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THE MEDITERRANEAN SECTION

CRETE

Crete, sometimes aptly called "the halfway house between Egypt and Greece," was, during the third and second millenia B. C., the center of a high civilization which was snuffed out by barbarians from the north and forgotten by subsequent generations. A few faint echoes of that vanished civilization ring in the legends current in historical Greece: Zeus was born in Crete; to Crete he carried, from Asia Minor, his bride Europa; and in Crete he died. Cretans long pointed out his burial place, and thereby drew upon them for their blasphemy the opprobrium of all religious Hellenes. "The Cretans are always liars," says St. Paul, quoting Callimachus, the Greek poet. The two sons of Zeus and Europa, Minos and Rhadamanthys, were at the end of their lives translated to Hades, where they sat in judgment on the dead. In life Minos was the more famous of the two. He was the great lawgiver of Crete, a mighty sea king whose power extended not only to Greece but possibly to Sicily. He conquered Megara and Attica. This last is admitted by the Athenian legend of the seven youths and seven maidens sent as recurrent tribute to Crete to bait the Minotaur, the bull of Minos. How serious this tribute was may be inferred from the joy of the people at its remission, in token of which every year until at least the third century B. C. the traditional galley of Theseus, kept in repair from year to year, was sent on a sacred voyage to Delos with solemn sacrifices of purification, and with especial envoys. During the days of the voyage, the city could not execute criminals nor perform any act entailing public impurity. So Socrates, condemned to death for impiety, was granted a reprieve for thirty days until the sacred galley should return to Athens.

All the historical background for these legends had, as has been said, vanished for centuries until the digging of British, Italian and American excavators in Crete unearthed treasures of that astounding culture which was lost but dimly remembered in the days of Homer. "*Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona.*" (There were brave heroes before Agamemnon.) Of their arts, their houses, and their gods considerable information has been gained. Of their stoneware and pottery, their stone and bronze implements, the expeditions of the University Museum have brought back to Philadelphia representative specimens. These are grouped according to a system of chronology generally acceptable to archaeologists. The whole civilization is called Minoan* from the name of Minos, which may be less an individual name than a dynastic title, as Pharaoh in Egypt. There are three eras of Minoan culture, early, middle and late, each of which is subdivided into three periods—I, II, III.

MINOAN CHRONOLOGY

Early Minoan I.....	Before 2800 B. C.
Early Minoan II }	About 2800-2200 B. C.
Early Minoan III }	
Middle Minoan I.....	About 2200-2000 B. C.
Middle Minoan II.....	About 2000-1800 B. C.
Middle Minoan III.....	About 1800-1600 B. C.
Late Minoan I.....	About 1600-1500 B. C.
Late Minoan II.....	About 1500-1350 B. C.
Late Minoan III.....	About 1350-1100 B. C.

The greatest age of the Minoan civilization is spread over the period from 1600 to 1350 B. C., Late Minoan I and II. Between Late Minoan II and III there is a break, caused by some catastrophe, invasion perhaps, from which there is a valiant effort at recovery. The last period, Late Minoan III, is generally called the Mycenaean Age, because the centers of civilization were Tiryns and especially Mycenae in Greece. This was the age about which the Homeric poems were written, poems written long afterward in memory of a time that was no more. There is no decay to the Minoan civilization. In its glory it was snuffed out at the end of Late Minoan III by

*Some scholars prefer for this civilization the name "Ægean," because traces of the culture seem to be limited to the neighborhood of the Ægean Sea.

another and greater disaster, which completely destroyed the life and spirit of these people, and with that fell the night of the dark ages that preceded the glorious renaissance which we call historical Greece.

POTTERY

CASE I.

The Cretan collections are exhibited in cases I-IV, inclusive. In case I is pottery, arranged chronologically, so far as possible. The shapes, it will be seen, vary considerably, but a few are especially characteristic of the Minoan culture. Some of these are so peculiar as to warrant special notice. There is, for instance, a jug on a low foot, a sort of pitcher, with its spout prolonged into a large beak (No. 3). A second shape is the stirrup jar or false necked amphora, so-called because there is no outlet between the handles, but the neck is sealed and a spout is inserted at the shoulder. This shape is very common in the Third Late Minoan period. The finest specimen of this shape is the famous octopus vase, reproduced in case IV, alcove C No. 13 (West Room), a very round vase decorated with a masterful naturalistic design of marine forms, dominated by the waving arms of an octopus. A third characteristic shape is the filler. This is a tall, slender vase tapering to a pointed base, which is always pierced by a hole. It served, apparently, as a funnel. Its most famous representation is on the fresco of the Cupbearer. Varieties of this shape are seen in No. 182 and No. 189, the former being especially noted for its naturalistic marine decoration. A fourth shape much affected in this civilization, and later forgotten, is analogous to the modern tea cup (No. 40). Sometimes this cup is made with a high foot (No. 171), a shape very popular with metal workers of the Mycenaean Age.

Sizes, it will be seen, vary more than a little. There are many variations possible between the miniature or toy vases (No. 47) and the huge pithoi or storage vessels (No. 211), used as containers of grain, oil, etc. Some such vessel as this last must have constituted the famous tub in which Diogenes, the cynic, later lived. In general, large shapes are characteristic of the Late Minoan Age. Two varieties of the large jars are important.

(1) The so-called Mycenaean amphora, with handles in groups of four, or multiples of three (No. 205).

(2) The long necked jar with two handles, a shape which persists in the later Dipylon amphora (No. 206).

*East
Room*

Common household utensils are represented by the brazier (No. 60) and the cooking pot on three legs (No. 55), used in Gournia more than 3,500 years ago. A large water flask (No. 204) is of the same shape still found practicable for canteens.

In the decorated pottery can be traced the evolution of potters' ornamentation. The earliest specimens are not decorated, but sometimes are mottled by the firing (No. 3). When decoration begins, the primary idea is realism. Accordingly one finds employed vegetable (No. 183) and marine forms (No. 182); the naturalistic develops into the conventional (No. 187), the coils of the nautilus suggest spirals (No. 189); and finally comes the geometric (No. 194), in which is found the last flicker of decorative genius, after the destruction of the Minoan civilization.

STONE VASES

CASE III.

The Cretans learned from Egypt the art of working stone. A number of stone vases in case III, from various sites in Crete and from the island of Mochlos, range in date from the First Early Minoan period to the Third Late Minoan. Stone vases were made, then, throughout the Minoan civilization, but the finest are products of the First Early Minoan period. The materials used are steatite (a sort of soapstone), soft veined marble and alabaster. As the art of pottery making was developed, less interest was shown in stone vessels, which, of course, were hard to work, for the stone cutters' tools were of bronze, iron being as yet unknown. In general, the latest specimens are distinguished by very thick walls and a correspondingly small containing space (No. 115 or No. 133). No hard and fast rule is, however, possible, for of the three alabaster vases (Nos. 95, 96, 98) all of which have very thin walls and are very skilfully worked, No. 95 and No. 96 are of the First Late Minoan period, and No. 98 is of the Second Early Minoan period—a difference in date of nearly 1,000 years. The Late Minoan period produced at least one pleasing shape, typically Cretan, the so-called blossom bowl, of which the Museum possesses two specimens (Nos. 97 and 107). The name comes from the working of the outer surface to represent leaves with strong midribs that rise from the base and sheathe the bowl.

LAMPS

CASE IV.

Stone as well as clay was used also for lamps, a number of which will be found in case IV. These are low and open, with two diametrical depressions cut into the broad rim to afford a rest for the end of a floating wick. Such lamps are portable, but many Cretan lamps have a high foot (case III, No. 62). Whether on a high foot or not, typically Cretan lamps have certain peculiarities.

*East
Room*

(1) They have open shallow bowls with a broad rim which is frequently grooved.

(2) They have two diametrical depressions for wick rests.

(3) They have two diametrical "ears" depending from the rim and placed always equidistant from the wick rests.

MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTS

CASES II AND IV.

A miscellaneous collection of objects, mostly from Crete, is displayed in cases II and IV. Most of the objects come from Crete, but there are included also some neolithic sherds from Thessaly in Northern Greece (No. 90). The collection includes bronze knives, pins, fish hooks, needles from various sites in Crete, spindle whorls, and a collection of Cretan sherds, interesting for a study of decoration on pottery.