EXPLORATION FUND, at MESSRS. ROBERTS, LUBBOCK AND CO., Lombard Street, E.C.

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