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EXPLORING THE PAST SERIES

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36770
Finding Out About

THE MINOANS

by

E. ROYSTON PIKE

Illustrated by

PATRICIA A. CULLEN

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Michael Ventris

The Author is indebted to the Keeper of the Department of Antiquities, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for permission to use all the above photographs, with the exception of the portrait of Michael Ventris.

I

A LAND CALLED CRETE

AMONG THE stories that the Greeks of old loved to hear and tell their children was one about King Minos, who had lived in Crete in the long ago. He was a rich king and powerful, and a lover of strange devices, and one day he commissioned a clever young engineer in his employ named Daedalus to make him a labyrinth, a sort of maze of rooms and passages that should be so complicated that no one who entered it could ever get out again unless he knew the key.

Daedalus made the labyrinth, and it was all that King Minos had intended it to be. And in the middle of it, in a huge den far from the light of day, the king stabled a fearsome monster, half-man, half-bull, which used to dine off young men and maidens. Until one day there appeared on the scene a valiant Greek who slew the monster, rescued the captives, and carried off the beautiful princess who had shown him the way.

It is a queer story, and it is not surprising that it came to be believed that the Greeks had made the whole thing up. And so we might still be believing

if it had not been for Arthur Evans. He went to Crete, and started to dig in the dustheaps that were supposed to mark the site of King Minos's palace, and see what he could find.

No, he did not find the Monster, but he *did* find the labyrinth and a whole lot of other amazing things. And that in the main is what this little book is about.

To begin with, let us take a look at Crete itself. If you have an atlas handy, you will find it on the map of Europe, not far from the right-hand corner. There it lies in the Eastern Mediterranean, level with Cyprus, which is in Asia. From its cliffs you should be able to see on a clear day the mainland of Greece, and there are islands which form convenient stepping-stones across the channel that separates it from the coast of Turkey.

It is quite a large island. In length it is about 125 miles, but it is nowhere more than 35 miles across, and in parts it narrows to ten or a dozen miles only. For the most part it is rocky and mountainous, but there are valleys and plains where the soil is rich and there is plenty of water.

At a very early date men came to Crete and made their homes there. We do not know where they came from, or what race they belonged to. They built little huts of rubble and mud brick; they made pottery of a rather rough kind, black or earth-coloured; they had not learnt to work metals but still relied on tools and weapons made of lumps of stone, suitably polished and sharpened. There were

plenty of wild animals about, and they hunted these for food and their skins which they made into clothes. But they also had flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, and they planted olive groves and vineyards and fig gardens. They caught fish in the rivers and sea, and developed a taste for molluscs and octopuses. There were quails and partridges in their season, and ducks and geese in the marshlands. They caught the birds in nets or knocked them down with stones from slings, or shot them with arrows as they flew overhead.

So far as we know, these first Cretans could not write, and certainly they have left nothing behind them that suggests writing. We have no idea of what they thought about, and can only guess at their social and political arrangements. They seem to have had some sort of religion. The dove and the ox were venerated, and among the relics that have been dug up are some lumpy little figures of women, roughly shaped out of chunks of stone, which it is supposed represent the Mother Goddess who was worshipped by many primitive peoples in that part of the world before history began.

The culture I have been describing is known as the New Stone Age or Neolithic (from the Greek words *neos*, new, and *lithos*, a stone). It lasted for a very long time, judging



Female idol — the
“Mother Goddess” — found in
Crete

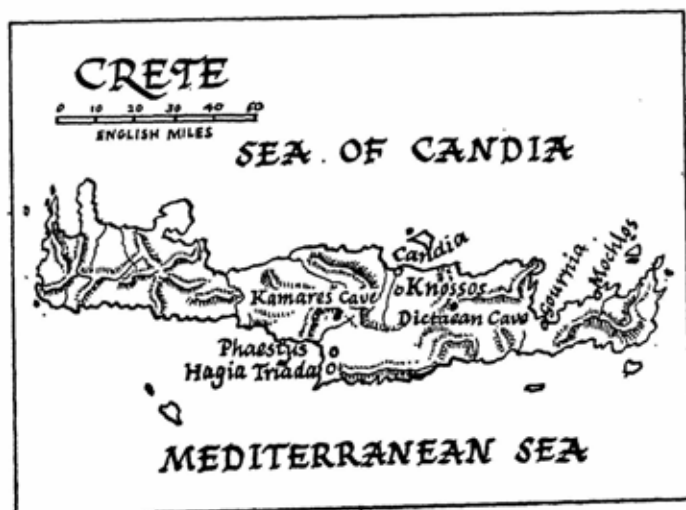
from the great depth of the deposits of rubbish that accumulated on the sites of the Neolithic settlements. In those days, we should realize, there were no dustbins and refuse-collectors ; rubbish of every description was just allowed to accumulate where it happened to fall or was thrown. Gradually the level of the ground rose. Villages were destroyed, and then rebuilt on the old sites, each one a little higher than its predecessor, on whose ruins it stood. So the deposits accumulated, layer upon layer, as the years passed.

At Knossos, a place near the north coast of Crete that we shall come to know very well before we have gone much further in our story, there has been discovered a stratum, or layer, of Neolithic rubbish that is nearly 40 feet thick. It is estimated that it would have taken about 5000 years to accumulate such a mass, and that would take us back to about 8000 B.C. But even that is not the beginning. There are other places in Crete that seem to be several hundred years older than Knossos.

Some time between 3500 B.C. and 3000 B.C. there was a great advance in Cretan culture. Hitherto men had had to rely on stone implements and weapons, but now they began to use metals. Probably the first to come into general use was copper, and its discovery was almost certainly by accident. We can imagine how it happened. Some copper-bearing ores happened to get placed in the camp fire, and got thoroughly hot, and then to the

amazement of the half-naked tribesfolk who were huddling together to get warm, there began to flow from out of the fire a thin trickle of molten metal. They touched it, and started back with a shriek of anguish. But when it had cooled, they found that it was easily workable and could be made into a number of useful things. Tin was probably the next discovery, and it was made in much the same way.

Then some bright spark hit upon the idea of diverting the flow of hot copper into that of tin, and lo and behold, something better than either was the result! Copper was really too soft to make satisfactory weapons and tools and it was difficult to sharpen; but add a little tin, and you have bronze. And bronze tools and weapons can be



sharpened and are strong enough to make a slashing blow. So the New Stone Age passed, not all at once but slowly and gradually, into the Age of Bronze.

Now that they had learnt the use of metals, the Cretans were well started on the road to civilization. Soon they learnt to work not only copper and tin but gold and silver and lead. With stouter axes they could cut down forests and convert trees into timber, with which they built themselves little huts, some of which had more than one room and even a loft or attic, to which they climbed by a ladder. The houses were collected into villages, and the surrounding area was turned into fields and gardens. They developed new ways of making pottery; they coated the vessels with a kind of glaze paint, and began to use ovens or kilns for baking them, instead of just leaving them in the sun to dry.

Meanwhile in Egypt civilization was well advanced. It was the age when the Pyramids were being built, big cities were flourishing, industries were highly developed, and religion was playing a prominent part in the life of the pharaohs and their people. It seems very likely that Crete learnt a good deal from the Egyptians of the Nile valley, and there may even have been a colony of Egyptians established in the island. Notwithstanding the separation of the two lands by two or three hundred miles of sea, the passage across is easy, since there is a regular sea current that flows from the north

coast of Africa along the shores of Syria and Asia Minor to Crete and so on to the Aegean Sea. There was a period of political instability and upheaval in Egypt, and it is surmised that a number of Egyptians may have quitted their homes and sailed across the sea to seek peace and fortune in Crete, which was perhaps inhabited by people of a kindred race. Or the first contacts may have been made by adventurous Cretan sailors, since throughout the summer months a north wind blows regularly in the direction of Egypt. Perhaps these first adventurers were driven out of their course by some sudden fierce gale, and put in for refuge in one of the many harbours of the Nile delta—and how surprised, staggered even, they must have been to see the mighty pyramids in course of erection, the splendid palaces and the great temples of the Egyptian gods! Thus either through accident or adventure the Cretans received an impulse to attempt great things themselves in their own island.

On the whole it would seem more likely that the Cretans discovered Egypt than the other way round. For they were among the first to hear the call of the sea. In their frail little barks with tiny sails they ventured among the innumerable islands of the Aegean. At first they always kept within sight of land, which was easy enough. But since they had no charts they often ran on to submerged reefs or were cast up against the rockbound cliffs. Sometimes they were swept off their course and had a hard job finding their way home again. They

encountered misadventure and disaster, but they kept at it, and they eventually became expert navigators—about the best to be found anywhere. Cretan sea-captains became renowned for their skill and daring, and there was not a creek or harbour for hundreds of miles around into which they did not take their gaily-painted little ships.

If they were seeking adventure, they found it, and very often more than enough. But they were also looking for something else—opportunities to make an honest penny out of trade and commerce. Their island was becoming crowded, and the soil was insufficient to maintain an increasing population. They had to find other ways of making a living, and so they became the traders and carriers of the ancient world.

Wherever you went in the Eastern Mediterranean you would meet Cretan ships, pushed through the water by husky oarsmen when the winds were not sufficient to fill the sails. The natives of the lands they visited, to whom a ship was a thing of wonder, brought down to the shore goods they had to dispose of, skins and hides, fruit and grain, wine and cattle, and boys and girls who might fetch a good price in some distant slave-market. In return the Cretans brought woollen goods and pottery, swords and knives made of copper or bronze, spices and ointments, and jewels that might add a touch of splendour to some barbaric chieftain's diadem or sparkle on the bosom of his queen.

Much of their cargo came from Crete itself,

where there were busy workshops producing things of everyday use and luxury, but much also came from Egypt, and possibly other parts of northern Africa. Among the "finds" dug up of recent years in Crete are little seals made of ivory, that had been buried in the graves of their owners; these surely must have come from Africa, for ivory comes from elephant tusks, and there are no elephants in Crete. Many of the beautiful vases, gold ornaments, armlets and other articles of adornment, also show signs of Egyptian workmanship. The Cretan shipmasters liked to have such things among their cargo, since they took up little space and were of great value.

For about a thousand years Crete was the scene of a wonderful civilization. Then around 1400 B.C. the curtain came down. Something dreadful happened. The cities were destroyed, the palaces crashed into ruin, the people died or fled away, the fleets sailed no more. Little remained but legends.

Hundreds of years later the Greeks looked upon Crete as a land of wonder and romance. Zeus, the King of the Gods, the "Father of gods and men," had been born there, in a cave on Mt. Ida, in the centre of the island, or on Mt. Dicte, in the eastern part, and was nourished by the nymph Amalthea with honey and goat's milk. He was the son of the god Cronus who, having been warned that one of his children would overthrow him, swallowed them as soon as they were born. Zeus was saved, however, by the cleverness of his mother Rhea,

who hid him in the cave away from her horrid husband's sight; and the infant's cries were drowned by the clashing swords of Cretan demigods who danced and shouted before the entrance. In Crete, Zeus grew to manhood, married Europa, the lovely daughter of the king of Tyre, and had a son named Minos. To Crete he returned at the close of his life on earth, and the Cretans used to show his tomb on Mt. Juktas, overlooking Knossos, the capital city of his son's realm.

But this claim to possess the burial place of the supreme god of Hellas (Greece) was indignantly disallowed by many outside the island; and since the Cretans persisted in maintaining what was denounced as a lie, they got a reputation for falsehood which was attached to them right up to New Testament times, as we can see from St. Paul's description of them in his epistle to Titus (ch. 1, v. 12): "One of themselves, even a prophet of their own [the 6th century B.C. philosopher Epimenides] said, The Cretans are always liars . . ."

In his great epic poem known as *The Odyssey*, Homer tells us (I am quoting Dr. E. V. Rieu's translation in the "Penguin Classics") that "out in the dark blue sea there lies a land called Crete, a rich and lovely land, washed by the waves on every side, densely peopled and boasting ninety cities." One of the ninety towns (he goes on) is a great city called Knossos, where "King Minos ruled and enjoyed the friendship of almighty Zeus."

It was around Minos, the son of Zeus and Europa,

that most of the ancient legends accumulated. He was reputed to have been the king of Crete and its subject islands, and to have ruled long and well. He was the intimate friend, the "gossip", of his father Zeus, and periodically received from him the laws that men were to obey. Every nine years he made his way to the "Dictaeon cave" which was revered as Zeus's birthplace, and was given a fresh instalment, and at the same time was required to render an account of his stewardship of the affairs of men. When he died, he was transferred to the Underworld, and there, crowned and with a sceptre in his hand, he was believed to sit on his throne and judge the dead as they passed slowly before him in an unending stream.

But alongside this legend of the impartial judge in the Land of the Shades was another, in which Minos is presented as a great sea-king and tyrant, the overlord of the Aegean, the monarch who commissioned Daedalus to make the Labyrinth and placed within it the monster known as the Minotaur. Is this the same Minos, or is it another—his son, perhaps, as one account has it? Very possibly the name Minos was a title given to the kings of a particular Cretan dynasty in turn, something like the "pharaohs" of ancient Egypt and the "Caesars" of Rome. We cannot tell, and the Athenians of 2500 years and more ago did not know either. "It had all happened such a long time ago," they said, "before the Siege of Troy even. No wonder we can't be sure . . ."

2

THE MAN WHO POINTED THE WAY

FOR OVER three thousand years the glory that had been Crete was buried and practically forgotten. But at length there came a day when it was resurrected, and the man who gave the first real push towards its rediscovery was a highly successful German business man who had once been a grocer's errand-boy.

His name was Heinrich (Henry) Schliemann, and he was born in a small town in the north of Germany in 1822. His father was a poor Protestant clergyman, who taught him Latin and told him of the great poems that had been composed in the long ago by a Greek named Homer. The boy was thrilled by the stories of the heroes who had gone to the war with Troy, and was never tired of studying a picture of the burning city that was among the illustrations in a book on *Universal History* that his father had given him. When his father told him that Troy had been destroyed, little Heinrich refused to believe it: "If such walls once existed," he protested, "they cannot possibly have been

completely destroyed; vast ruins of them must remain, but they are hidden beneath the dust of ages." He made a resolution that when he was grown up, he would go to Troy and see what he could find. There must be *something* left.

But for the present he had to earn his bread, and for years it was no easy task. He left school when he was fourteen, and was then apprenticed to a grocer in a little village shop. Here he worked from five in the morning until eleven at night, running errands, doing up parcels, cleaning out the shop, and so on. It was a hard, monotonous existence, but one day there came into the shop a man who in his young days had wanted to be a clergyman but had become a miller instead. He had not forgotten his Greek, however, and in a half-tipsy mood he (wrote Schliemann years afterwards) "recited to us about a hundred lines of Homer in the original, observing the rhythmic cadence of the verses. Although I did not understand a syllable, the melodious sound of the words made a deep impression on me, and I wept bitter tears over my unhappy fate. Three times over did I get him to repeat those divine verses, rewarding his trouble with three glasses of whisky, which I bought with the few pence that made up my whole fortune. From that moment I never ceased to pray God that by His Grace I might yet have the happiness of learning Greek."

He *did* learn it, but not yet. For the next twenty years he devoted himself to business, first as a

grocer's assistant in Hamburg and then as a clerk in a merchant's office in Holland. His employers recognized his ability, and sent him to Russia as their agent. Ultimately he was able to set up for himself, and became rich. But the love of learning never left him. He taught himself languages—English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese—and at last in 1856 set himself to learn Greek. By 1863 he had made so much money that he was able to retire from business, and prepared himself for what all along he had determined should be his life work—the re-discovery of Troy. He visited Greece for the first time in 1868, and did a bit of digging on some of the sites associated with the heroes of Homer's *Odyssey*. To prepare himself more fully for his chosen task, he divorced his unsympathetic wife and married a Greek girl named Sophia Engastromenos. She was eighteen, she was good, she was beautiful, and she loved Homer.

In 1871 Schliemann and his Sophia with 85 workmen began to dig among the ruins at a place called Hissarlik, the traditional site of Troy, in Asia Minor near the Dardanelles. Schliemann went at it like a bull at a gate. He knew nothing of the careful technique of the modern archaeologist, but just dug and dug to see what he could find. A great trench was cut through the mound of rubbish that had accumulated in the course of three thousand years, and the remains of *nine* cities were found, one on top of another.

Schliemann thought that the second of the cities

from the bottom was the Troy that the Greeks had captured and burnt, as told in the *Iliad*, and his opinion was confirmed when he came upon a mass of treasures, including silver jars, gold daggers, and diadems of pure gold. These were the crown jewels of the Trojan king, he claimed; he had actually excavated the palace of King Priam! There he was wrong, however; the Troy whose treasures he had uncovered was very much older than the Troy of the *Iliad*! In fact, we are now pretty sure that Homer's Troy was the sixth from the bottom, and not the second; Schliemann had dug right through it without knowing, and in his eager haste had destroyed a good part of what he was looking for. But he could not be expected to know this; and to him remains the credit of having demonstrated that there had actually been a Troy, and that Homer had not made the whole story up out of his head.

A few years later Schliemann turned his attention to Mycenae, an ancient site on the mainland of Greece which was traditionally the capital of King Agamemnon, who had joined in the expedition against Troy; when he returned home the king had been murdered by Clytemnestra, his wife, and Aegisthus, whom she had taken as her lover during her husband's prolonged absence. The murdered king and his attendants had been buried inside the city walls, and Schliemann after a careful investigation of the site thought that he had discovered just where. He set his men to work, and before long he had the immense satisfaction of disinterring the

bodies of men who had worn gold masks and breast-plates, together with bronze swords and daggers inlaid with gold, and drinking-cups of gold and silver. Wild with excitement, Schliemann sent a telegram to the King of Greece announcing that he had discovered the graves of Agamemnon and his companions.

In fact, he had not. The "shaft graves", as they are called, at Mycenae are now known to be some three hundred years *earlier* than Agamemnon: Schliemann had made much the same mistake as he had made at Troy. All the same, he might well be excused, for this was indeed the "Golden Mycenae" that Homer talks about. What Schliemann had really found, though he himself never fully realized it, was evidence of an empire that had passed into legend even before the Greeks and Trojans battled before the walls of Troy. He had gone in search of the heroes of Homer; he had stumbled on the remains of men whom Homer's heroes thought of as having lived in the brave days of old.

If Schliemann had lived only a few years longer he would have realized that. As it was, after a triumphal tour of England and several more successful archaeological "digs", he died suddenly in Naples in 1890.

To begin with, there had been plenty of people who were inclined to laugh at Schliemann; what a fool he must be, they thought, to waste his time and money in looking for something that had existed

only in the mind of Homer! Others were very angry with him, deploring the unscientific way in which he went about his digging. But when his enthusiasm and energy bore such rich fruits, the laughs and sneers died away. The jewels and ornaments, the rich armour, the swords and knives, the splendid vessels of gold and silver, the beautiful pottery—there was no denying that the extraordinary fellow had indeed discovered *something*. But no one was agreed on exactly *what*.

The civilization he had dug up at Troy and at Mycenae was not Greek, or at least it was very different from the Greek civilization that had been known hitherto. And there was some satisfaction in knowing that Schliemann had been mistaken in his identifications. The things he had found were far older than Homer, older than the Trojan War. The men who made them must have been highly civilized, far more civilized than the Greeks who up to now had been looked upon as the first really civilized men to have lived in Europe. Who were they?

Various answers were put forward, and perhaps the least unreasonable was that the art revealed in the glorious finds at Troy and Mycenae was Egyptian in origin, and had been carried to the islands and shores of the Aegean Sea by mariners from Phoenicia, the coastland of Syria. But by this time other archaeologists had got to work in Phoenicia itself, in Asia Minor, and the Greek islands, and everywhere they brought to light relics

of what seemed to be the same ancient civilization.

Another civilization had preceded the Mycenaean, it was realized, just as the Mycenaean civilization had preceded the Greek. What was it? Where had it flourished most? Where had it begun? How had it started, and when, and how and when had it come to an end?

Gradually men's eyes were turned towards the island of Crete, the largest of the Aegean archipelago. So far as archaeology went, it was still virgin soil; no one had dug there because it was always in such a troubled state. It was ruled by Turkey, and the Turks did not like foreigners, and its people were Christian peasants, who were afraid that anything they might find would be snatched from them by their Turkish masters. Towards the end of the last century Crete was the scene of frequent insurrections, and European archaeologists did not fancy becoming involved in a cruel and bitter civil war. But Crete seemed increasingly likely to have been the original home of the civilization that they were looking for.

In his later years Schliemann himself had begun to think so; his attention had been drawn to Knossos, which was reputed to be the site of a prehistoric royal palace. Robert Pashley had done some digging there in 1834, and had discovered that "all the now existing vestiges of the ancient metropolis of Crete are some rude masses of Roman brickwork," and Captain Spratt in 1851 found very little more. In 1878 a man with the very

appropriate name of Minos Kalochaerinos barely scratched the surface, but unearthed several great jars and some fragments of Mycenaean pottery.

Schliemann was definitely interested, but the man who owned the place asked for 100,000 francs, which Schliemann thought ridiculous. He beat him down to 40,000 francs, but then he found that the wily Turk had deceived him over the number of olive trees that were to be included in the purchase, and as a good business man Schliemann refused to be diddled and called the whole thing off. He was sorry: he wanted very much to crown his career with one more brilliant discovery and Knossos seemed to offer just what he was looking for.

Before he left the island he did sink a trial trench at Knossos, and unfortunately found nothing of interest. If he had found something, if he had managed to come to terms with the Turkish proprietor, he might indeed have crowned his work with a supreme achievement, for just below the surface lay wonderful things, waiting to be discovered, where they had lain for more than three thousand years.

As it was, the honour was to go to an Englishman, a wealthy amateur like Schliemann, but one far better equipped in scholarship and knowledge of what scientific archaeology ought to be. He had met Schliemann once in Athens, and had smiled quietly at the odd little man with his passion for Homer. He had admired his collection of Mycenaean antiquities, and had found them beautiful,

exciting, and puzzling. He had handled them curiously, and peered at them with screwed-up eyes. Schliemann (he wrote) was wearing spectacles, "through which—so fancy took me—he had looked deep into the ground." He himself was to look deeper. His name was Arthur Evans.

3

“EVANS OF CRETE”

IF ARTHUR Evans had not been so shortsighted he would never have seen things so clearly as he did. Indeed, it is not going too far to say that he would never have done his life's work. He would not have been able to make the discoveries that brought him fame, and restored to the knowledge and sight of men a whole civilization that had been buried and forgotten for ages.

Only with great reluctance could he be induced to wear proper glasses, and so a good deal of what other people saw clearly was to him nothing more than a vague blur. But if he held something small—an ancient coin, for instance, or an engraved gem—very close to his eyes, he could make out the tiniest detail. His eyes had the power of a microscope. He could detect the faintest squiggles that were the artist's signature or distinguishing mark.

From childhood he was accustomed to the study of relics of the past, for his father, John Evans, in the intervals of managing a large and prosperous paper-manufacturing business near Hemel Hempstead was a passionate collector of old

coins and the immensely older flint tools and weapons of prehistoric man. Very likely little Arthur's first playthings were the gold coins that glittered in his father's cabinets, and sometimes the boy was allowed to accompany his father on his expeditions in search of fossils. In 1864, when Arthur was thirteen, they went to Herne Bay, where they searched along the shore and at the foot of the cliffs for flints that showed signs of human handiwork, and in 1866 they had ten days together in northern France where, although it was raining heavily most of the time, they thoroughly enjoyed themselves among the relics that had been discovered in the gravels that had been laid down in the course of ages by the River Somme.

After a few terms at a preparatory school, Arthur Evans went to Harrow, in company with his two younger brothers. None of them did very well there, and Arthur's housemaster complained strongly of his "dirt and untidiness". One day the master and his wife came to lunch at the Evans's, and Arthur's step-mother wrote afterwards, "I am afraid he doesn't like Arthur; he doesn't think him so *very* clever"—from which we may gather that she thought differently. She admired his essays and the verses that he brought home to show her; she encouraged him in his studies and in his love for poetry; and she felt strangely moved when she saw him cataloguing his little collection of miscellaneous antiquities, or peering at some ancient coin, "like a jackdaw down a marrow-bone".

His masters could not understand him, and he did not make many friends among the boys. He was short and insignificant-looking, and his short sight made him carry his head in a rather peering, sticking-out way. At night he was practically blind, and on winter afternoons he had to be guided through the dusk to and from the classroom. He was not able to play cricket, since he could not see the ball properly, but he enjoyed the rough and tumble of a game of football. He was a great walker, and as he strode along he flourished a big walking-stick which he used to prod at anything that attracted his attention. His friends named it "Prodger", and he was hardly ever seen without it; in fact, Prodger—or a succession of Prodgers—accompanied him throughout his life.

Towards the end of his schooldays he blossomed out considerably. He helped to start a school magazine and wrote articles that were witty and satirical, and in his last year took part in the school debating society. But he was too shy to make a good speaker, and when in later years he had to give lectures to learned societies he was often quite inaudible. He wrote no better than he spoke, his handwriting was atrocious, and the printers who had to read his corrected proofs were driven to distraction.

When he left Harrow, he went to Oxford, where he did well enough but by no means brilliantly. He read History, and would have liked to remain at the University with a fellowship. But he was disappointed, and returned home to take up a career

in—he was not at all sure what. One thing he was determined on: he would not go into the family business. Paper-making could get on quite well without him, he was sure, and his tastes lay in quite other directions. At twenty-four he was reported to be a “fantastically conceited” young man, and his friends wondered what he had to be conceited about. They spoke of him as “Little Evans, son of John Evans the Great”, for his father was now an important figure in business and local affairs and one of the foremost authorities on such things as the coinage of the Ancient Britons and the implements and other relics of Palaeolithic, or Old Stone Age, Man. Arthur was also deeply interested in such things, but he was resolved to make a name for himself, and how could he do that in a field where his father was such a recognized master? He decided to travel, and fortunately he did not have to worry about money, as his father made him an allowance of £250 a year—worth very much more in those days than now.

For several years he lived at Ragusa (now called Dubrovnik), which was then included in the dominions of the Sultan of Turkey, and there he married Margaret Freeman, daughter of a famous historian and a woman of high intelligence and culture. Then he got mixed up in local politics, and the Austrians, who had taken over the country from the Turks, expelled him and his wife.

Back in England he was at a loose end, as the saying goes. But after a time he was appointed

Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and he devoted all his time and energies and a good deal of his money in transforming it into one of the finest institutions of its kind. But although he worked hard and successfully, much of the work was dull and monotonous, and he found it difficult to get on with the committees which seemed to control everything he wanted to do. He missed Ragusa, and then his wife died suddenly when they were on holiday in Italy. He wanted somewhere fresh to go to, he wanted a fresh field to study. He wanted a complete change. And what he wanted so badly, he found. It is summed up in the one word: CRETE.

When he was on a visit to Athens in 1893 he wandered down Shoe Lane there, and kept a keen eye open for anything particularly interesting and strange among the antiquities displayed in the trays outside the little antique shops. Among the things that attracted his attention were some small three-sided and four-sided stones, engraved with symbols which he could not identify but which he was quite sure were not Egyptian. "Where did you get these?" he asked the shopkeepers, and they told him, "They came from Crete". He bought some of the stones, and later came across more stones very like them at the Berlin Museum, and even found one in his own Ashmolean.

The inscriptions puzzled him. They seemed to be hieroglyphs, a kind of picture-writing such as the ancient Egyptians had used for thousands of years.



Two faces of a prism-shaped Cretan seal, such as aroused Arthur Evans's curiosity

But they had not come from Egypt; they had come from Crete. Then he remembered that Heinrich Schliemann had once had the intention of digging at Knossos. If Schliemann were still alive Evans would have hesitated about entering on a field of work which he had explored so long and so successfully. But now Schliemann was dead, and Evans could go to Knossos without feeling that he was trespassing on his preserves. He determined to spend the spring of 1894 there, and explore the site of Knossos.

Taking the steamer from Piraeus, the port of Athens, he arrived at Candia (now called Herakleion) after a 24 hours' voyage, which had tried him horribly. He was able to visit the bazaar, however, and bought a few antiquities that appealed to him.

He liked the look of Candia; its Venetian walls impressed him, and the houses resembled those he had lived in so happily years before in Ragusa. He felt at home; even the light seemed the same, pearl in the early morning, diamond at noon, and amethyst at dusk. A few days later he went with a Greek guide to Knossos; the site (he noted in his diary) was brilliant with purple, white, and pinkish anemones and blue iris. All around were remains of walls and passages that he thought were Mycenaean, and innumerable pieces of broken pottery lay scattered over the ground. Here and there he noted symbols very like those on the seals that had first attracted his attention, and his interest was stimulated, since the meaning of such symbols was what he had set out to discover.

For a few weeks he rode about the country on horseback, exploring the ancient sites of which there were plenty in the island. He bought a number of engraved seals from the villagers, and would have bought more but the peasant women were unwilling to part with them. They called them "milk-stones", and asserted that they helped them to suckle their babies. One woman, wife of a shepherd, was particularly firm in her refusal. "The woman only pointed to a small bairn," wrote Evans, "and declared that if she parted with the stone it would die for want of nourishment!" Before he returned to England he had another good look at Knossos, and liked what he saw.

Next spring he was back again in Crete, and he

decided to buy the site of Knossos if he could. His first offer was turned down, and there was much haggling over the terms. Before he could arrange a settlement, the Cretan villagers broke out in armed rebellion against the Turks. Moslems and Christians massacred each other, and there were dreadful atrocities committed by both sides. At last the Great Powers of Europe intervened, the Turkish troops were expelled, and a Greek prince was put in charge of the administration. He proved much more reasonable than the Turkish governor had been, and Evans resumed his negotiations for the purchase of Knossos.

This time there were no last-minute hitches, and in 1899 Evans became the owner of the whole site. He got together a little band of expert archaeologists, who knew much more about the actual spade-work than he did, and engaged thirty native workmen to do the actual digging; it was characteristic of him that he insisted that there should be both Moslems and Christians among them, so that the two peoples who had to live together in the island should learn to work together in harmony. They started digging on March 23, 1900, and had hardly pushed a spade into the ground when strange things began to come to light.

Arthur Evans watched them with eager eyes, and often took a hand himself. He was still there more than thirty years later, still digging, still discovering. He had set out with the modest intention of learning the meaning of a script; he never did

learn it—but to his amazement, and the amazement of the world, he discovered a whole new civilization, the civilization of the Bronze Age empire of Min-oan Crete.

Once, in the long ago, they had called him “Little Evans”, and they were not referring only to his slight stature. But there was nothing little about him now. He had “Sir” before his name, and a host of letters signifying academic honours after it. He was pleased and proud, but in his heart of hearts the title that surely pleased him most was the one the man in the street gave him: Evans of Crete.

4

LET'S GO TO KNOSSOS

KNOSSOS LIES about four miles south of Herakleion (or Candia as it used to be called), on the north coast of Crete. To get to it, you walk from the harbour along the narrow streets of the bazaar quarter and pass through a wide breach in the wall that was built by the Venetians centuries ago when Crete was part of their trading empire. Now the road passes over the vast moat and climbs slowly through suburbs of mean looking houses. It is dry and dusty, and the scenery is not very attractive. On the left is an old Moslem cemetery, and all around are the remains of what was once a Roman city.

Now we come to a low ridge, and once we have topped this we see a wide stretch of open country, bare save for a few trees here and there, but straight ahead is the cone-like peak of Mt. Juktas, where according to Cretan legend the great god Zeus lies buried.

The road descends to where two streams meet, and close by is a low spur or headland jutting out from the west slope below the road. Here it was

that Arthur Evans, on one of his first visits, was having a picnic lunch one day when he suddenly exclaimed, "When I come to dig here, this is where I shall build my house". And build it he did, for there it stands, the Villa Ariadne as he named it after the Cretan princess whose acquaintance we shall make in a later chapter. This slope, clothed with cypresses and olives, and in summer by a rose and purple trail of bougainvillaea, is called Kephala, from the Greek for "headland", and here is the site of Knossos.

From where we are standing it does not look much like a hill, but we learn that its top was levelled by the builders of the palace; if we had approached from the south or east, we would have seen that the slopes are quite steep. In Minoan times the approach was across a massive viaduct that bridged the stream, and impressive indeed must have been the city-palace with its buildings rising in terraces from the foundations of tree-girdled rock.

But "impressive" is hardly the word to describe it today. Knossos does not dominate the plain as Troy does, or Mycenae, or Athens; it is overlooked in every direction from better points of vantage. There is nothing of the solemn magnificence of the Egyptian temples, nothing of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome. Nothing save broken walls and cracked pavements, rooms that have lost their roofs, stairways that lead nowhere, signs of restoration and

rebuilding, piles of rubble and freshly turned soil, holes in the ground.

We need a guide to explain its meaning, and fortunate were those in years gone by who were taken round by Evans himself. Next best to him would have been John Pendlebury, who was curator of the site from 1928 to 1934 and wrote a handbook for the use of visitors and a standard volume on *The Archaeology of Crete*. Pendlebury, like Evans, was a born archaeologist, and although he was more than fifty years younger than Evans the two got on very well together. He married a girl who had been a fellow student with him at the British School of Archaeology at Athens, and the two thoroughly explored Crete, walking the island from end to end. In 1940, when Crete became caught up in the Second World War, Pendlebury was made a captain in the British Army and acted as liaison officer with the British Military Mission which was engaged in organizing the villagers against the German invaders.

Then in May 1941 he was wounded when trying to join his band of guerrilla fighters in the mountains, and the next day he was killed by a German parachutist. He was only 37, and his death was a great loss to Cretan archaeology. His books remain, however, as the monument of a man who, we are told by Miss Joan Evans (in the book *Time and Chance* in which she tells the life-story of Arthur Evans, who was her half-brother) had "a touch of knight-errantry about him, a real humanity, and

an enthusiastic knowledge of the complex Knossian site", one of the most important archaeological sites in the world.

From the first it was clear that Evans had chosen just the right spot. The remains of an ancient house were the first things to be discovered, with fragments of frescoes or wall paintings. Then numbers of little coloured cups came to light, together with many other pieces of pottery. At the end of the first week they found among a collection of great storage jars a kind of clay bar which, much to Evans's delight, had script on it and what appeared to be numerals. This was just what he had come to look for, and he engaged a lot more men for the digging. He was entering a new world, he was seeing things that no human eye had seen for thousands of years. And this was only the beginning; there was more, lots more, to come.

On April 5, 1900, he noted in his diary, "A great day!" That morning they had been working on what seemed to be a corridor, and found two large pieces of Minoan fresco. One represented the head and forehead and the other the waist and part of the skirt of what at first they thought was a female figure, holding a long "rhyton" or high, funnel-shaped cup of Mycenaean pattern. The figure was life-size, and the head had a European aspect, with dark, slightly almond-shaped eyes, full lips, curly hair, and high skull. The skin colour was reddish-brown, and it was this that led them to conclude finally that the figure was male, since they found

that the Minoan artists adopted the convention of this colour for men as against the white complexion with which they complimented the other sex.

"We have here before us, in fact," wrote Evans in his account of the discovery, "a sunburnt scion of the Mediterranean race. There was something very impressive in this vision of brilliant youth and of male beauty, recalled after so long an interval to our upper air from what had been until yesterday a forgotten world. Even our untutored Cretan workmen felt the spell and the fascination. They, indeed, regarded the discovery of such a painting in the bosom of the Earth as nothing less than miraculous, and saw in it the 'ikon' of a saint."

As they could not finish the job of removing the fresco before dark, one of the most trustworthy of the gang of diggers was set to watch over it during the night. In the morning the man had a strange tale to tell. The "saint" had appeared to him in a dream, and waking, he had been conscious of a mysterious presence. The animals round about had begun to low and neigh, and he summed up his experience in the words, "the whole place spooks!".

It was in this way that the first portrait of a member of the Minoan race was discovered. The remains of the fresco were carefully retrieved and taken away to the museum at Candia, but in order to preserve the archaeological record on the spot Evans commissioned a Swiss artist on his staff, M. Gilliéron, to execute a replica which was placed in

the section of the wall that the original had occupied.

The "Cup-bearer", as they named it, was the first of what proved to be a number of frescoes; it was clear that the Minoan artists had carried the technique of painting pictures on damp, freshly-laid plaster to a very high degree of excellence. The walls of rooms and corridors, stairways and courtyards, had all been covered with delightful representations of men and women, of plants and animals, and of geometrical designs. The durability of the colours (Evans noted) was marvellous, so that pieces of the painted stucco that were uncovered and exposed to the elements in the early days of the excavation were even brighter ten years later than when they were first exhumed.

Most of the frescoes were in fragments, and it required great skill and patience in putting the hundreds of thousands of little bits and pieces together. Some were much better preserved than others, however, and among these is one that is known as the "Saffron-gatherer". It is said to be the oldest of the Knossian frescoes that have survived in anything like complete form, and shows a youthful figure, naked save for a girdle, gathering saffron-flowers or crocuses, and setting them in bowls in a rocky field. At least that is how Evans described it at first. But he was not sure about the identification, since the body is painted in grey-blue, and, as we have just seen, the Minoan artists adopted the convention of reddish-brown for males.

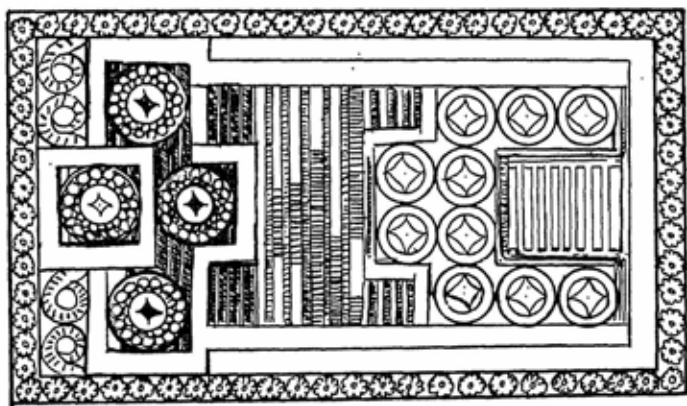
He thought, therefore, that it might represent a girl rather than a boy. Further work on the reconstruction of the fresco led to the conclusion that the figure was neither a boy nor a girl but a monkey.

There is no possibility of mistake about the sex of the next fresco on our list. It is referred to as the "Priest-King", and it is by far the best picture of a Minoan male that has been preserved. The splendid swing of the chest and the powerful muscles of the lean thighs (writes Pendlebury) show the Minoan ideal of the human figure. The youth is wearing a coronet of lilies with a plume of peacock feathers. The flowing locks of his hair come down over his chest, and round his neck is a collar of lilies that may be the insignia of a Minoan order of chivalry. He is very small-waisted, and he is dressed only in a loincloth clasped about him by a tight girdle. And he is walking in a paradise of fantastic lilies and butterflies. He seems to be leading something, but we cannot be sure what—a griffin perhaps.

Now here is a fresco showing Minoan women—the "Ladies in blue", it is styled. It was found in a horrible jumble, but it has been put together and shows the upper part of what is clearly a group of seated ladies. Their bosoms are open, and they wear blue short-sleeved bodices covered with rich embroidery. Their wrists, necks, and tresses are jewelled, and from the action of one of the hands, which is seen fingering the beads of a necklace, and of another which is apparently about to

feel the border of her neighbour's dress, it would seem that they are comparing fashion notes. Such a picture as this, showing women in the intimacy of the boudoir, serves to bring the Minoans of so long ago very near to us.

Next we have something of a very different character. It is an inlaid gaming-table, or perhaps draughtboard, and a magnificent thing it is. It is



What game was played on this splendid "gaming-table"?

about 3 feet long by 18 inches wide, and it is made of ivory laid on wood. It is bordered with a pattern of daisies, and the divisions are formed of bars of crystal backed with silver. We do not know what game was played on it, but not far away were found a number of conical draughtsmen made of ivory, and also some prism seals that may have served as dice.

As the digging proceeded, Evans realized that the task he had embarked upon was far greater than he had contemplated in the beginning. The palace was as big as a town; in fact, it *was* a town, the headquarters of the Minoan king and his government, his palace and his shrine, his workshops and storerooms and offices. Roughly it constitutes a square block of buildings, measuring about 150 yards each way, and in the immediate neighbourhood are other buildings which seem to have been royal villas or smaller palaces and the houses of great government officials.

The main excavations were carried out between 1900 and 1908, but the work continued for many years after that, and indeed still goes on. It was carried out with the greatest care, and small regard for expense: Evans is said to have spent £250,000 of his own money on it. What made it exceptionally difficult was the fact that the palace had not been built mainly in one period but had been in course of construction for centuries. It bears unmistakable signs of alterations and additions, and of catastrophic changes brought about by earthquake and fire, and possibly by enemy attacks and sackings. Often it is a matter of extreme difficulty to decide what should be preserved, and what period the remains belong to.

From the beginning Evans was not concerned, as Schliemann had been, with just finding interesting objects: he was resolved to restore as much as possible to its original state, so that the world of

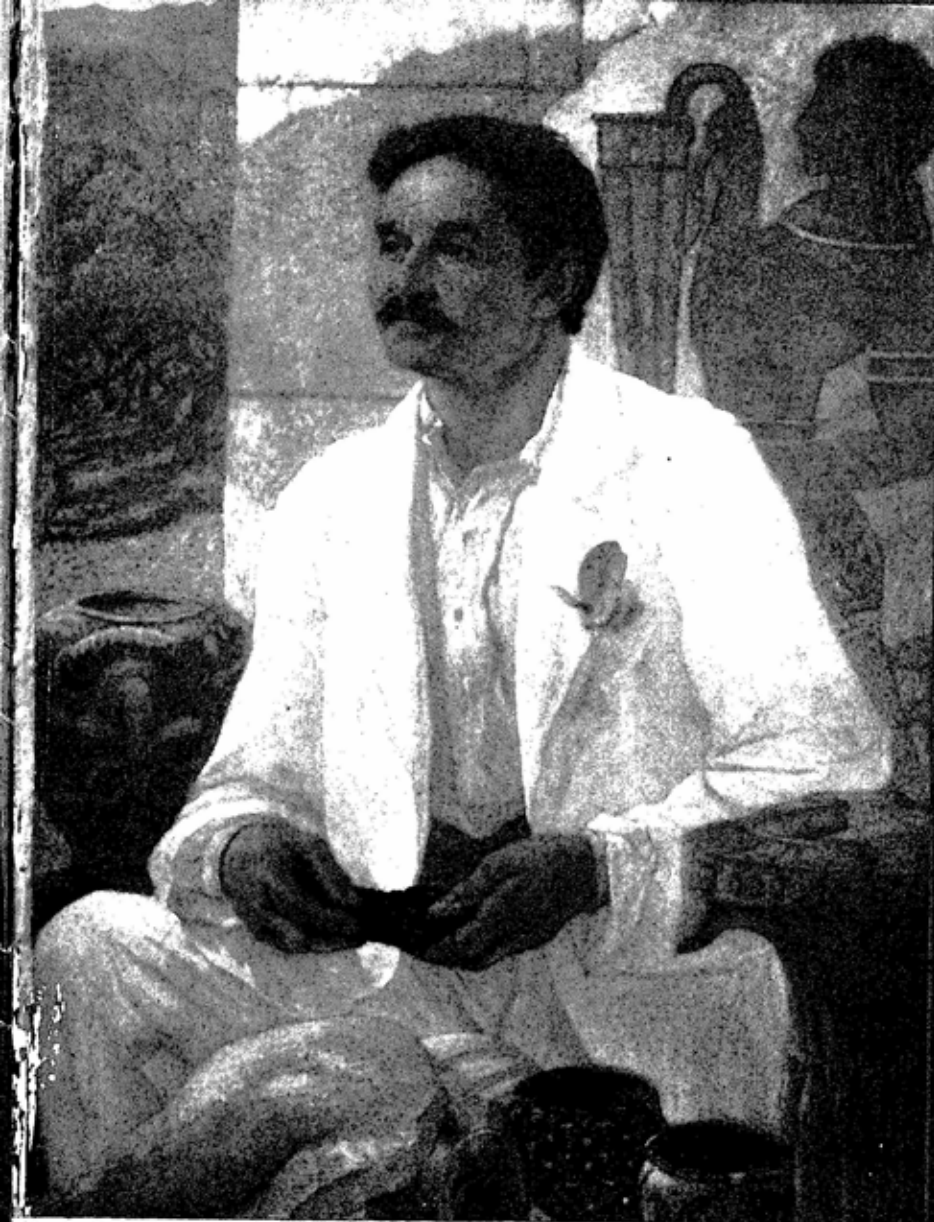
today would be able to form a reasonably clear and accurate idea of what the Minoan city-palace of more than three thousand years ago looked like. Whenever possible he rebuilt. He was one of the first excavators to have a trained architect always at hand, and it was this expert's job to preserve all that he could and to restore the ruins to their original shape. It was discovered that a good deal of timber had been used in the original building; this had rotted away, or had been burnt, but Evans's men replaced the wood with beams of concrete, and in this way whole rooms were preserved intact. Thus it is that today visitors to Knossos can enter the chambers of the Minoan lords and ladies, go down into the cellars where the great pottery jars that once held oil were found still standing, walk down the corridors along which the royal processions moved in colourful magnificence, go up and down the splendid stairways, and enter what is supposed to have been the Throne-room of King Minos.

And there, set against a wall decorated with frescoes of papyrus flowers and leaves and crouching griffins, fabulous creatures with lion's body and eagle's beak, is the "Throne of Minos". It is a chair made of stone, with a high back shaped like a leaf, and it is

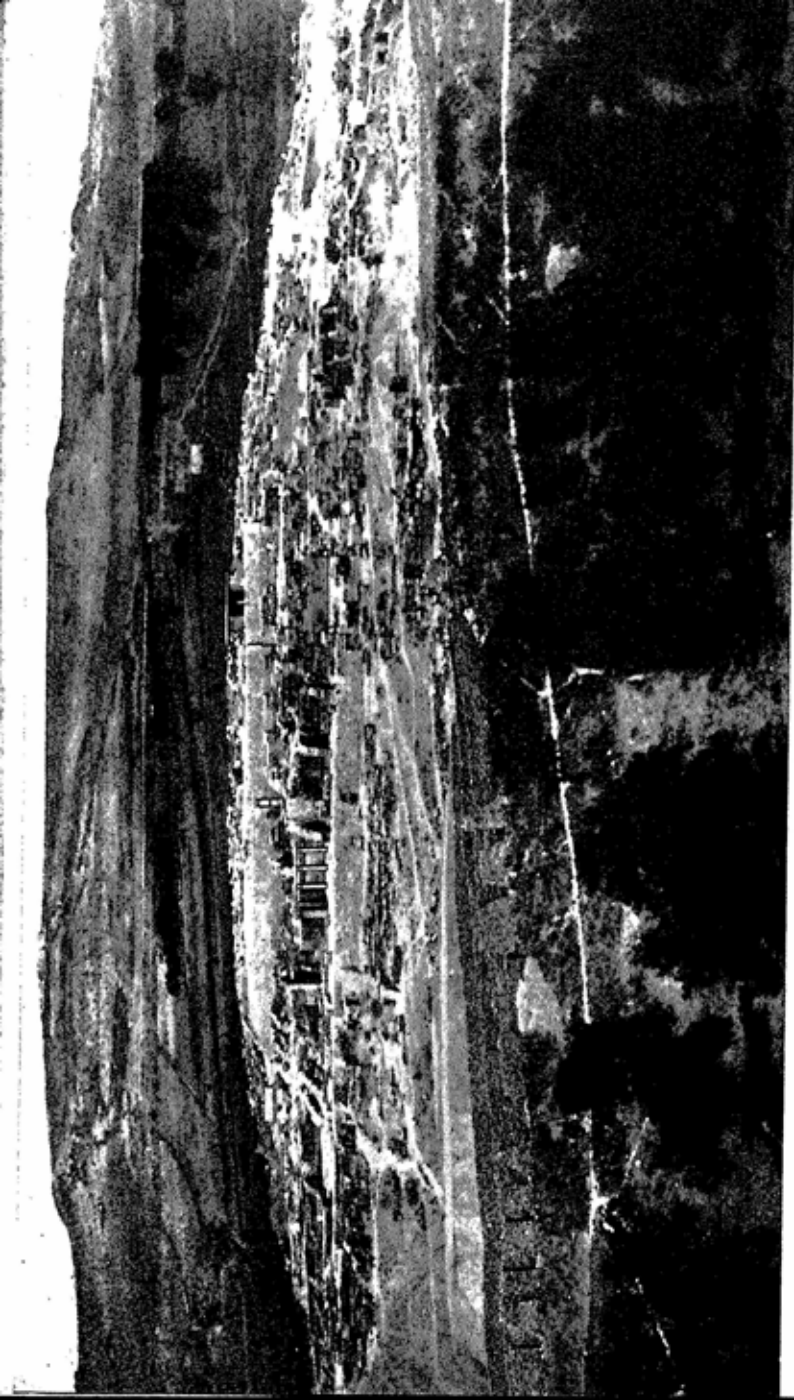


Throne of King
Minos

said to be very comfortable to sit in. Traces of plaster indicate that the back was decorated. On either side are stone benches for the use of the king's ministers and courtiers, and in the pavement in front is a depression which is assumed to have held water or oil with which visitors purified themselves before coming into the presence of his Majesty. "The oldest throne in Europe", Evans called it, with justifiable pride; more than three thousand years older than the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey.



Sir Arthur Evans, discoverer and revealer of Minoan Crete
After the painting by Sir William Richmond: photo, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



The Palace at Knossos: the excavated area seen from the air: *photo, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*



The Cup-bearer. Painted on the wall of the Palace at Knossos some 3500 years ago, this was the first portrait of a Minoan to come to light:
photo, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



(Left) The Snake-Goddess
Votary statuette (restored),
found in the Palace at Knossos.
(Below) Knossos. Part of the
Palace as restored by Sir Arthur
Evans: *photos, Ashmolean
Museum, Oxford*



5

EARLY, MIDDLE, AND LATE

THIS IS going to be a short chapter, and at first sight it may look an uninteresting one. But it is a very important one, for it deals with *dates*. (And I don't mean the ones you eat.)

How is it that when no dated or datable inscriptions have come down to us from ancient Crete, we can still make statements about its history? For such statements are made. True, we have no such easy-to-remember dates as "Battle of Hastings, 1066" or "Accession of Queen Elizabeth II, 1952", but we know roughly when civilization began in Crete, when there were exceptionally big changes, and when the final disaster came. This has been made possible by "parallel finds" of Egyptian objects in Crete and Cretan objects in Egypt. Since the chronology of Egypt is practically fixed, we are fairly entitled to assert that an 18th Egyptian dynasty object found in a grave in Crete means that the burial cannot have been made later than about 1350 B.C., since this was when the 18th dynasty was succeeded by the 19th.

The "objects" most useful in this connection are

vases and other pieces of pottery. For pottery is a most common material, found and used almost everywhere; when broken it is useless and the fragments are thrown away, not used in the making of something else. And as everyone knows, it is practically indestructible, although it is the easiest thing in the world to break.

All the same, this method of dating is not completely satisfactory. It is all very well for archaeologists to assert that a particular design or pattern is characteristic of a certain period, but we cannot be sure that it was not copied and repeated long after it had "gone out of fashion". And reliance cannot always be put on the layer of other deposits among which it happens to be found. A vase might, in the course of the destruction of a building or town, drop through a hole in the floor and become buried in a much earlier deposit.

Or it might happen the other way. A vase that was particularly prized might have been kept for generations (like great-grandmamma's Derby china tea-set) before it met with an accident and was thrown into the ancient equivalent of a dustbin—usually the rubbish-heap outside the door—and so became mixed up with rubbish of a much later time. And it should also be mentioned that although the chronology of Ancient Egypt is practically fixed, it is not absolutely certain, and all dates before 1580 B.C. are still pretty tentative. The earliest dates may be as much as 1800 years "out" compared with the chronology most generally favoured.



Early Minoan pottery; very useful in "dating" the deposits

With these warnings and reservations, Cretan chronology has been worked out with considerable preciseness, and it is given in the Table on page 53.

As will be seen, it is divided into three main groups or sections, which are named *Early Minoan*, *Middle Minoan*, and *Late Minoan*, and each of these is again subdivided into three, e.g. Early Minoan I, Early Minoan II, and Early Minoan III. It was Evans who first suggested this method of naming, and he had in mind, of course, the more or less legendary King Minos. It seemed so obviously suitable that it has "stuck".

Although lines are drawn between the main

periods, we must not suppose that there was any clear break between them. They are not watertight compartments; they usually slide imperceptibly into the next. As Pendlebury puts it, "It is not reported that King Minos declared, *I'm tired of Middle Minoan III, let Late Minoan I begin!*".

For comparative dating in Crete, nearly everything is based on Knossos, since Knossos was the first and most important of the Minoan sites to be excavated, and only at Knossos is the series of successive periods anything like complete. Elsewhere there are gaps and divergencies in the record; and even at Knossos the pottery fragments are not arranged in a nice tidy fashion, the oldest at the bottom, above these the next oldest, and so on until we reach the top, but there has been so much rebuilding and digging up of old foundations to make fresh ones that the potsherds have got horribly mixed up. But there is nothing better or anything like so good to be found elsewhere: it is Knossos or nothing.

The Table begins with a question-mark. We do not know when the first Neolithic settlers established themselves on the hillside at Knossos. Evans thought that it might have been as early as 8000 B.C., but Pendlebury was of the opinion that a few centuries before 4000 B.C. was much more likely. Round about 3500 or 3000 B.C. the Neolithic or New Stone Age in Crete tended to merge into the Age of Bronze, in which the whole history of the Palace lies. The really striking fact is that the

EARLY, MIDDLE, AND LATE CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

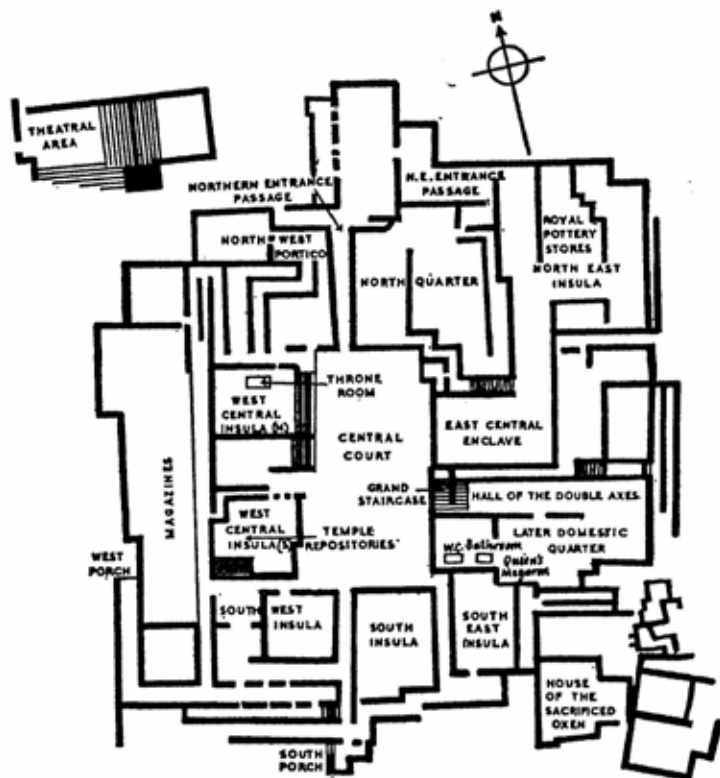
53

B.C.	Crete	Contemporary
<i>approx.</i>		
8000?	First Neolithic settlements	Prehistoric period in Egypt
3500	Transition to Bronze Age	
?	<i>Early Minoan I</i>	
2600	<i>Early Minoan II</i>	"Old Kingdom" in Egypt (Dynasties I to VI)
2400	<i>Early Minoan III</i>	
2200	<i>Middle Minoan I</i> Knossos palace begun	"Middle Kingdom" in Egypt (Dynasties XI to XVII) Hammurabi ruling in Babylon
2000	<i>Middle Minoan II</i> First climax of Minoan civilization Catastrophic destruction of Palace at Knossos and other sites	XIIth Dynasty in Egypt
1800	<i>Middle Minoan III</i> Palace at Knossos rebuilt	"Hyksos" kings in Egypt
1650?	Earthquake; Palace rebuilt	
1550	<i>Late Minoan I</i> Terrible earthquake	"New Kingdom" in Egypt (XVIIIth Dynasty)
1450	<i>Late Minoan II</i> "Golden Age of Crete": Palace re-modelled	Exodus of Israelites from Egypt?
1400	Fall of Knossos	
1375	<i>Late Minoan III</i> Leadership passed to Mycenaeans on the mainland	Pharaoh Akhnaton
1358		Pharaoh Tutankhamen
1200	Transition to Iron Age	Homeric Age Trojan War

Minoan civilization lasted for not far short of *two thousand years*—about as long as the whole history of this country since the arrival of the Romans under Julius Caesar. And the Palace at Knossos stood for some eight hundred years, so that when it was finally destroyed it was about as old as Westminster Abbey is today.

There is not much to see of *Early Minoan* work: either it was destroyed in the course of the successive rebuildings or it lies buried far down beneath the later foundations. Traces of one or two houses have been discovered, and we know from better preserved remains at other sites that they were built of brick on a stone base and were of two or three storeys.

Somewhere about 2200 B.C. the *Middle Minoan* period opened, and now it was that the first Palace at Knossos was begun. The top of the hill was cleared of its buildings and levelled off to make a broad platform, and the north-west corner of the site was extended above a mass of débris. In the middle of the platform a central court was planned, and around this were built a number of blocks of buildings which are referred to by the Latin word *insulae*, "islands", which is what they were. There was no great surrounding wall such as is found in most ancient cities, and from its absence it is inferred that the Cretans did not fear attacks by enemies from without, either because they were not threatened or because they had learnt to put their trust in their navy. But some of the blocks were



Knossos: sketch plan of the maze of buildings uncovered by Evans

“keeps” or guard-houses, in particular the one near the North Gate; perhaps this was the city prison, since underneath it were found several cells or dungeons, twenty or thirty feet below the ground.

The greatest achievement of the Middle Minoan builders seems to have been the great Viaduct which

carried the road from the south into the heart of the Palace. A branch road led off to the Harbour Town on the north coast. And another thing worth mentioning is the elaborate drainage system, which indicates an altogether exceptional and surprising knowledge of the principles of sanitary engineering.

As king followed king, the Palace was extended or rebuilt on grander lines, and about the middle of the Middle Minoan period the buildings were consolidated. The blocks were linked up, and the Palace took the form of a compact structure completely enclosing the Central Court, which remained open to the sky. On the west were the official quarters, the Throne Room, the audience chambers, the government offices and magazines or store-rooms, while on the east a great new Domestic Quarter was erected on a cutting in the hillside. Then a catastrophe of some kind occurred, which seems to have affected other places in the island as well as Knossos. Very likely it was a great earthquake, but we cannot be sure.

This catastrophe, whatever it was, happened about 1650 B.C., and it was followed by a great new spurt of building activity. The Palace that we see today—or rather, what is left of it—is the structure that was raised by the builders of Middle Minoan III. The place was almost completely rebuilt, on grander and bigger lines, and in particular the Domestic Quarter was remodelled and enlarged and the Grand Staircase was built. One new

feature that was adopted was the system of light-wells such as we find in modern office buildings.

Another innovation in building technique was the use of columns made of trunks of trees placed upside down. This downward taper is characteristic of the later Minoan architecture, and Pendlebury argues that it was reasonable enough; if the trunks had been placed in the building right way up, they would be liable to sprout, and besides, the continual drip of rain after a shower would rot their bases if they were wide enough at the bottom to catch the fall. As it was, they were narrower at the bottom, and so the raindrops missed them.

Not long before the close of the Middle Minoan III period there was a disastrous earthquake, but the Palace was shortly after rebuilt as glorious as before. So we come to the *Late Minoan* period, about the middle of which is placed the "Golden Age of Crete". There was not much building: the Palace was complete and as good as the architects and builders could make it. There was yet another earthquake, but the damage was soon made good. Then towards the close of Late Minoan II, about 1400 B.C., something terrible happened to Knossos—and only to Knossos. The Palace was again destroyed, and this time for good.

6

MEET THE MINOANS

AT THE HEIGHT of its greatness, Knossos and its harbour-town may have had a population of a hundred thousand. This is Evans's guess, and if it be anywhere near the truth, the population of the whole island must have been at least twice as many. For there were many other towns besides Knossos, although none approached it in size and importance. Knossos was the metropolis, and its great Palace was surrounded by the living quarters of a densely-packed people.

What sort of people? Judging from the skeletons that have been dug up in the cemeteries, they were long-headed and on the short side, averaging 5 feet 4 inches in height—which is about two inches shorter than the Cretan peasant of today. But we are not dependent on old bones for our idea of what they looked like, since there are the splendid pictures on the walls of the Palace at Knossos and other buildings—pictures that were drawn and painted by artists who watched the people go by as they worked.

Minoan men had copper-coloured skins, for

there is no reason to suppose that the reddish-brown employed by the artist in their representation was only a convention. They were beardless and shaved the upper lip, and they wore their hair in coils on the top of the head with three curls hanging down to their shoulders. Their bodies were slender, with small hands and feet. They emphasized their slimness by drawing in their waists with a tight belt; and the impression we get is of a small-boned race, relying on quickness of limb and brain rather than on brute strength.

Nor need we rely on the frescoes, for the present-day Cretan (wrote Pendlebury, who knew the race and country so well) has much of the Minoan in him. "All over the island today you see the wasp waists, no longer artificially restricted but still emphasized by the long silk girdle, the slim hips, the high square shoulders and the long legs. Many a village boy might be the direct descendant of the Cup-bearer or the Priest-King, and who can deny the possibility that he may be?"

The everyday dress of the Minoan men was simplicity itself, being normally nothing more than a loincloth girt by a broad belt made of gaily coloured and patterned leather or cloth, or alternatively a pair of short drawers. On their feet they wore shoes of leather, with bindings of red and blue and in some cases delicately embroidered. Then round the lower part of the leg they wound strips of cloth very like a modern soldier's puttees. On high days and holidays, however, the men—at

least those of the upper classes—wore elaborate robes and feathered head-dresses or turbans, and their love of jewellery was shown in their necklaces and armlets or bracelets, and the jewelled dagger in their belts.

In the Minoan wall-paintings the women are shown with dead white skins, contrasting strongly with the bronzed complexion of the men. But as we have already noted, this was an artistic convention, and besides, the women portrayed in the frescoes are palace ladies; if the artist had pictured peasant girls he would probably have shown them with skins burned brown with the sun, since they shared with their menfolk the long hours of toil in the fields and olive-groves.

Minoan ladies obviously took delight in following the fashion. The frescoes and statuettes show them wearing garments that have been carefully sewn and fitted to the figure, without any suggestion of flowing draperies. The upper part of the body was encased in a tight-fitting bodice, rather like that worn by Swiss peasant-girls on fête-days at the present time. This was laced in front into a very small waist, and the sleeves were puffed and the neck was cut very low and open. In the contours of the Knossian belles there is nothing of the flowing curves of the Venus de Milo: every morning their maids must have tugged and strained at the laces on their bodices, until their waists were squeezed to the fashionable size. The dames of ancient Greece did not wear corsets, but the ladies

of Knossos would have felt horribly undressed without them.

Sometimes the ladies wore instead of a bodice a kind of blouse of some light stuff that was so thin that you could see through it, and sometimes they left their bosoms completely uncovered. In this case there was not the slightest suggestion of immodesty: modesty after all is largely a matter of geography and custom. And while we are on the subject, we may note Evans's tribute, that "from the beginning to the end of Minoan art, not one single example has been brought to light of an indecorous nature".

Round their waists ladies wore a broad belt of some coloured material, often richly embroidered, and from this hung down bell-shaped skirts, sometimes flounced throughout their length, with ruffles of varying widths and colours. The whole costume suggests a taste for elegance and concern for fashion, and the dressmakers must have been expert needlewomen. We know that Minoan women did sewing, for the needles and bodkins that they dropped accidentally have been discovered among the ruins of their boudoirs and bedrooms.

Women wore their hair in long, waving tresses, in twists on the top of the head, and in coquettish curls that clustered about the neck. No doubt the ladies spent many happy hours at the coiffeur's, comparing hair-styles and exchanging the latest gossip, while the hairdresser practised his beautifying art. Altogether there is a very modern look

about the Minoan ladies, and it is not surprising that a French scholar, seeing the frescoes from Knossos for the first time, exclaimed in excited admiration, "*Mais, ces sont des Parisiennes!*".

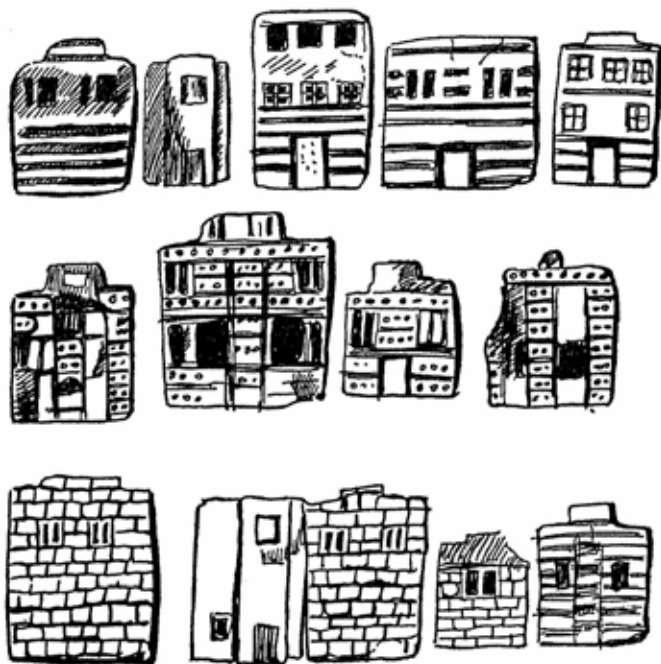
One item of costume remains to be mentioned, the seal, which was made of soft stone such as steatite, ivory, or hard stones such as cornelian, amethyst, rock crystal, and jasper. The seals were of various shapes and sizes. The "signet" type were like chess-men, with the design on the under-surface; some were cylindrical, and both these types were hung round the neck at the end of a string. Others were round or oval or lens-shaped, and these might be worn on the wrist or in finger-rings. The "Priest-King" is wearing his seal on a strap round his left wrist, and so is the "Cup-bearer". The designs on the seals include birds and beasts and fishes, human figures, and fanciful ornaments. Great numbers of seals, and of seal impressions on clay objects, have been discovered, and we are justified in assuming that every man of importance had his own personal seal which he stamped his belongings with and used in "signing" his letters.

So much for the people; now let us take a look at the houses they lived in. In the early days of settlement on the island, the Cretans lived in huts made of mud and wattle, but by the Minoan period they had learnt how to build houses of brick and stone, with wooden floors and roofs. The ordinary citizen's home had sun-baked brick

walls reared on a foundation of rubble; timber beams were inserted into the fabric to strengthen the masonry, as in Elizabethan houses in this country. The interior walls were plastered, and sometimes covered with pictures. The ceilings were of reeds plastered together, and the floors were of earth rammed hard or made of cobblestones or flagstones. The roofs were flat; and if, as was often the case, the house consisted of several storeys, these were arranged to give a terraced effect.

We can get a very good idea of what houses were like in the Middle Minoan period from a number of faience (glazed coloured earthenware) plaques that were found in Knossos. This "Town Mosaic" shows villas of two or more storeys, constructed of masonry tied together with great wooden beams. On the ground floor there is only a door, but above are rows of square windows with window-panes painted scarlet in some cases. Evans suggested that these windows may have been filled in with a red material—oiled and tinted parchment, or some other anticipation of glass.

These plaques were found in a chest at Knossos, but the best actual remains of Minoan houses are at Gournia and Pseira, in eastern Crete. At Gournia a whole town plan has been made out. On the top of the hill overlooking the sea is the mansion of the lord of the manor, with a big public court and a "theatral area" in which plays and other public performances may have been given. The rest of the houses are divided by paved streets, two of



Minoan houses pictured on a mosaic from Knossos

which were “ring roads” almost encircling the hill at different levels. Houses built on a slope had basement rooms with back doors on the down-hill side and front doors opening on to the street.

Crossing the stone threshold, you found yourself in a paved hall or antechamber, with several doors leading into the ground-floor rooms. In one corner would be steps or stairs leading to the upper floors, and more steps descending into the

cellar or basement. The living rooms were probably on the first floor, which had windows, whereas the ground floor was windowless and was probably used as a storeroom. Somewhere there would be a small shrine or private chapel, with images of the god or goddess who was the family's favourite divinity. There are evidences also of bathrooms and sanitation, but nothing to compare with the latrines with wooden seats that have been discovered at Knossos.

A Minoan householder seems to have had a dwelling of six to eight rooms on the average, but a really substantial citizen might have twice that number. No doubt he needed them, since in addition to the family there were living under his roof a retinue of slaves who performed the domestic duties and worked in the fields that belonged to their master just outside the town walls. There seems to have been no separation of the women's apartments from the men's—nothing in the nature of a harem. Women were not shut away in a dull and monotonous seclusion, but shared and enjoyed the life of their menfolk.

The furniture has all perished, but there was probably not very much—wooden tables and benches, string beds on a wooden frame, wooden chests to hold the family's clothes and personal belongings. Cooking was done on an open grate, the smoke escaping through a hole in the roof. The most usual cooking vessel was a three-legged pot made of copper, and there were in addition

stewpans, saucepans, jars and basins, also made of copper but more generally, perhaps, of pottery.

In the palaces, at Knossos in particular, the furniture and fittings were much more elaborate and plentiful, of course. The tables and seats would be of stone, finely carved, and there would be plenty of cushions, curtains to the windows, mats or carpets on the floor. The eating and drinking utensils might be of silver or even gold, and all the cooking pots would be of copper. The kitchens must have been vast, for the preparation of the immense quantities of meat and drink that were needed each day. The walls were covered with brightly painted pictures, and the ladies' apartments in particular must have been warm and intimate. We can imagine the ladies of the court taking the equivalent of afternoon tea, lolling on the long, comfortably cushioned couches, nibbling at the cakes and sipping their sweet wine, while discussing the latest fashions and the exciting happenings of yesterday's performance in the bull-ring.

Most of the people were engaged in agriculture, producing food not only for themselves but also for the town populations. There were cornfields, which had to be ploughed by teams of oxen, and when the grain was ripe it was reaped with copper sickles. There were meadows in which herds of cattle grazed, and open downs across which wandered flocks of sheep in the guardianship of shepherd-boys. Milk was obtained from cows and goats: milk vessels hanging from yokes are among the

oldest of the pictures that compose the Minoan script.

The farmers had wagons, for little models of four-wheeled carts have been found; probably they were drawn by oxen or perhaps asses. Horses had been introduced by Late Minoan times, but they were probably rare and expensive; they were used to draw chariots, but there were not many of these in Crete, because the surface was generally too rough. Most transport was by pack animals, oxen and asses, and asses were in general use for riding. The Minoans do not seem to have used horses for riding. The rich people were carried in palanquins—a light litter or wooden-framed box borne on men's shoulders such as has been used in China since time immemorial.

Every town site in Crete has yielded stone mortars and querns or handmills for grinding corn, and actual grains of barley and handfuls of peas have been found in the bottom of stone jars that once were in some Minoan housewife's larder. There were fig trees and olive groves, for then as now the olive was a staple article of diet as well as providing the fat used in cooking. The Minoans cultivated the vine and so had wine to drink, and they also had beer, probably made from barley—and it was pretty strong stuff, as may be gathered from such scenes of joviality as are pictured on the "Harvester Vase" found in Hagia Triada.

Most Cretan homes had their looms, on which women wove cloth for garments and domestic



Minoan pottery. This page, Early Minoan; opposite page, Middle Minoan in the upper half, and Late Minoan beneath



use; we know this because of the number of stone loom-weights that have turned up. The farmer's wife no doubt looked after the dairy and the chickens, and gave a helping hand in the fruit-picking and harvesting.

In the towns were craftsmen and workers of every kind. Now and again we come across the actual tools that they used, as when in Gournia the digging revealed a complete carpenter's kit, including axes and saws, chisels, files, and adzes; one saw was five feet long, and was used probably for cutting down trees for house timbers. But it was in pottery that the Minoans were particularly skilled, and there is no doubt that the Greek artists of centuries later inherited their technique and were inspired by their example.

To begin with, the pottery of the Neolithic period was entirely plain, baked in the sun, polished inside and out, and of very simple shape. Gradually a process of decoration was introduced, consisting of lines cut in the wet clay or impressed by some blunt instrument so as to give the effect of rippled sand. Paint was first introduced in Early Minoan I, and the decoration took the form of groups of lines rendered in dark colours against the light background of the ware. In Early Minoan II the pottery was much better shaped, and there was a vastly increased variety of form, with elaborate painted ornament. Furthermore, there are evidences that the ware was now being fired in a kiln. Towards the close of the Early Minoan period

the proportion of painted vases increases, and it seems that the potter's wheel had been introduced. The decoration that was most favoured was a painted wash over the whole surface, with lighter lines, spirals especially, painted on.

Now we come to Middle Minoan III, in which ceramic art reached a wonderfully high standard of excellence. There was an extraordinary range of shape and decoration. Designs included zig-zags, spirals, and other geometrical figures, and representations of beasts, birds, and fishes. To the middle of the period are assigned the polychrome (several colour) vases that were discovered by J. L. Myres at the cave of Kamares on Mt. Ida. This "Kamares" ware is superb—fine, hard, and even, and often of almost eggshell thinness and texture, and the designs are a mosaic of forms and colours.

About 1600 B.C. the Cretan artists were favouring marine designs, such as the rocks, seaweed, shells, and octopods on the vases that were unearthed at Palaikastro in 1903. This appreciation of the beauty and wonder of the sea is natural enough in such a seafaring people as the Cretans, who at this time were reaching ever farther in their galleys. So we come to Late Minoan, among whose artistic achievements were three famous vases—called the Boxer, the Harvester, and the Chieftain—that were found at Hagia Triada.

In this period pottery provides a reliable aid to dating, for painted on the walls of Egyptian tombs of the XVIIIth Dynasty at Thebes are pictures of



Kamares ware, and the "Chieftain Vase"

people called *keftiu* bearing gifts of various kinds, including vessels of characteristic Late Minoan type. One tomb is that of Senenmut (about 1480 B.C.), who was an official of Queen Hatshepsut, and another is that of Rekhmara, who was prefect of Upper Egypt under Pharaoh Thothmes III about forty years later. That the *keftiu* are Minoans is clear from their dress. In their gaily-decorated loincloths, ornamented girdles and tight belts, they would have been recognized at once as fellow-countrymen by the "Cup-bearer".

We know nothing of the government of the country, apart from the legends concerning King Minos, and we can hardly expect to know anything until inscriptions are discovered and deciphered. There must have been a strong central government,

to build and maintain for so long the splendid metropolis at Knossos, and we may imagine the hordes of tax-collectors that were required to collect the tribute of goods and services to keep the great place going. There was no money as yet, but the rates and taxes were paid in the shape of ingots of copper, corn, cattle, timber and stone, and possibly slaves.

From one end of the island to the other there ran a network of roads, some of them paved with stone; the most important was the one that ran across the island from Knossos to the ports on the south coast. Along this road came the visitors from Egypt, the envoys and merchants and simple tourists, and on the way they passed Minoan traders carrying skins, meat, fruit, timber, metals, and the beautiful vases and other "goods for export" made in the workshops of Knossos.

The impression we get is of an ordered state, firmly run and controlled by the king and a centralized bureaucracy of civil servants. What the people thought about it, we do not know; doubtless they grumbled at the taxes, but whether the grumbling and discontent ever boiled over into insurrection and revolt is not to be discovered. The Minoans had soldiers, for arms and armour have been found in many places, but history tells nothing of any wars in which they may have engaged. On the whole, they seem to have been an unwarlike people; first and foremost they were international traders, and what they were really keen on was not foreign

conquests but openings for peaceful commerce. Very likely the only fighting they ever engaged in was against the pirates who infested the seas and interrupted the channels of trade.

We know what Minoan ships looked like, for they are often represented on seal-stones. They were usually open-decked and had a high prow, and in some cases a raised stern also. Usually they had a single mast, and both sails and oars were used. The oars were in banks, from five to eleven rowers a side. For steering they used a fixed rudder projecting from the stern, or they used two steering oars. In these little galleys the Cretan mariners sailed far and wide.



Ships of King Minos's navy

THE LAIR OF THE MINOTAUR

AFTER HE had been digging at Knossos for a year or so, Evans arrived at a startling conclusion. He looked around and was impressed by the fact that the whole building was a maze of rooms, of long corridors and underground passages, of galleries that seemed to lead nowhere but ended in a blank wall. Here and there he found on a wall a maze-like pattern, and everywhere there was the sign of the double-axe, whose name in ancient Greek was *Labrys*. Putting two and two together, he expressed his opinion that "there can be little doubt that this vast edifice, which in a broad historic sense we are justified in calling the 'Palace of Minos', is one and the same as the traditional 'Labyrinth'".

This brings us back with a jump to the old legend of King Minos and the Minotaur, which I mentioned in the first page. Let us look at it now in more detail.

Minos (we learn) was not only king of Crete, but of many of the neighbouring islands. Thus Thucydides, the great Greek historian of the 5th century

B.C., tells us that "he made himself master of a great part of what is now called the Hellenic Sea; he conquered the Cyclades islands, into most of which he sent the first colonists, appointing his own sons as governors; and as a necessary step to securing the revenues for his own use, did his best to clear the sea of pirates". He was "the first king known to us by tradition as having established a navy". Evidence of the king's widespread empire is to be found in the use of Minos as a place-name on the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean, marking the sites of trading-stations or garrisons or actual townships that he had established. Likewise Herodotus, the "Father of History", speaks of "Minos the Knossian" as one who had the mastery of the Aegean Sea in days before "that which is called the generation of man".

But the great king was not so fortunate in his private life as in his political and commercial arrangements. He had taken to wife a semi-divine personage named Pasiphae, and by her had become the father of four sons and three daughters. But she was a creature of depraved tastes and infamous passions, and she caused him much grief and vexation of spirit.

The eldest son was named Androgeus, and when he grew to manhood he became famous as a wrestler. He went to Athens and engaged in the festival or sports meeting that was held every year in honour of the goddess Athene, and overcame every opponent who risked a fall with him. So

popular did the young prince become with the Athenian crowds that the king of Athens, Aegeus by name, grew intensely jealous of him, and caused him to be waylaid and slain on his way home.

This is one version of the story; another has it that the prince was killed by a great bull that was directed into his path. However that may be, Androgeus was dead, and his father, when he heard the news, was overcome with grief and rage. He raised a great fleet and made war on Athens, and having wasted Attica, the country of which it was the capital, at length compelled King Aegeus to sue for terms. They were hard enough, and among them was the requirement that every ninth year Athens should send to King Minos a tribute of seven youths and seven maidens, who were to be chosen by lot, or, according to another version, selected by Minos's officers from the young people of a certain age group. The youths and girls were taken away to Crete and imprisoned in the Labyrinth, a vast underground building which had been designed and built by Daedalus, the king's extraordinarily clever young architect, primarily to serve as a stable for a monstrous beast called the Minotaur.

"Minotaur" comes from *Minos* and *tauros*, the Greek word for "a bull", and the monster was generally supposed to be the offspring of Queen Pasiphae and a handsome bull that had been presented to her husband by the god Poseidon; he was half-man, half-bull, and he had to be fed on

human flesh. So now we know the fate that lay in store for the Athenian captives.

At least, this is what the Greeks believed; but Plutarch, who tells the story in his famous *Lives*, reports that some held that the victims were not killed and devoured by the Minotaur but just got lost in the subterranean mazes of the Labyrinth and died of hunger and thirst; and he also says that the Cretans of his acquaintance indignantly denied the whole story, declaring that the Labyrinth was nothing more than a prison, "which had no other inconvenience than this, that those who were confined there could not escape". In support of their contention, they adduced the cases of several of the young men who had been taken away to Crete, and had not been killed but had been given by King Minos to the victors in the games or sports that he had instituted in honour of his son Androgeus, after which they had been employed as slaves in various occupations and had lived to old age.

Plutarch was inclined to accept this version himself, but the ordinary folk persisted in believing in the ancient tale that put King Minos in the worst possible light. According to this, the first tribute had been paid, and the second, and the time for making the third came round. All through the years public indignation had been mounting, and now it reached its peak. Why should the flower of the city's youth be sacrificed in this fashion, the people demanded; why should our young men and virgins be sent away to a foreign land to die a

horrible death? After all, it was all King Aegeus's fault: it was he who had caused the young Cretan prince to be assassinated, and yet he bore no part of the punishment! To make matters worse, the king had no legitimate son of his own, but was proposing to appoint as his heir a young man who had only recently appeared on the scene and was said to be Aegeus's son by a foreign woman.

This young man's name was Theseus, and any jealousy and suspicion that the citizens had harboured against him was soon turned to admiration, for when he went down to the quayside and saw and heard the mothers and sweethearts of the destined victims bemoaning their sad fate, he felt so humiliated that in a mood of generous self-sacrifice he offered himself as one of the male quota. His father the king strongly protested, but Theseus refused to be diverted from his purpose, and when the ship sailed for Crete he had his place among the rest. He would seek out the Minotaur, he vowed, and, if the gods so willed, slay him, when (as it had been always understood) the infamous tribute would be remitted.

So brave and confident did he show himself that the Athenians were quite cheered up. On the two previous occasions of the tribute they had provided the ship with black sails, as a sign of mourning, but now they gave the captain a white sail as well, telling him to hoist it if he should bring Theseus back in triumph.

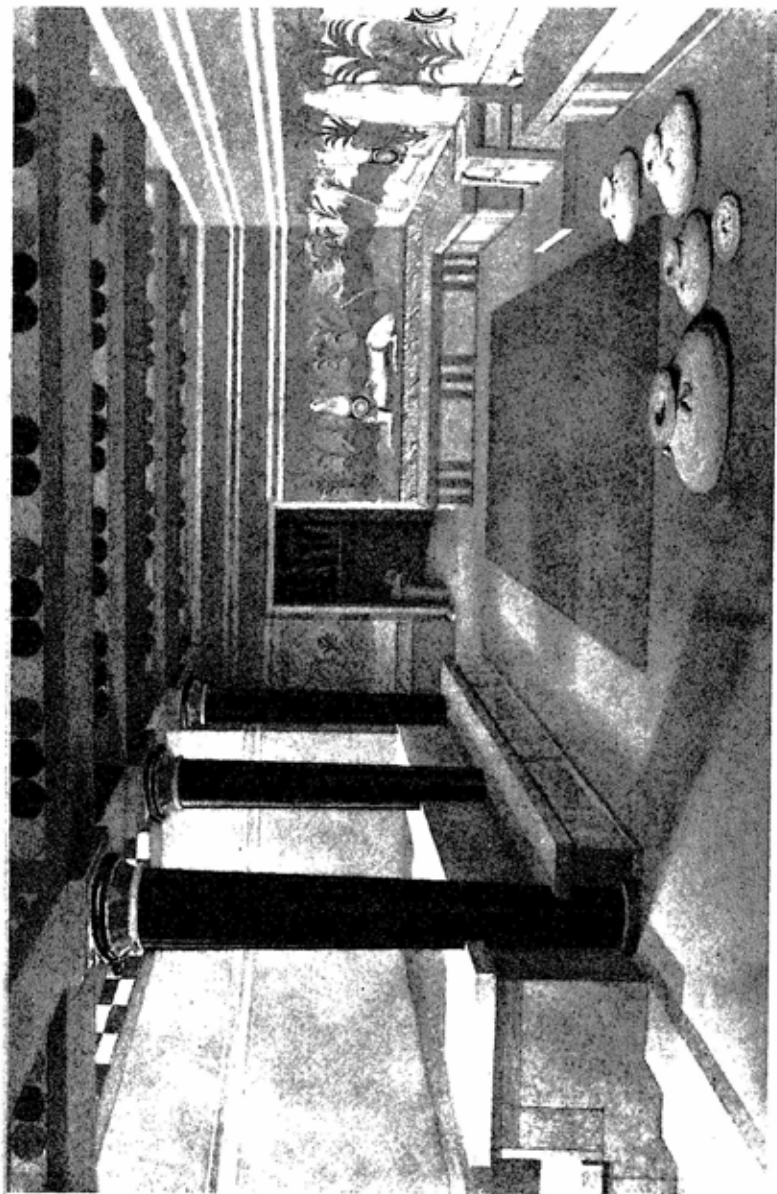
On arrival in the harbour-town of Knossos,

Theseus and his companions were taken away under guard to the Labyrinth, there to await their turn to encounter the Minotaur. The youths and girls were separated, but before they left Athens Theseus had managed to introduce among the girls two very effeminate-looking youths dressed in women's clothes, and these two youths somehow managed to keep in close touch with him. Then Theseus boldly challenged the champion Minoan wrestler, a powerfully built but very unpopular soldier named Taurus, to engage in a wrestling match with him. Taurus agreed, although he probably thought his opponent was hardly worth his notice. The match took place in the arena or sports ground at Knossos, and Theseus had the better of it, to the unconcealed delight of the crowd.

Now among the spectators was King Minos's daughter, Princess Ariadne (pronounced *ar-i-ad-nee*), and when she saw Theseus three times in succession toss the champion over his head and pin his shoulders to the ground, she fell in love with the handsome young Greek on the spot. Somehow they managed to meet; and since she was young and beautiful and altogether charming, Theseus returned her love. They took counsel together how he and his friends might escape from the dreadful predicament they were in. Ariadne made no bones about her attitude towards her half-brother the Minotaur. "I detest him," she told Theseus, "and would gladly help you to put him out of the way. He is a horror and a disgrace, and the sooner he is



The Priest-King. Wearing a coronet of lilies and a patterned loincloth, this small-waisted, brown-skinned young man may be taken as expressing the Minoan ideal of male beauty: *photo, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*

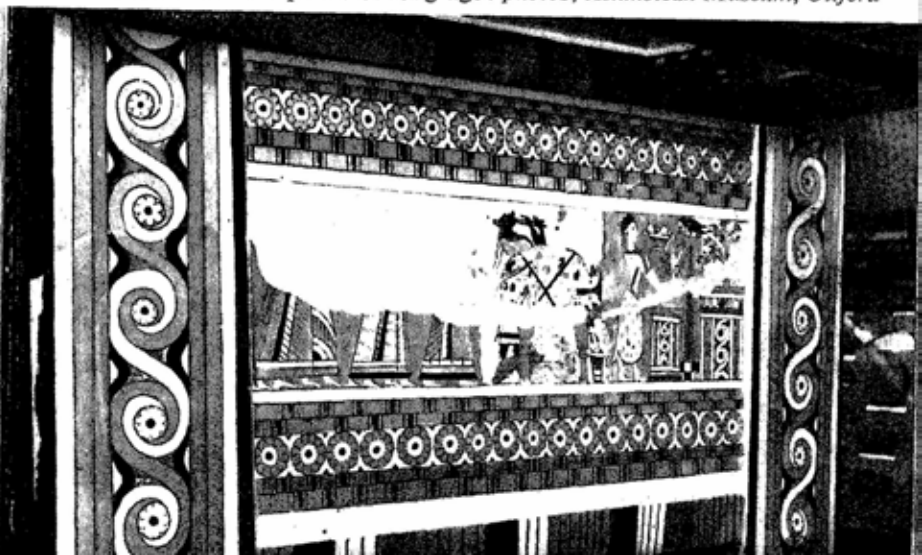


The Throne-room at Knossos (restored): on the right, "the oldest throne in Europe":
photo, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



(Above) The Ladies-in-Blue fresco, showing Minoan ladies gaily gossiping.

(Below) Hagia Triada Sarcophagus, the brightly painted last resting-place of some Minoan prince of long ago: *photos, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*





Circus-girl of Knossos. In the Minoan sport of bull-grappling, girls shared the perils with male performers. Here a girl has just alighted from a somersault over the charging bull's back: *photo, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*

dead the better. But you must agree to one thing, that if I help you to achieve your purpose, you will take me back with you to Athens as your wife."

Theseus of course agreed at once, and Princess Ariadne then showed him a magic ball of thread that Daedalus, the builder of the Labyrinth, had given her before his departure from Crete. "Take this", she told her lover, "and when you enter the Labyrinth tie one end to the doorpost, and then pay it out behind you. However many twists and turns there be in the maze, the ball of thread will roll along the ground, and when you return it will be an easy matter to retrace your steps by winding it on your fingers."

Theseus thought this a wonderful idea, and when his turn came to enter the Labyrinth he did exactly as Ariadne had shown him. As he went deeper and farther into the Labyrinth he paid out the thread, and fortunately it was long enough to reach to the entrance to the Minotaur's lair. He tied it to a post, and then crept into the den, where the monster lay asleep. Reaching for his hair, Theseus seized his head, and after a fearful struggle succeeded in killing him with his bare hands. Presumably no one had heard the noise of the struggle, for, thread in hand, he was able to return the way he had come; at the entrance Ariadne was waiting for him and they embraced passionately.

Before the guards had found out what had happened, the two youths disguised as girls had killed the keepers of the women's quarters, and the whole

party—Theseus and Ariadne, who acted as guide, the Athenian youths and girls—hurried down to the harbour, where a ship was in readiness to take them to Athens. They stole on board, and without waiting a moment the rowers took the ship out to sea. One writer says that Minos sent his fleet after the fugitives, but Theseus had taken the precaution of boring holes in the bottoms of the Cretan ships to hinder their pursuit.

So the fugitives arrived safely at the port of Athens, but in the excitement of the moment the captain forgot to hoist the white sail. When King Aegeus saw the black sail he was in despair, thinking that his son was dead, and flung himself off his palace wall into the sea and was drowned. (And that is why, explained the old geographers, the sea is called the Aegean to this day.)

When Theseus entered Athens, he found the city in mourning for his father, but the people's grief was turned into joy when they learnt of his victory over the Minotaur and they received back the young folk whom they had never expected to see again. The shameful tribute was at an end, and Theseus was hailed as king.

"There are yet many other traditions about these things," says Plutarch, "and as many concerning Ariadne, all inconsistent with each other. Some relate that she hanged herself, being deserted by Theseus, because he had fallen in love with another. Others that she was carried away by his sailors to the isle of Naxos, where she married a priest of

Bacchus. Others say that she had sons by Theseus. And some say that there were two Ariadnes. . . .”

Clearly Plutarch had his tongue in his cheek when he related the old story—old even in his day, the first century of our era, at least fifteen centuries after the time when Theseus and Ariadne were supposed to have lived. But the ordinary Greeks swallowed it whole. To them it was no fable but history, and for several hundred years they preserved the ship in which Theseus was said to have sailed. “How can you refuse to believe that the story’s true,” they demanded of the doubters, “when there is the actual ship to prove it?”

Nevertheless the doubters got the best of it, and the story passed into the realm of fable. And there it remained until Arthur Evans came along. He loved the old story of Ariadne, and as we have seen, he named his house at Knossos after her. He also discovered a “theatral area” at Knossos, just beside the Palace wall, and was reminded of Homer’s description in the *Iliad* of the “dancing place all full of turnings,” that “cunning Daedalus made for fair-hair’d Ariadne”. In his mind’s eye he saw the place as it might have appeared in the long ago, when (to quote from George Chapman’s translation of the *Iliad* that Keats loved so much),

... in it youths and virgins danced, all young and
beauteous,
And glued in one another’s palms. Weeds [garments] that
the wind did toss

The virgins wore; the youths wore woven coats, that cast
a faint dim gloss

Like that of oil. Fresh garlands too, the virgins' temples
crown'd:

The youths gilt swords wore at their thighs, with silver
bawdricks bound.

Sometimes all wound close in a ring . . . and out again . . .
Not one left fast, or breaking hands.

A multitude stood round

Delighted with their nimble sport . . .

On the pavement of the open space was a mosaic pattern that was very like a maze. This, taken in conjunction with what he had already noticed, that the whole Palace was a maze, led him to conclude that he had alighted on the explanation of the old legend about the Labyrinth. "King Minos's Labyrinth," he said in effect; "you want to know where it was? Why it's here, at Knossos, and I'm walking through it now!"

8

THRILLS OF THE MINOAN
BULL-RING

WHAT ARE they looking at, the Minoan ladies shown in this fresco from Knossos? They are sitting close together in what seems to be a sort of gallery or grandstand. They are wearing dresses brightly coloured with bands of red and blue and yellow, very tightly drawn in at the waist, with puffed sleeves and skirts flounced all the way down. Only an hour or so ago they must have been at the hair-dresser's; their hair is frizzed and curled and falls down their backs in long tresses that are twisted round with strings of beads and jewels.

Below them are half-a-dozen rows of men, and above are more rows of male faces, all coloured the conventional reddish-brown. These upper rows are probably young boys, since they have the distinctively boyish feature of top-knots; they are pointing excitedly at what is happening down below.

What is it? A religious performance perhaps, or a parade of King Minos's bodyguard, or a theatrical "first night"? More likely, however, it is a

performance of "bull-grapplers", for this is the sport that appeals most strongly to the Minoan temperament. It is full of thrills, it calls for acrobatic ability, athletic perfection, the skill that comes with long and hard training, and the native bravery without which skill would be as nothing. And what adds to the interest and the appeal is that the performers are handsome young men of splendid physique—and young girls.

These "Ladies in blue", then, are waiting for the show to start, and we might as well join them. We manage to find a vacant seat in one of the stands; and looking round, we see that we are in a large, rectangular space enclosing an oval-shaped arena. Round this is a stout wall, above which rise the stands, filled now with a gay, chattering crowd.

In the wall just mentioned are several gateways, and one of these suddenly opens and through it comes a bull, a splendid creature, with galloping feet and tossing head and fierce flashing of gold-tipped horns. And now there are human figures in the arena, sharing it with the snorting, bellowing beast. There are three of them, they are young and nimble—they have to be!—and, yes, two of them are girls, and the other is a youth who is not much more than a boy.

All three are dressed in a loincloth and girdle, but whereas the youth's are plain yellow, the girls' are decorated with black stripes and bars. Their hair is curled and held in place with coloured ribbons; they wear bands round their wrists and

double necklaces, and their footgear consists of short gaiters or stockings and pointed, moccasin-like shoes.

Round and round the ring they go—the charging bull, getting more infuriated every minute, and the dancing youth and girls. The great lumbering beast tries to catch them on his tossing horns, and it would be a sudden, tragic end if he did.

And now there is a hush, as if everybody knows that the great moment of the display is at hand. The three dancers cease their acrobatics, and take up their prearranged positions. Down the straight of the arena canters the bull, shaking and tossing his head, blowing great gusts of air through his nostrils, bellowing rage and defiance. And right in his path is standing one of the girls!

Her body is slightly bent forward, she holds her arms extended on either side; her face is beaded with perspiration and her breath comes in gasps, but she is steady on her feet and has her eyes fixed on the bull. You can almost feel the ground shake beneath those pounding, thundering hooves.

Still the great brute comes on. He lowers his head, and with a swift savage sweep his horns enclose the girl between them. As they pass beneath her arm-pits she grips them firmly with her hands and strives to hold them down. At this critical moment the youth, who has come up behind her, takes a flying leap over her shoulders on to the bull's back. He makes a somersault, and as the bull rushes from beneath him he jumps or falls into the arms of the

second girl who has dashed up to receive him in her outspread arms.

Now the girl who has been hanging on so desperately to the bull's horns suddenly lets go, and flings or rolls herself out of the way. Hers, surely, is the most dangerous part of the performance. A slip in the sand, a misjudgment of a fraction of an inch, a nervous uncontrollable jerk—and she would be spitted by one of those terrible horns.

A grim sport, but a terrifically exciting one, when life or death depends on the flick of a wrist, the blink of an eyelid, a straying wisp of hair. . . .

This picture that I have tried to draw of the Minoan bull-grappling is based on a fresco that was discovered, in fragments, in the eastern part of the Palace at Knossos (*see* plate facing page 112). It is not much more than a foot in height, or two feet six with its frame. Evans's experts succeeded in putting it together again, and of all the Minoan wall-paintings it is the most lively and dramatic. But there are other "Toreador frescoes", and the sensational episode is also illustrated on sealstones and engraved gems. And let me say at once that my interpretation of the course of events would not be accepted by all who have studied the representations. In fact it is not at all easy to follow the different stages.

One suggestion that has been made is that the girl who seizes the horns also makes the somersault—but the possibility of her being able to do this has been discounted by American cowboys. As one

expert put it, "there is no chance of a human person being able to obtain a balance when the bull is charging full against him". On the whole, then, it would seem more reasonable to suppose that one of the performers made the somersault while one of the others strove to hold down the horns.

However it was done, the sport was a great favourite among the Minoans, and it remained popular throughout their history. There must have been something in it that appealed to the people's fierce emotions, just as it is said that bullfights are "in the Spanish blood". But the Cretan bull-grappling was not marked by the disgusting cruelty of the Spanish bullfighting displays. If there was blood on the sand, it was not that of tormented bulls and poor, old, worn-out horses but that of the intrepid men and girls who were prepared to risk everything and to pay the price if they failed.

Where did they come from, one wonders. Were they volunteers, or were they pressed? The old Greeks, when they heard reports of the Minoan bull-grappling, and when they saw for themselves the frescoes still on the walls of the Palace at Knossos, were irresistibly reminded of the story of King Minos and the Athenian captives. So this is what happened (they surmised) to our young men and maidens when they were taken away in payment of the shameful tribute; they were not done to death by the Minotaur in a dungeon deep below the ground but were made to encounter him in the arena in the full light of day, before the

gloating eyes of a great multitude of Minoan holiday-makers!

But Evans would not have it: he thought too highly of the Minoans to believe anything so nasty about them. The "taureadors", as he calls them, are shown in elegant attire and their attitude is one of pride in their skill and daring rather than one of resignation to a dreadful doom. "There is no reason to suppose that the acrobatic figures of either sex engaged in these dangerous feats actually represent captives, trained like the Roman gladiators to 'make sport' for Minoan holidays." Still farther are we away from the more ferocious custom that is illustrated on the monuments of Ancient Egypt, in which prisoners-of-war were exposed to wild bulls.

Just as the artists of Ancient Greece delighted in representing the unclothed forms of athletic men and women, so the artists of Minoan Crete loved to show the lithe, sinewy forms of the men and girls engaged in the sports of the Knossian arena. The great Mother Goddess, of whom we shall learn more in the next chapter, was supposed to share the delight of her worshippers in the sensational displays, and it was doubtless this religious sanction that made it possible and even proper for girls to enter the ranks of the highly-skilled performers.

Some people have argued that they must have been slaves, or they would not have engaged in such unwomanly activities. But, as Evans points out, there is nothing in the least servile about their

appearance. On the contrary, their elaborate coiffure and the special elegance of their ornaments and the gay *bandeaux* that they wore round their heads, clearly indicate that they were girls of gentle birth, occupying a good social position. True, their dress was as scanty as that of their male companions, but this "sexual transformation" as Evans calls it, whereby the girls divested themselves of all articles of feminine dress except their headgear and necklace and adopted the sporting costume of the male performers, including the masculine loincloth, may convey a hint that the sensational feats of the bull-ring were at one time performed exclusively by men.

But besides the bull-grappling frescoes there are plenty of other representations of girls employed in catching and herding and taming the wild bulls of the Cretan countryside. Thus on the gold cup that was found at Vaphio, in Sparta, on the Greek mainland (but which is of such exquisite craftsmanship that it is supposed that it must have been an import from some Cretan workshop) a girl is shown stopping a wild bull in full career by locking her legs and arms round the great brute's horns.

Surely it is not unreasonable to think that girls engaged in such dangerous work, whether in the open country or in the confined space of the bull-ring, adopted the male costume because it was more suitable than the flowing garb of the female sex, just as modern girl athletes wear shorts.

Another suggestion that has been put forward is

that the presence of girls in the arena is an indication of female subjection. But as we have just seen, the girls are elegant and gay; and besides, women among the Minoans do not seem to have been looked upon or treated as the inferior sex. They were not confined in a harem, they went about freely and unaccompanied, they had their own recognized place in the world.

Nor is there the slightest reason to suppose that there is anything in another suggestion, that the girls were forced to engage in the bull-grappling because of some crazy whim of that old tyrant King Minos. The Minoans, we may think, saw nothing strange in the presence of the girl acrobats. "In these champions of either sex," concludes Evans, "we must rather recognize the flower of the Minoan race, executing, in many cases under a direct religious sanction, feats of bravery and skill in which the whole population took a passionate delight."

THE LADY WITH THE SNAKES

THE MINOANS do not seem to have been particularly religious. Like most primitive peoples, they worshipped the powers of Nature, which they thought of as having shapes and personalities very like their own. So like are they, indeed, that when studying the little pictures of religious scenes engraved on seals and gems, or the larger pictures on painted pottery and frescoed walls, it is often difficult to make out which are the worshippers and which the worshipped.

Perhaps it was because their divinities were supposed to be so very human that the Minoans did not think it necessary to build temples for their special use. There is nothing in Crete remotely resembling the magnificent temples of the Nile valley or the surpassingly lovely Parthenon at Athens. In their palaces and mansions the Minoans had little chapels or shrines, each with its shelf or ledge on which stood the images and other objects to be venerated, but for the most part they worshipped their divinities in the open air, on hilltops exposed to all the winds of heaven, or in dark caves

reached through holes in the mountainside. As an example of the peak sanctuaries, we may mention the shrine on one of the peaks of Mt. Juktas that was excavated by Evans, while the holy caves include one at Amnisos, four miles east of Herakleion, and the even more famous one on Mt. Dicte, of which we shall read in the next chapter.

So far as we know, the Minoans did not worship the heavenly bodies. They had many gods and goddesses, we may assume, but there is no knowing how many there were. But it is agreed that they were nothing like so numerous as the gods of the Greeks and Romans. Indeed, it has been argued that the Minoans thought of the powers of Nature as being largely concentrated in one great Mother Goddess who was known as Mistress of the Trees and Mountains and Lady of the Wild Animals. A young male figure is often associated with her, and he is spoken of as being her son, or sometimes as her husband or consort.

Numerous little figures of naked women, carved in stone, have been found on Cretan sites, as in many other countries of the Eastern Mediterranean world, and it is usually assumed that these are representations of the Mother Goddess. But these crude little sculptures belong to the pre-Minoan Age; the Minoan artists, on their rings and seals, picture the goddess as bareheaded, with her hair streaming in the breeze, and dressed in the fashion of the times. Her male companion is represented as either naked or wearing a simple loincloth, and

occasionally he has a peaked cap on his head. "He is one of those soulless, faun-like, heartless boys," writes Pendlebury, "whom you meet in the wilder parts of Crete today."

But the Minoans were original in their religious art as in so many other ways; and among the most interesting of the relics discovered by Evans at Knossos were several statuettes of a female personage entwined with snakes, and this figure has been generally accepted as a representation of the Mother Goddess in her aspect of Lady of the Underworld.

The first of the statuettes was found beneath the floor of one of the rooms. The "Snake-Goddess", as she is usually styled, stands about thirteen-and-a-half inches in height, and is beautifully modelled in faience. She is wearing a high tiara of a purplish-brown colour with a white border, a richly embroidered bodice laced tightly in front and leaving the breasts bare, and a skirt with horizontal stripes and a short double apron. Her black hair is cut to a fringe in front and falls behind her neck and on to her shoulders; she has black eyes and dark eyebrows, and her ears seem to be on the big side.

But the most remarkable feature of her "costume" is the snakes. There are three of them. One is coiled round her shoulders, and she holds its head in one hand and its tail in the other. The other two are twined round her waist and then climb up her body, the one to coil round her right ear and the other to encircle her tiara.

With the "goddess" were found remains of two

other similar figures, of which one was capable of being restored although the head was missing. She is somewhat smaller, and it is thought that she may have been a priestess or votary, or perhaps a "double", of the goddess. Her hair is longer, and falls down behind her hips. She is wearing a skirt of many flounces, sleeved bodice, and double apron, but round her waist in place of the snakes is what appears to be a tight-fitting metal belt into which the lower border of her bodice is tucked. But in her right hand she is holding a wriggling snake, and although the left arm was missing there is little doubt that it also held a snake. She is rather slimmer than the "goddess", small-waisted, and showing a very prominent bust.

Her figure is what might be called "Edwardian", suggesting the contours of the fashionable ladies of King Edward VII's court at the beginning of this century, and Lady Evans expressed the view, when she was shown the statuette, that her "lines are those considered ideal by the modern corset-maker rather than the sculptor". As for the third figure, the upper part of the body was missing, but the lower part shows a skirt and apron exactly like those of the "goddess", and she had long hair reaching to her waist.

Some scholars have ventured the opinion that these little figures represent snake-charmers who practised their art in the Palace courts. Evans urged that so far as the minor figures were concerned this is really a distinction without a difference, since

the practice of snake-charming would have been one of their priestly functions. But he persisted in his view that the principal figure does indeed represent a goddess, and no less a goddess than the Great Mother in her chthonic aspect (*chthonic*, pronounced *thonik*, "pertaining to the earth or to the Underworld").

To us the very idea of a snake or serpent seems sinister and even horrid, but Evans held that "this manifestation of the chthonic side of the divinity need not be invested with any malignant significance". Out of his experiences in the Balkan countries as a young man he recalled the peasant dwellings in which snakes crept for warmth into some cranny near the domestic hearth, and were regarded as a kind of good genius or spirit. It was not an uncommon thing for snakes that had sought such human hospitality to be fed with milk and be treated as domestic pets.

Since the first of the statuettes were unearthed at Knossos, similar figures supposed to represent the "Snake-Goddess" have made their appearance in museums and art galleries in Europe and America, and sometimes their genuineness has been suspect. But no suspicion of forgery can attach to Evans's finds, even though there is not always agreement on his interpretations.

The double-axe (two axes joined together, back to back), for instance, that is often encountered on the walls at Knossos: Evans thought that this is yet another symbol of the Great Goddess, and



Cretan double-axe

maintained that the Palace was her sanctuary. Other authorities have taken a different view. Thus Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Hawes, who were highly experienced workers in Cretan archaeology, wrote in their little book *Crete, the Forerunner of Greece* that in the beginning the double-axe was undoubtedly both tool and weapon, but that when met with in a religious context in Minoan art it may be either an ascription of power to the goddess, like the representation of the Greek goddess Athene with a spear, or the blazon (something like a coat of arms) of a worshipper. Often it appears on an object which has no sacred meaning whatever, and then it is nothing more than an ornament.

If the snake be taken as the symbol of the Great Mother Goddess in her aspect of Guardian of the Underworld, the home of the dead, the dove may be regarded as the symbol of her celestial or heavenly attributes and responsibilities. Although her character was generally peaceful and benevolent, she yet had a fearful aspect as Lady of the Wild Creatures. In this case she is often represented on gems and seals in company with a lion. The bull was very likely sacrificed to her, but it is good to learn that animal sacrifices seem to have played a very small part in Cretan worship. There is, however, one picture of a bull being

sacrificed, painted on a sarcophagus or stone coffin found at Hagia Triada.

In the same cavities with the "Snake-Goddess" statuettes were found a number of other remarkable objects. There was, for instance, a marble cross about $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide. Strange, reflected Evans, that this most distinctively Christian emblem should have been found among the relics of a religion that was old and dying a thousand years before Christianity came into the world; but no Minoan votary (he wrote) could have regarded it with greater veneration than did the pope (village priest) of the Orthodox Greek Church, whose parish included the remains of the Palace at Knossos; and it did much to confirm the views of the pope's flock that the fresco figures on the walls were icons or holy images of the saints of old. . . .

Then there were shells, bushels of them, such as might be picked up any day on the beach. But they had been painted in bands of brilliant colours, crimson, orange, brown, green, black. They had been strewn over the floor and what Evans called the altar-ledges, and he argued that they marked the religion of a people long accustomed to the sea as a principal source of livelihood. Very possibly the custom had been handed down from the time when these "fruits of the sea" formed an important part of the people's diet.

Finally, there were the beads. Some of them were "segmented", made in one piece but having the appearance of a number of beads joined together

one above the other. Now beads of the same form and faience material have been found in graves of Early Bronze Age people in southern Spain and much farther afield—in the barrows or burial mounds of southern Britain, from Cornwall to Sussex. This is the part of Britain that was most open to intercourse with Spain and the Mediterranean lands beyond, and Evans suggests that the beads were a sort of currency, and had been brought to our shores by traders from Spain and given in payment for Cornish tin. Bearing in mind the widespread nature of Cretan commerce, those traders may well have been Minoans.

10

THE CAVE OF THE GOD

WHEN WE think of the Minoans, we think instinctively of Knossos. And with good reason, since it was at Knossos that Evans first revealed the evidences of the Minoan civilization, and it is still the site that has been most thoroughly explored, and is a "must" for visitors to the island. Furthermore, it was undoubtedly the principal centre of Minoan life and King Minos's capital. All the same, it was not the only centre. Homer speaks of the "ninety cities" of Crete, and there is no reason to suppose that he was exaggerating, since traces have been found of many Minoan settlements in the island. One of the most important is Phaestus, on the south coast overlooking the Messara plain.

Knossos lies hemmed in by hills, but Phaestus was built on a hill rising three hundred feet above the plain, with extensive views on every side. It flourished throughout Minoan times and was destroyed about the same time as Knossos. Then for thousands of years its remains lay buried, until they were uncovered in 1900 by Professor

Federico Halbherr and his team of Italian archaeologists. When he arrived there Halbherr found the land was cultivated, and he had considerable trouble in arranging terms with the close-fisted proprietors. Once permission had been obtained, the workmen were soon uncovering streets and walls, houses, and the remains of a succession of palaces that had been built in the Middle Minoan period.

Because of the slope of the hill, the palace was erected on four different levels, and the Minoan architects showed their skill in producing a terraced effect. The lowest level was that of the so-called "theatral area", which was based on an artificial platform built out from the side of the hill. On the second level was the main entrance, leading to storerooms and a set of small chambers and bathrooms that may have been intended for the use of official guests and their servants. An imposing corridor led to the central court, north of which were the royal apartments. The third level contained the Hall of State at the head of a fine staircase 45 feet wide, which was overlooked by a balcony whence one might obtain a good view of everything that was going on—the arrival and departure of guests, shows of various kinds, and the everyday happenings of a wealthy and distinguished society. From the Hall of State a narrow stairway led to the fourth floor, which opened on to a flat courtyard.

As at Knossos, the palace was added to and altered and rebuilt on more than one occasion, but

it was considerably simpler in plan and more compact. Once you had passed through the great West Gate you would have been impressed by the paved courtyards, the rooms with painted walls and pillars, the imposing stairways leading to the private quarters of the Lord of Phaestus and his ladies.

Plenty of painted pottery was discovered at various levels, but the most interesting "find" is what is called the "Phaestus Disk". This is a flat, circular tablet of terracotta, six inches in diameter, with engraved characters on both sides forming a spiral running from the rim to the centre. Between forty and fifty different signs have been made out, and they include a rosette, vase, fish, eagle, house, galley, carpenter's square, hatchet, woman, running man, and a male head with a feathered head-dress. They are indeed a mixed lot, and it has been assumed that they are characters in a pictographic script. But they have hardly any relation to the Minoan script. The plumed head-dress that appears on several of the characters is reminiscent of the "Peoples of the Sea" who are pictured on the Egyptian monuments of four hundred years later. Many attempts have been made to discover the meaning of this mysterious and fascinating document, and some day it may be deciphered. Most scholars who have studied it seem to be of the opinion that it is not Minoan at all, but came originally from Asia Minor.

The most interesting thing about it is the way



As yet undeciphered: one side of the Phaestus Disk

in which the inscription is written. The characters were impressed upon the clay not with a stylus, but with stamps or seals which must have had some general resemblance to the stamps with which bookbinders print titles upon the backs of books. Thus the Phaestus Disk may be described as the oldest example of printing from movable types in the world.

Between Phaestus and the sea, in the middle of a

plain covered with olive groves, is another important Minoan site—Hagia Triada, or “Holy Trinity”. Here have been found remains of a small palace or villa, which may have been the residence of the heir-apparent to the principality of Phaestus or perhaps the dowager princess. It was built in terraces like the much bigger palace at Phaestus, but it is not the building but what was found in it that makes it so interesting. As a storehouse of artistic objects, Hagia Triada is in a class by itself.

To begin with, there was discovered in the “Room of the Seals” a hoard of seal-impressions—small lumps of clay bearing impressions of picture signs, which were hung round the neck by a cord. Among the pictures are various animals, women dancing, women engaged in worshipping sacred objects, a man with a lion, soldiers, men fighting with lances, a seated goddess, and the “Lady of Wild Creatures”. One shows part of a chariot drawn by two horses, which is said to be the first representation of a horse found in Crete.

Then there are two steatite (soapstone) vases. The first is the so-called Boxer Vase—a rhyton or drinking-flask bearing four pictures, three showing boxers and the fourth a spirited scene from the bull-ring. The boxers are represented as muscular young men, wearing heavy helmets on their heads and puttees on their legs and not much else. Round hand and wrist may be discerned traces of what seems to be a *cestus*, or boxing-glove. The second vase is the “Harvester”, on which appears a group

of harvesters making for home after the harvest has been got in. They are wearing headcloths such as are worn by Cretan peasants today. They have their winnowing fans over their shoulders and are bawling a song at the top of their voices.

Another of the treasures found at Hagia Triada is a stone sarcophagus, in the form of a rectangular chest 52 inches long by 18 inches wide and 32 inches deep. Whose body was huddled up in it ages



Funeral scene on the Hagia Triada sarcophagus

ago? It would be good to know, but all that we can be sure of is that it was a person of some importance, since the tomb is a splendid thing. Each side bears a picture painted on fine plaster, and on the best-preserved side it is possible to make out three bare-chested men in baggy kilts approaching an open doorway in which stands a mummy-like figure that may perhaps be intended to represent the dead man. On one of the other sides is the picture mentioned in the last chapter, of a bull apparently being sacrificed; the animal's

throat has been cut, and the blood is streaming out into a bucket-shaped vase.

At Gournia, as mentioned earlier, are the remains of the most perfect Minoan *town* so far discovered. They cover a small hill close to the sea, and were first located by Miss Harriet Boyd (later Mrs. C. H. Hawes) whose attention had been directed to the place by Evans. For a time she searched and searched and found nothing. Then one day in the spring of 1901 a peasant, who was also a bit of an antiquary, brought her a fine sealstone. She hastened to the place where it had been found, and saw a ridge strewn with ancient potsherds, almost entirely concealed beneath a thick growth of wild carob trees. Within twenty-four hours she had thirty men at work, cutting down the trees and digging trial trenches, and very soon they had penetrated into houses, were following along roads, and had piles of pottery vases and broken pieces bearing octopus, ivy-leaf, double-axes and other designs that were unmistakably Minoan. In 1903 and 1904 the work was continued, and at length a whole town plan was revealed.

The place had been a town of farmers, but no doubt they had connections with the sea. On the top of the hill had stood the mansion of the local lord, facing a big public court. The town consisted of houses of at least two storeys, opening on to paved streets about five feet wide, arranged on a neat plan. In the middle of the town stood a small shrine, and the narrow lane leading to it was paved

with cobblestones worn by the feet of pious worshippers of the long ago. When excavated, a carob tree had twisted its roots about a group of religious images and other cult objects that were huddled together in one corner. The images were very rough, made of terracotta, but it was possible to identify the Great Goddess twined with snakes, her doves, and the symbol of the double-axe. Thus it was clear that the worshippers in this unpretentious little chapel had the same religion as the lords of Knossos, who were probably their political masters.

The town seems to have been destroyed by a conflagration, since sun-dried bricks were found that had been baked bright red, and deposits of charcoal and marks of smoke-grime showed where wooden steps and posts had been. The carpenter's kit referred to earlier was discovered in a cranny in the wall. Had it been hidden by its owner in a hurry, and had he expected to be able to return before long and retrieve it? If so, he never did; it lay there, until more than two thousand years later the archaeologists brought it out to the light of day.

Quite a number of other town sites have been located, and the work of exploration continues. But one of the most interesting sites is not a town but a cave—the cave of Dicte which, according to one version of the ancient legend, was the birthplace of Zeus, and into which his son, King Minos, descended periodically when he was required to accept a further instalment of the divine laws. The man responsible for its discovery was an English

archaeologist, David George Hogarth (1862-1927).

Hogarth was appointed in 1897 Director of the British School of Archaeology at Athens, and he was a much more experienced archaeologist than Evans. He accompanied Evans to Crete in 1900, and was present when the first diggings were made at Knossos. "Minos was waiting for us when we rode out of Candia", he wrote in his book *Accidents of an Antiquary's Life*. "Over the very site of his buried Throne a desolate donkey drooped, the one living thing in view. He was driven off, and the digging began. . . . I did something to help my colleague to start, for in digging, as in most ventures, the first steps are most difficult: and I did more in the following months to define the limits of his vast field."

But Hogarth's first soundings produced nothing of any great interest, and it grew clearer every day that the central hillock held the key of the town's early history and almost all its riches, and that hillock was Evans's peculiar preserve. So in early May Hogarth quitted Knossos, and set out eastwards for the plain of Lasithi, where some very interesting things had been discovered in a grotto or cave in the hillside overlooking the little village of Psychro. According to the story he had heard, some Cretan shepherds, folding their flocks in the cave at night or during a sudden storm, had grubbed up strange objects of bronze and terracotta from the thick deposits of black mould that covered the cave floor. Some of these had been sold by the

peasants to visiting archaeologists, and the visitors had climbed up into the cave itself and tried to clear away the stones and rubble that blocked the entrance, in the hope of discovering some sort of altar. They had gone away disappointed, however. Now it was Hogarth's turn, and he made his way to the cave fully prepared. He took with him some trained men, stone hammers, blasting-powder, and the rest of a cave-digger's plant. Then after they had made a path up the mountain to the cave entrance, they proceeded to blast their way in.

The cave proved to be a double one. Just inside on the right was a shallow hall, and then on the left was an abysmal chasm which Hogarth considered was not unworthy to rank among the famous limestone grottoes of the world. "The rock falls sheer at first, but, as the light grows dim, you find your feet on an easier slope, and can clamber down safely into deeper darkness. Having groped thus far, stand and burn a flare. In front an icy pool spreads from your feet far into the hill about the bases of fantastic stalagmite columns, and hall opens out of hall, each fitted with fretted roof and black, unruffled floor, while behind and far above a spot of luminous haze shows the way you have come from the upper world. It is a fit scene for Minos's colloquy with his father Zeus, and for the cult of a chthonian God."

Blasting-powder made short work of the boulders that blocked the way in the upper hall, and crow-bars and stone-hammers finished the work. After

four days they could begin the real search, but preparations for further blasts had to go on, and what with the metallic din of the mining tools, reverberating from roof to walls, "what with the heavy hanging fumes of powder and the mingled reek of hot, unwashed men and chill, newly turned earth, we had not too pleasant a task in that dim, dripping cave." As the soil was dug out, it had to be carried up the slope and deposited outside, and for this work Hogarth found the local village women particularly good. At first they had just stood by and watched their menfolk, but Hogarth had brought two girls with him from Knossos who had had experience of the work, and they acted as lures. Before long a laughing mob of women and girls came running up the hill tossing sieves and clamouring to be enlisted, so that "with their sisters, cousins, and aunts, who brought up the midday meals, they made the terrace before our cave the gayest spot in Lasithi."

In the upper hall the black earth lay five to seven feet deep, and as they dug it out they found a number of most interesting things. There were miniature effigies of bulls and sheep, knives, pins, lance-heads, needles and other toilet articles, hundreds of little clay cups, and a little chariot of bronze, drawn by an ox and a ram. At the back of the hall was a dark recess, overhung by rocks that looked as if they might fall at any moment; when they ventured into it, there was a sudden thunderous slide of rock and earth that sent the scared diggers scampering for

their lives, but soon they realized it was harmless and they returned to their digging.

It took more than a fortnight to clear the upper hall completely, and as Hogarth looked at his finds, at the great variety of little objects that had been left behind as offerings to the god by the worshippers of Minoan times, he felt tempted to leave the lower cave unexplored. It seemed hardly likely that it contained anything other than a few scraps of pottery that might have been washed down into it by the stream that in ancient days poured through the cave. After much deliberation, however, Hogarth sent his team down into the abyss, and the women especially moaned at the sight of the clammy mud in which they must now stand and search by the smoky light of petroleum flares.

But the grumbles soon ceased, for first one and then another of the searchers picked an antique bronze out of the soil covering the upper rock slopes. One of the first things to be found was a little statuette of the Egyptian god Amen-Ra, and Hogarth wondered how he had come to be there, whether it was in the hand of an Egyptian visitor to the shrine or of a Cretan worshipper? Then blades and pins were discovered, and, on the margin of a subterranean pool, where the lights shone no brighter than glow-worm lamps to the man above, the pioneers scraped from the slime rude bronze statuettes, male and female, some nude and some draped, left behind by worshippers who had wished to be specially remembered of the god, and also



In this amazingly realistic fresco the youth has just landed on the bull's back, while his girl assistants (distinguished by their light flesh tints) play their part in the tremendously exciting "act":
photo, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



*Photographs, Ashmolean
Museum, Oxford*



Theseus and the Minotaur. Depicted on a bowl for mixing wine (*above*) and on a vase (*left*). Greek artists of about 500 B.C. picture the slaying of the Minotaur by the hero-prince of ancient legend.



The Vaphio Cup. This beautiful gold cup (*above*) was found in a tomb in the plain of Sparta, on the Greek mainland, but it was probably made in a Cretan workshop. (*Below, left*) The Boxer Vase, found at Hagia Triada, and (*below, right*) the Harvester Vase, giving us a glimpse of Minoan peasant farmers celebrating "harvest home" with joyous abandon.





*Photographs, Ashmolean
Museum, Oxford*



(Above) Minoan writing. These three clay tablets were inscribed with Linear B script; they were baked hard by the heat of the conflagration that marked the end of Knossos about 1400 B.C. One of the tablets bears a list of women, probably slaves. No one could read this script until it was deciphered in 1952 by the young English architect, Michael Ventris (left).

signet rings and gems, pins and needles by the score.

By this time more than half the work-people were splashing about in the pool, encouraged by the special rewards that Hogarth was offering for particularly lucky finds. "But Chance had reserved her crowning grace. A zealous groper, wishful to put both hands to his work, happened to wedge his guttering candle in the fluting of a stalactite column, and by its light espied in the slit the green edge of a bronze blade. I passed the word to leave mud-larking in the pool and search the colonnades. Men and girls dispersed themselves along the dark aisles, and, perching above the black waters on natural crockets of the pillars, peered into the flutings. They found at once—blades, pins, tweezers, brooches, and here and there a votive axe, and in some niches as many as ten votive things together. Most were picked out easily enough by the slim fingers of the girls; but to possess ourselves of others, which the lights revealed, it was necessary to smash stalactite lips that had almost closed in long ages." For about four hours they discovered at least one object a minute.

At last they decided that they had found all that there was to find, and the diggers were called off. Two days later they left "the violated shrine of the God of Dicte", and Hogarth had "never struck tents with sharper regret". The digger's life is full of surprises, he reflected, but seldom had his imagination been so provoked as in that dim

chasm. "As we saw those pillared aisles, so with little change had the last worshipper, who offered a token to Zeus, seen them three thousand years ago. No later life had obliterated his tracks. One seemed to come very near indeed to men who lived before history."

In the Minoan Room of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford—the Museum of which Arthur Evans and then D. G. Hogarth were Keepers, and which contains what must be the finest collection of Minoan antiquities to be found anywhere in the world outside Crete itself—you may see some of the things that were discovered in the Dictæan Cave. Among them is a small table on which libations (liquid offerings) were made to the god, and also a fine specimen of the double-axe that is the typical symbol of the Cretan Zeus. If only we knew the real story that lies behind them! If only we could see for ourselves what went on when the god was worshipped!

Some scholars are of the opinion that the Cave was the scene of a periodical murder. We are told (it will be remembered) that every nine years Minos was required to repair to the Cave to meet his father Zeus and receive a fresh batch of instructions; it is also said that the Athenians were obliged to send their tribute of youths and girls to Crete every nine years. The mention of nine years is significant, say these scholars: we have here, they suggest, a recollection of the fact that the king of Crete held his throne only for a period of nine

years, and that at the end of his term he went to the Dictaeon Cave, the sanctuary of the god, and never came out again alive. He was slain there by the priests, and in his place there stepped out into the light of day his successor, a new king who had been made ready in advance.

This new king was hailed by the worshippers as their old king born again, as it were, in a young and vigorous frame! He was an incarnation of the god, as his predecessor had been. Down the mountain-side he went, and back to Knossos where he reigned for nine years, until the time came for him in turn to make the journey from which there was no return.

Furthermore, it is suggested that the seven youths and seven maidens who were sent to Crete every ninth year were killed with the Cretan king, in order that they might serve him in the Underworld! Or alternatively, they were killed in the cave as a substitute for the king, who was allowed to continue to live for a further term.

An extraordinary story, and a grim one, and something of the kind is said to have taken place among other peoples, particularly in Africa. The theory underlying the killing of the king is that thereby the monarch was always kept strong and active, for an old and decrepit king might have had a very bad effect on the fortunes of the people he was called upon to rule. But so far as Crete is concerned, there seems to be very little evidence to support the theory.

Nor is there any real evidence to support the extension of the theory, that the king when he was killed was wearing a bull-mask—in other words, he was acting the part of the Minotaur! We just do not know, and the Dictæan Cave is gloomy and sinister enough without imagining that it was the scene of a succession of horrid murders.

11

WHAT LANGUAGE DID THEY SPEAK?

WHEN EVANS first went to Crete it was with the special object of finding a means of deciphering the strange markings on the seals and other antiquities from the island that had come into his possession or to his knowledge. Within a week of starting digging at Knossos he unearthed the first of what proved to be a very large number of inscribed tablets. He was almost beside himself with excitement. His father, old John Evans, was as excited as he was, and hastened to send him a cheque for £500 as a contribution towards his expenses.

"The great discovery," wrote Arthur to his father in acknowledging the gift, "is whole deposits, entire or fragmentary, of clay tablets analogous to the Babylonian but with inscriptions of the pre-historic script of Crete. I must have about seven hundred pieces by now. It is extremely satisfactory. . . ."

The seven hundred was only a beginning. As the days and weeks passed and the diggings spread wider

and deeper, more and more of the tablets—looking very like slabs of chocolate in colour, size, and shape—were unearthed. Evans's spirits continued to rise: with such a wealth of material it should be possible to discover the key. Little did he realize that forty years later the secret of the script would still elude him; and in fact he died before the puzzle was solved, or came near to solution.

But in those early days he felt justified in his optimism, particularly when he found himself able to distinguish three different forms of writing. The earliest that he came across was pictographic, that is, it consisted of pictorial signs that were easily recognizable as such things as a head, a star, an arrow, and so on. This was the script used on the sealstones. The second form he styled "hieroglyphic", since the signs were very like those used in the hieroglyphic writing of the ancient Egyptians; they are no longer pictorial but mere outlines, and hence Evans called this manner of writing Linear A.

Inscriptions in Linear A have turned up in many sites in Crete that had been occupied by the Minoans. A collection of about 150 was unearthed at Hagia Triada, but Evans found some at Knossos and had already encountered others in museums and private collections. Linear A inscriptions have also been recognized on various articles associated with religion, made of stone or metal, and painted or scratched on pieces of pottery. Clearly it had been of widespread use in Crete in the Middle Minoan period and probably later, but it does not

seem to have spread to any extent beyond the island.

The third script was discovered by Evans on tablets unearthed at Knossos, and he called it Linear B, because he formed the opinion that it was a modified form of Linear A that had been developed about 1400 B.C. Later authorities have doubted this, and have concluded that the relationship between the two scripts is not so close as Evans supposed. If B were a straightforward development of A, one might reasonably suppose that its forms would be simpler and more easily written, whereas in fact the Linear B forms are often more elaborate and complicated than their Linear A counterparts.

Evans found more than three thousand pieces of Linear B at Knossos—indeed, almost all the clay tablets found at Knossos are in Linear B—and in the fourth volume of his great work *The Palace of Minos*, published in 1935, he reproduced 120 of them with explanatory notes. He was still working at the tablets in the last year of his life, but he died in 1941 before his notes had been properly arranged and the bulk of the material remained unpublished. Then Crete was occupied by the Germans, and some of the tablets were damaged, and it was not until 1952 that Evans's old friend and colleague, Professor Sir John Myres, published his final notes.

By this time other workers were engaged on the problem of the scripts, and much of Evans's work was seen to be out of date. But some of his

conclusions have stood the test of time. Thus in his earliest report, written in 1901, he recognized that a great many of the tablets relate to the royal stores and arsenal: they are inventories, and the signs represent persons (slaves perhaps), animals such as swine, houses or barns, ears of corn, various kinds of trees, flowers, and clay vessels of various shapes. He recognized some ninety different signs, and as they were far too numerous to constitute an alphabet it was assumed that in all probability they represented syllables. Evans further decided that counting was on a decimal system, in which the units were represented by upright strokes, the tens by horizontals, the hundreds by circles, and the thousands by circles with four rays or spurs.

Strangely enough, Linear B tablets were found by the thousand at Knossos, but nowhere else in Crete. But the script has now been identified on tablets unearthed on Mycenaean sites on the mainland of Greece, particularly in the palace of King Nestor at Pylos. Here in 1939 a band of Greek and American scholars led by Prof. Carl W. Blegen were successful in finding nearly 600 clay tablets inscribed with Linear B characters. Photographs of these were hurriedly taken to the U.S.A. just before the Mediterranean was involved in the War in 1940, and there they were carefully studied by American experts, who confirmed the identification and made considerable progress towards their decipherment. Meanwhile, a number of scholars in other countries were working on the problem.

But it was an English scholar who was destined to achieve the solution, a young man named Michael Ventris.

Michael George Francis Ventris, to give him his full name, was born at Wheathampstead in 1922, the son of an Army officer in India and a half-Polish lady who brought him up in an artistic atmosphere and encouraged him in the study of languages. He had learnt Polish by the time he was six, and when he was seven he bought himself a German book on the Egyptian hieroglyphics and tried to master it. He went to school in Switzerland, where he was taught French and German and taught himself Swiss-German, the dialect of the local people. Learning languages came naturally and easily to him: we are told that he not only had a remarkable visual memory but also the ability to learn languages by ear.

From his Swiss school he returned to England and won a scholarship to Stowe School; and it was in 1936, when he was 14, that he accompanied a party of schoolfellows to an exhibition in London held to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the British School of Archaeology in Athens, and there heard Sir Arthur Evans lecture on the civilization of Minoan Crete. In this lecture he learnt of the mysterious writing that awaited decipherment, and he may well have decided that he would do his best to solve the problem when he grew up.

On leaving Stowe he entered as a pupil at the

school of the Architectural Association in London, since he had resolved to become an architect. Then came the War, and he served for four years in the R.A.F. as a navigator in a bomber squadron. After the War he returned to his architectural studies, and qualified with honours in 1948. For a time he was a Civil servant, designing schools for the Ministry of Education; and with his wife, who was also an architect, he designed a modern house for themselves and their two children. But while practising most successfully and happily as an architect, he still continued his interest in the Minoan scripts and kept in close contact with other scholars who were working on the same problem. For years he kept at it, and followed more than one false trail. By the summer of 1952 he decided that he had found the answer: Linear B was a Greek dialect!

He made the announcement of his theory in a talk he had been invited to give on the B.B.C. Third Programme, in connection with the recent publication by Myres of the last volume of Evans's collection of inscriptions. "During the last few weeks," he said, "I have come to the conclusion that the Knossos and Pylos tablets must, after all, be written in Greek—a difficult and archaic Greek, seeing that it is 500 years older than Homer and written in a rather abbreviated form, but Greek nevertheless."

An eager listener to the broadcast was another young English scholar, John Chadwick, two years

older than Ventris and a Classical don at Cambridge. Chadwick was interested, but not greatly impressed. "In view of the recurrent claims that had been made," he writes in his book *The Decipherment of Linear B* (1958), "I did not regard Ventris's system as standing much chance; in particular I already had a pretty clear notion of what Mycenaean Greek should look like, and I doubted whether Ventris had." But he was not prejudiced against the Greek solution, and when he got home he proceeded to test the theory. Very shortly he was convinced that it was on the right lines and he wrote to Ventris and told him so.

Ventris's reply was "typically frank and modest"; he wanted "moral support", he said, and gladly accepted Chadwick's offer of assistance. To begin with, the two wrote an article on the theory which was published in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* in 1953, and then three years later—a few weeks after Ventris had been tragically killed in a motor accident on the Great North Road near Hatfield—appeared their book *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, in which they explained the method used in the decipherment of Linear B and their conclusions, and gave in translation a representative selection of three hundred of the tablets discovered at Knossos, Pylos, and Mycenae.

For fifty years scholars had been working on the Linear B tablets, and not only scholars but talented amateurs and people whom Ventris described as "cranks of all kinds from the lunatic fringe of

archaeology". All of them had endeavoured to link the tablets with some language already known, and the candidates put forward ranged from Egyptian hieroglyphics to Finnish, from Hebrew to Basque. Ventris himself, in a paper contributed at the age of eighteen to an American archaeological journal, had started off with the theory that the language was related to Etruscan. Nearly all had been influenced by Evans's contention that the Minoans exercised supremacy not only in Crete but in the Mycenaean settlements of the mainland, and that it was most unlikely, therefore, that they would have spoken the language of a subject people.

But all along there had been some who had been feeling their way to the conclusion that the Greek language, as well as Greek myth and religion, had firm roots in the Mycenaean Age. Now, it seemed, they had been proved right. The Mycenaeans, the people whose remains had been so dramatically discovered by Schliemann, spoke Greek! But what of the Minoans? Did they speak Greek too?

Beyond any doubt there had been close and constant contact of the Mycenaean and the Minoan civilizations. Each had influenced the other, but whereas Evans had insisted that the Minoans had exercised dominion over Mycenae—he suggested that the Mycenaeans were, to begin with, colonists sent out from Crete—it now seems that it was rather the other way round. In the light of the available evidence it appears that about 1450 B.C.—that is,

about fifty years before the Fall of Knossos—Knossos came under the rule of the Mycenaeans. It was not apparently a military conquest, but may have come about as the result of a change of dynasty. Perhaps a queen had succeeded to the throne in Knossos, and she married the king of Mycenae, who thereupon became sovereign of both countries. *Perhaps*—but what does appear certain is that the new rulers of Knossos brought about a change in the script used in official circles.

This happened only in Knossos; the other cities and towns of Crete continued to employ Linear A, which presumably was distinctively Minoan. It would seem, then, that elsewhere the local rulers maintained their rule; it was only in Knossos that there was a change-over from one script to the other. In the metropolis the royal clerks kept their accounts in Linear B, and tablets have been discovered recording in Linear B the payments made by the vassal cities to Knossos, which is referred to as *Ko-no-so*.

Linear B is Mycenaean Greek; Linear A is—Minoan? Even Linear B has not yet been fully deciphered, notwithstanding Ventris's amazing success; no value has yet been attached to some of the syllabic signs, for instance, so that there is room for considerable variety in translation. Furthermore, it should be stated that not all competent scholars accept Ventris's interpretation in its entirety.

But no progress whatever has been made in the

decipherment of Linear A, which is the script that was used by most of the Minoans and by the Knossians right up to a half-century of their eclipse. Until that is done we shall not be able to say what language the Minoans spoke outside the official and court circle in Knossos.

There the matter rests and must remain until more tablets are discovered, at Knossos and elsewhere; tablets which give something more than lists of names and objects. Up to now no letter has turned up, no historical account, no poem, nothing at all in fact of a literary character. Surely, among a people of such marked artistic achievement, such must have existed? It is not to be supposed that so elaborate a manner of writing as Linear B, not to mention Linear A and the other script, can have been employed only to keep store-keepers' records and to make out tax-receipts! Surely there must have been some sort of literature.

There is, of course, the possibility that it did exist but has perished. We have to remember that the script was incised on clay tablets which were usually only dried in the sun and would have soon perished if exposed to damp. Those which have survived at Knossos had been baked hard by the heat of a fierce conflagration at the end of Late Minoan II. Other materials that were very likely used, such as skin, slabs of wood, palm leaves, papyrus, and tree bark, have long since disappeared without trace. Even so, it is remarkable that other objects that have survived—pottery, tombstones,

metal utensils, and so on—are very rarely inscribed with what seems to be lettering.

For us at the present time Greek literature begins with Homer, who is supposed to have lived in the 9th century B.C.—that is, about six centuries after the Fall of Knossos. But the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are so perfect in design, composition, style, and metre that it is hard to believe that they did not have predecessors of a primitive character, possibly in the Mycenaean Age. If the Mycenaeans had a literature, can we doubt that the Minoans had one too? Surely they must have had their lays of ancient heroes, sung by bards in the great halls of Knossos and Phaestus on dark nights while the wind howled without; the ladies in their gaily-decorated drawing-rooms must surely have turned a willing ear to what the palace versifiers had to say about their fair complexions and curly hair and slender waists. Some day a few lines of poetry or an inscription may be unearthed that will carry back the history of European literature hundreds of years before Homer.

12

THE END OF KNOSSOS

AT a quarter to ten on the evening of June 26, 1926, after a warm, clear day, Evans was reading in bed in the basement of his house, the Villa Ariadne, on the slope above the Palace at Knossos, when the ground suddenly began to heave and shake. He jumped out of bed, but did not rush out of doors as most of the villagers were doing. He knew it was an earthquake, but he felt pretty confident that his house, built on a frame of concrete and steel, would stay up. It was a new experience for him, and he resolved to see it through.

Small objects were thrown about the room, and a pail of water was nearly splashed empty. The shocks lasted about a minute and a quarter, long enough to remind him most unpleasantly of a storm at sea.

"A dull sound rose from the ground like the muffled roar of an angry bull," he wrote later; "our single bell rang, while, through the open window, came the more distant jangling of the chimes of Candia Cathedral." As shock followed

shock in rapid succession, he heard the crashing of roofs of two small houses outside the garden gate, mingled with women's shrieks and the cries of small children, who, however, were happily rescued. Some guests whom he had staying with him came down from upstairs or on the roof, and hurried across the terrace—where a round stone table was performing a kind of dance—into the open, where the trees were swaying violently and looked as if they might come crashing down at any moment. Meanwhile "a dark mist of dust" rose sky-high, so as almost to eclipse entirely the full moon, and the house lights reflected on this cloud bank gave the appearance of a conflagration wrapped round with smoke.

Evans's confidence in his house was fully justified. The building creaked and groaned, heaved, and rocked from side to side as if the whole must soon collapse. But it remained standing, and the only damage suffered was a few small cracks. The places round about were not so fortunate, however. Hundreds of houses were destroyed or suffered heavy damage, and although the casualties were few, since most of the people had not gone to bed and were able to make a dash for safety, crowds of terrified folk poured out of Candia and camped in the open. Not for several weeks did they venture to return to their shattered homes.

Looking back on the experience, Evans was rather pleased that it had come to him. For some time past he had been making a study of

earthquakes in the Mediterranean region, and he had discovered that Crete (which lies right in the middle of one of the main belts of earthquake activity, stretching from Portugal along the Mediterranean into Asia Minor and beyond) had had on the average two serious earthquake shocks in every hundred years. The last had been in 1856, and there were men still living who could tell him about it. It had been a dreadful affair; in Candia over 500 people had been killed, and many more injured, and out of 3,620 houses only eighteen had been left undamaged. To make matters worse, the 'quake had been followed immediately by a destructive fire.

As he listened to the tales the old men told him, and turned up the records of earthquakes that in centuries past had periodically devastated the island, Evans became more and more impressed with the part that these great cataclysms of Nature had wrought in the developing pattern of civilization. Time and again Candia and the Cretan towns and villages had been destroyed, and had been rebuilt on the old foundations. About the earliest on record was one that occurred in the time of the Emperor Nero, in A.D. 66, but it was only reasonable to suppose that there had always been earthquakes in the area.

The Minoans must have had their earthquakes, he mused, in which case it should be possible to find some traces of them in the ruins of Knossos and other places. Indeed, he had uncovered parts

of the Palace that fitted in very well with his theory.

That little house close to the Palace wall, for instance: he had named it the "House of the Fallen Blocks", since it was clear that it had been ruined by huge blocks of stone hurled on to it from the Palace wall, twenty feet away. The great blocks, some weighing more than a ton, had been left where they had fallen, close beside the holes that they had made in the house walls and surrounded by the débris of the ceiling. This house had never been rebuilt, but its site had been levelled and the holes filled in, and a new house erected on what had now become a raised platform. Men could not have flung those great blocks such a distance, but an *earthquake* could.

The supposition was strengthened by the discovery of the remains of a number of stone lamps lying about the floor. Some of the lamps were unfinished, and it seemed clear that the occupier of the house was a lamp-maker who had been interrupted in his work and had fled precipitately.

In the Palace itself there were long stretches of buildings that had been buried in débris; when you dug into them you found objects that were whole and unbroken—pottery kitchen utensils, vases, and the like—and a row of big clay jars still standing where they had been put by King Minos's storekeepers. Obviously the roof had fallen in upon them so suddenly that they had not even had time to topple over. The rubble had buried



One of the great oil-vats in a storeroom at Knossos

them completely, and at a later date the ground above them had been levelled to form the foundation for another building.

Then there was the Throne-room. When it was discovered, it was clear that it had been left in complete disorder. Apparently preparations were being made for some sort of anointing ceremony,

for a number of alabaster oil vessels had been removed from their usual places along the wall (where the marks made by their bases still showed) and placed near a great jar brought up from the storeroom below. The big jar was found crushed and broken beneath a mass of earth and rubble, and close by were the vases, set ready to be filled. *Something* had sent the servants scurrying for safety, and they had never come back.

Even more significant was what was discovered in the "House of the Sacrificed Oxen", as Evans named it. In a basement room were set, in facing corners, the heads of two large oxen, and in front of them were the remains of portable altars resting on tripod bases. Evans decided that these were sacrificial relics. Probably people had been killed; and when their bodies had been carried away for burial the Minoan priest had offered up a sacrifice of bulls to the powers of the Underworld, and uttered at the same time a solemn curse on any who should undo his ceremonial work by rebuilding the house at some subsequent time.

If it be asked why bulls should be sacrificed, Evans reminds us that Homer says in the *Iliad* that "in bulls doth the Earth-shaker delight"; and he goes on to draw illustrations from the folklore of various peoples, that earthquakes are caused by the motions of some huge beast beneath the ground.

Sometimes the beast is a monstrous fish, as in Japanese belief; sometimes it is an elephant or other animal of prodigious size, but the bull is

the most natural agent. Evans quotes a belief of the Moslems of Tashkent, in what is now Soviet Asia, that God established the earth on the back of a bull of such tremendous size that from his head to his tail was five hundred years' journey, and the space between his horns would require another two hundred. The bull was sometimes tempted by the Devil to throw off his burden by shaking his head and tossing his horns. Whereupon a midge was sent to sting him in the nostril, and he set up a mighty bellowing, so that he became known as "the bellower".

"To one who has experienced the tossing and listened to the muffled roaring from below," says Evans, "this popular explanation of earthquakes seems natural enough."

In support of the earthquake hypothesis has been quoted what Plato has to say in his dialogue *Timaeus* and its sequel *Critias* about the fabled realm of Atlantis. Critias says that his grandfather had been told by Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, that he had visited Egypt, where the priests had given him much information about the early history of Athens. The most famous exploit of the Athenians had been the overthrow of the "island Atlantis", when its people had ventured to invade Greece. Not long afterwards the island had been wrecked by great earthquakes and had disappeared beneath the sea, leaving behind a range of shallows dangerous to navigation.

Atlantis is described as lying over against the

"Pillars of Hercules", where it formed a passage to other islands. To it came ships "bringing many things from foreign countries". The chief city had walls and palaces and temples filled with images made of gold. There were baths for the king and for private persons, and separate baths for women and cattle. There were gardens and places of exercise, and round the island ran a racecourse for horses. The docks were full of ships and naval stores. Bulls were hunted not with weapons but with staves and nooses, and when captured were sacrificed on the top of a pillar, so that the blood fell on to the ground beneath.

Much of this is suggestive of Crete in Minoan times, and it is supposed by some that Plato had in mind some dim recollection of the civilization that had flourished and perished long before his time. But, on the other hand, the "Pillars of Hercules" were near Gibraltar, and the island is said to have been full of elephants. Moreover, Plato was a novelist, and it is suspicious that the story seems to have been unknown to Homer and is not mentioned by Herodotus, who above all men liked to hear a good story and re-tell it. On balance, it seems clear that Atlantis was not Crete.

Some writers have supposed that the final disaster that overtook Knossos was an attack by enemies from across the sea, most probably the Mycenaeans, who had fallen out with their old friends and allies. A dramatic picture has been drawn of the enemy ships driving King Minos's

navy on to the rocks in hopeless rout, the Palace guards overwhelmed by invading columns moving up from the beach, the storming of the Palace, the sack, the burning, and finally, the triumphal return of the victors to their ships, laden with loot and driving before them a crowd of dishevelled, weeping, Minoan women and children.

This sort of thing happened often enough in the world of antiquity, and Pendlebury thought that something of the kind may well have occurred. He pointed out that on the western side of the Palace at Knossos there are smoke stains that must have been blown there by a south-west wind. There had been a fire; and he could not see why, if the destruction had been due to an earthquake merely, as Evans maintained, there should have been one. For earthquakes do not burn—at least, the earthquakes of olden days did not: the fires that follow 'quakes today are the result of burst gas-mains and broken electricity cables. But it might well be that the attackers had taken advantage of an earthquake that had shattered the Minoan defences and sapped their morale.

Against the theory that there was an invasion by Mycenaeans is to be put the fact that the disaster was not followed by signs of Mycenaean colonization in Crete. Nor did the Greeks have any traditional memory of such an occurrence. Perhaps, then, there was a rising of the other Cretan cities against their Knossian overlord, whose rule had become oppressive? But—and this is most signifi-

cant—the overwhelming disaster that overtook Knossos overtook the other cities also; Phaestus, Hagia Triada, Gournia, Mallia, Mochlos—one and all were involved in common ruin at about the same time. Perhaps the theory that there was a great sea-raid by piratical powers of the eastern Mediterranean, jealous of the naval supremacy of the Minoans, is as good as any.

Perhaps, but we cannot be sure. What we are sure about is that on a spring day in about 1400 B.C., when a strong south wind was blowing that carried the flames of the burning beams almost horizontally towards the north, the great unfortified Palace of Knossos was sacked (otherwise what happened to the treasures of gold and silver that must have been there?) and burnt to the ground. At roughly the same time a similar fate befell the other towns of Crete.

Most of the island seems to have recovered from the blow. The western part of Crete was developed more thoroughly than it had been before, and the Cretan genius still found expression in art, religion, and social life. But not so Knossos: for her there was no recovery; rather, there followed a period of disorganization and rapid decline. She had suffered great disasters before, and after each there had been rebuilding and restoration, a fresh surge of creative activity. But the last catastrophe had no such happy sequel. The great Palace was not rebuilt, but instead miserable little dwellings crept up the slopes where it had stood. The remains of

the royal chambers were parcelled out into tenements, and in the sanctuaries "grotesque fetish forms", as Evans styles them, supplanted the beautiful little faience figures of the Snake-Goddess and her companions, suggesting that some primitive element in the population had risen to the surface like an evil scum and had assumed control.

For hundreds of years Knossos had been the leader of Minoan civilization in Crete and the surrounding islands and on the mainland of Greece, and now that she had fallen, leadership passed to Mycenae, where the Minoan civilization continued under the kings whose splendid treasures were to be discovered in such amazing fashion by Schliemann.

As for the Minoans, they fade away out of history altogether—unless there is any substance in the extraordinarily interesting theory that the Philistines of the Bible were Minoans, driven out of their own land and compelled to take to the war-path in search of new homes! According to tradition, the Philistines, who contested with the Hebrews so bitterly and so long the possession of the land called Palestine after them, came originally from Caphtor, and some scholars believe that Caphtor was Crete. If in fact the Philistines were Minoans, or at least were inheritors of the Minoan civilization, Goliath of Gath whom the boy David slew with a pebble, was a Minoan champion, and the lords and ladies who crowded upon the roofs of Gaza to see Samson, the Hebrew hero, "make



Philistine prisoners pictured on an ancient Egyptian monument:
were they Minoans?

sport", would have resembled the Minoans who yelled with excitement in the bull-ring at Knossos.

All this is nothing more than supposition, of course. What is definite is that within a hundred or two hundred years of the Fall of Knossos, Crete together with Mycenae was under the occupation of the Achaeans, who are the Greeks of Homer's *Iliad*, and as a part of the Greek world the island sent ships to join in the Greek attack on Troy. Then followed the Dorian Greeks, who brought Crete within the sphere of the culture of Classical Greece.

Hundreds of years after Knossos had been destroyed, the Dorian colonists might still find much to amaze them in the ruins. The name of the Labyrinth was still preserved, so Evans tells

us; hard by the western gate was a fresco showing Princess Ariadne in her royal robes, and standing before her a comely youth who might well be taken for the hero Theseus, about to receive from her hands the coil of thread that would enable him to negotiate the maze of galleries beyond. At more than one turn in the passages rose the representation of a mighty bull, perhaps shown being grappled with by a half-naked man. "One may feel assured," writes Evans, "that the effect of these artistic creations on the rude Greek settler of those days was not less than that of the disinterred fresco on the Cretan workman of today. Everything around—the dark passages, the lifelike figures, surviving from an older world, would conspire to produce a sense of the supernatural. It was haunted ground, and then as now, 'phantasms' were about." The stories of the grisly king and his man-eating bull grew up later; they sprang, as it were, from the soil, and the whole site called forth a superstitious awe.

The newcomers left it severely alone. Another Knossos grew up on the lower slopes of the hill. "Gradually earth's mantle covered the ruined heaps, and by the time of the Romans the Labyrinth had become nothing more than a tradition and a name." And so it remained for two thousand years, until Arthur Evans came along, saw in his mind's eye the Minoans sleeping there below the ground, and restored them, in all their beauty and brilliance, to the light of day.

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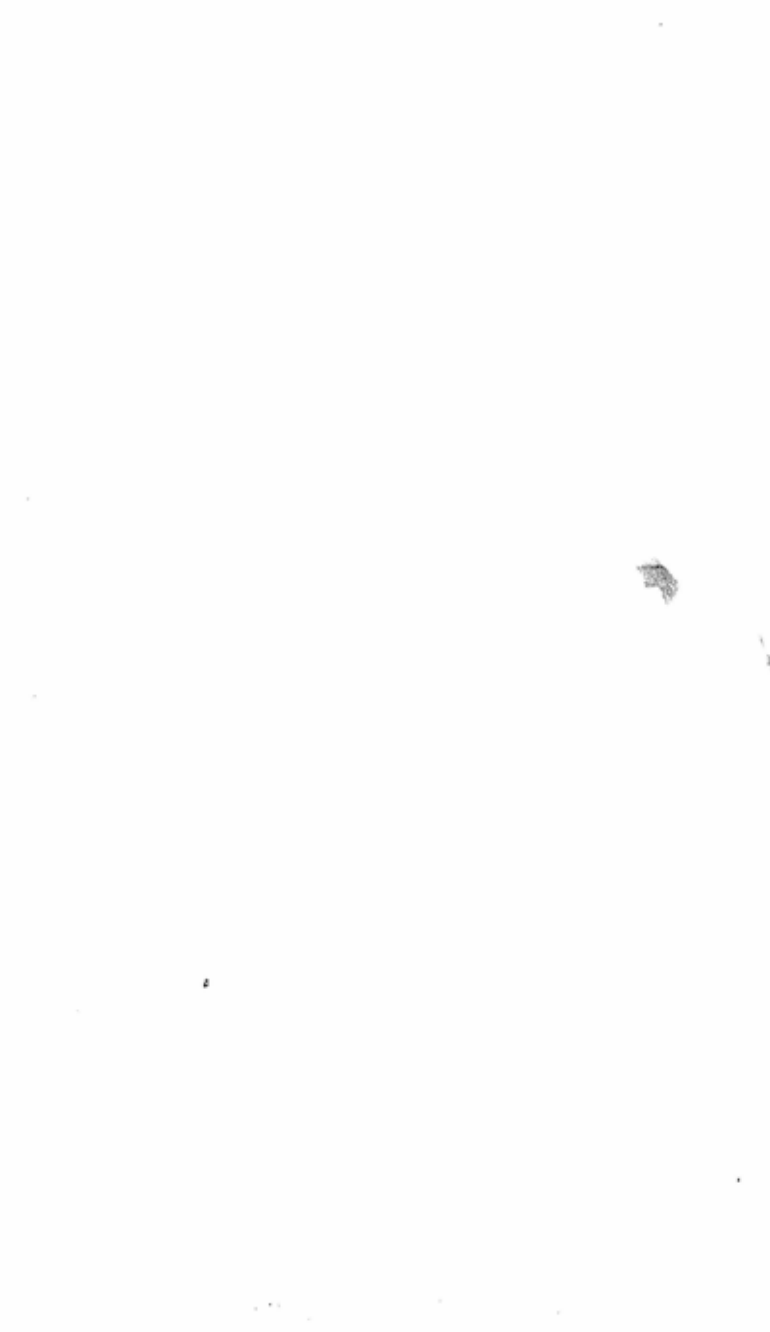
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