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Their life?*

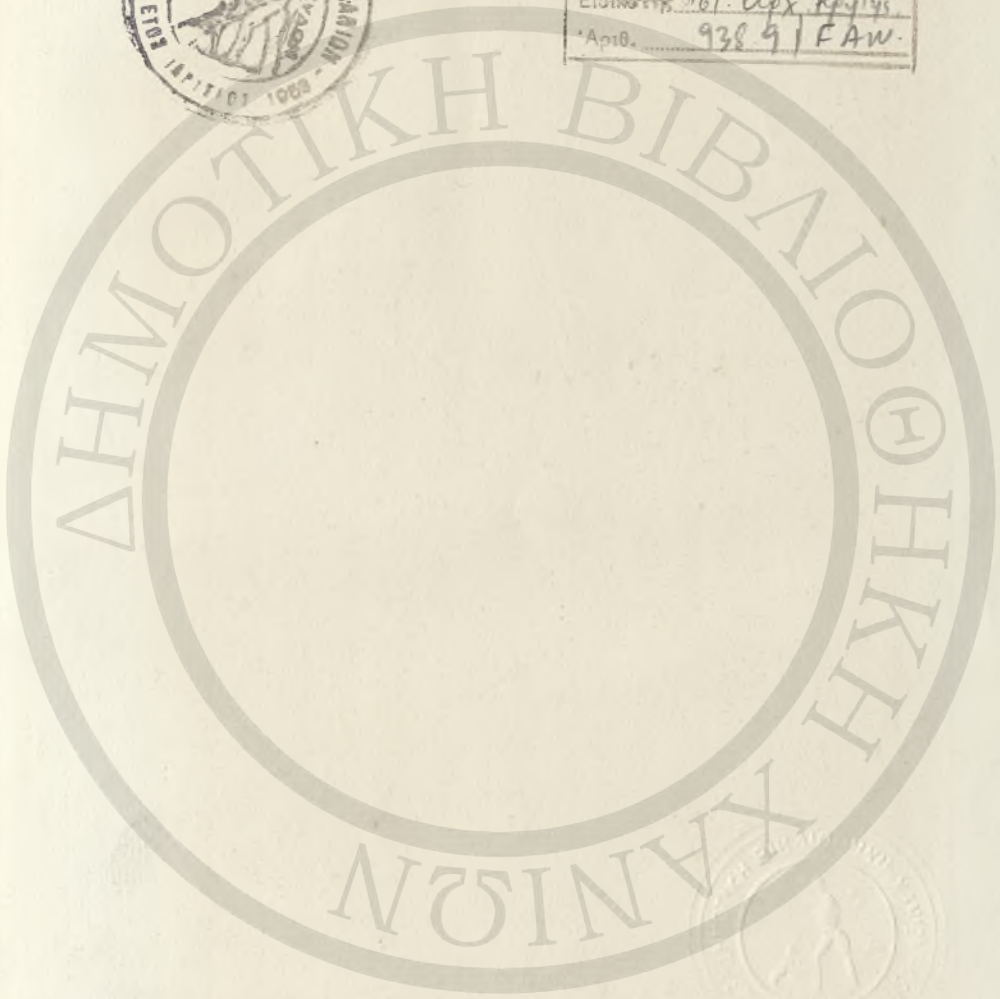


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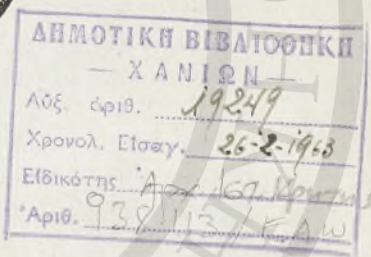
THESE wall frescoes from Knossos—the Blue Bird and the Monkey—are two of the finest examples known of this peculiarly characteristic expression of Minoan art. Partially restored from fragmentary remains, they date from about the 17th century B.C., and display a most happy combination of realism and decorative design.

Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

What Was *Their* Life?



CRETE



Edited by
RAYMOND FAWCETT

Editor of the HOW DID THEY LIVE?
and *WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?* books

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BY many people in this age of science and machines, the achievements of our ancestors, the incalculably rich cultural inheritance which they have amassed for us down the centuries, even their tangible monuments that have survived Time itself, are summarily dismissed in the late Henry Ford's terse comment "History is bunk." To such as these the past is dead, only the present and the future are significant.

Editor's

Foreword

What folly is this! All the marvels of modern Man would be as naught were it not for the profound store of knowledge, skill and learning bequeathed to him by his forefathers. What they, with painful trial and infinite labour over the ages, have proved to be of enduring worth is today the very foundation of our accepted standards of civilized life. How, then, can we afford to ignore that which is so close woven into the essential fabric of our existence?

TO make much of the present and more of the future we should surely live with the past ever at our elbow, its fathomless depths of experience ours to command, its tried counsel ready to our comfort. To know and appreciate how Man has lived in the past is the least contribution we can make towards an unrepayable debt.

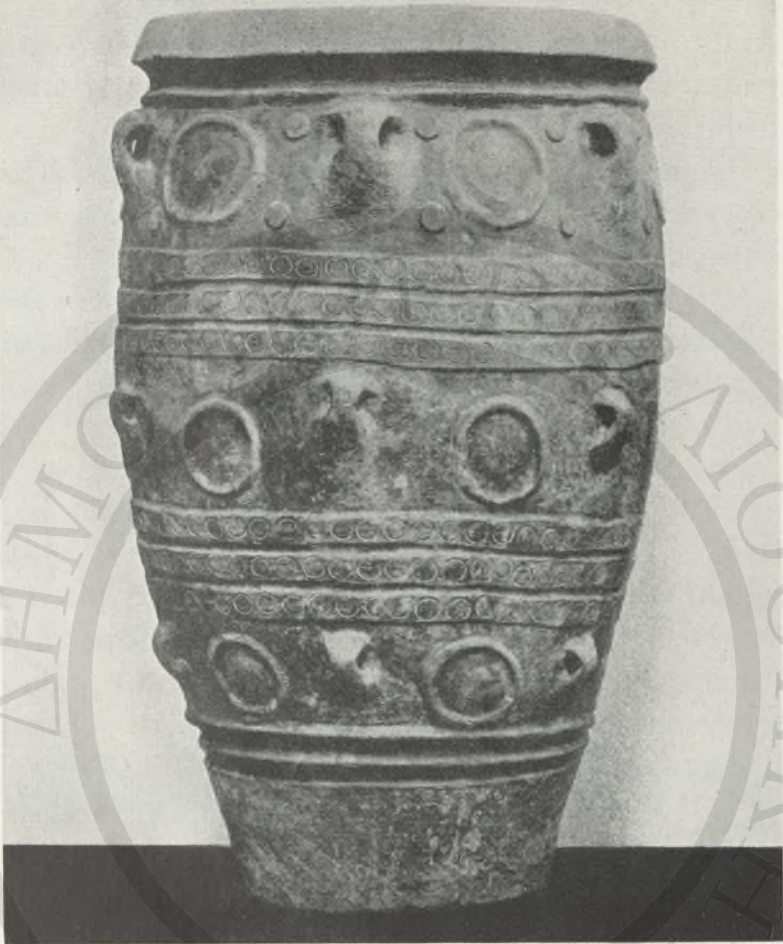
What was *their* life? In the series of books of which this is one, Mr. CYRIL G. E. BUNT offers the answer in six different parts of the earth at varying periods. To give unimpeachable background to his authoritative, yet entertaining impressions of the everyday life of these ancient peoples, and to point the value to us of their many-sided accomplishments, the pictorial resources of both Old World and New have been drawn upon with care and discrimination; and where authentic reconstruction has been called for it has been specially executed in the light of recent archaeological discovery.

EUROPE'S first civilization was evolved by the Minoans in the Mediterranean island of CRETE some 4,000 years ago. By about 1,500 B.C. their pattern of living was fully formed and it is at this period that you are here taken to meet the people of this early Welfare State, to delight in their lively and unrivalled art, and marvel at the magnificence of the great palace of the Sea-Kings at Knossos.

R. F.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Editor acknowledges with thanks the assistance with certain illustrations kindly given by the Editors of "History Today."



“**A** TRULY remarkable jar, is it not?” comments the old, old man beside us. “A veritable Grandfather of all Jars.” And as we gaze in wonderment at this huge stone vessel well-nigh as tall as ourselves, we have to agree.

“If they once made jars as large as that, you can well believe that Ali Baba’s Forty Thieves were able to hide in them,” we rejoin.

“You can indeed, though Ali Baba was an

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Arabian and this monster comes from Crete. Do you see the label? *Oil Jar (Pithoi) from Knossos.* It doesn't tell us much, does it?"

"What more is there to tell?" we ask. The old, old man peers at us with just the suspicion of a twinkle in his astonishingly keen eyes.

"How about Shakespeare's lines in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?" he counters with an air of mystery.

*"And the quaint mazes on the wanton green
For want of treading are undistinguishable."*

"But what on earth has that to do with the big jar?"

"Aha!" he exclaims, obviously pleased that he has us puzzled. "That is a long story and to find the clue we must go back down the ages to a period fifteen hundred years before the Birth of Christ. Are you game for such a journey?"

WE nod agreement and, as in a dream, follow the old, old man towards the marble-paved hall of the Museum where he rings a bell in the wall beside the strong doors of a lift. Almost immediately the doors open, disclosing a mighty grille of gilded bars which swings outwards while we pass inside and then clangs to behind us. The doors close again and we begin to move, though whether upwards, downwards or sideways, it would be hard to tell. After a while we hear our venerable companion talking to us once more.

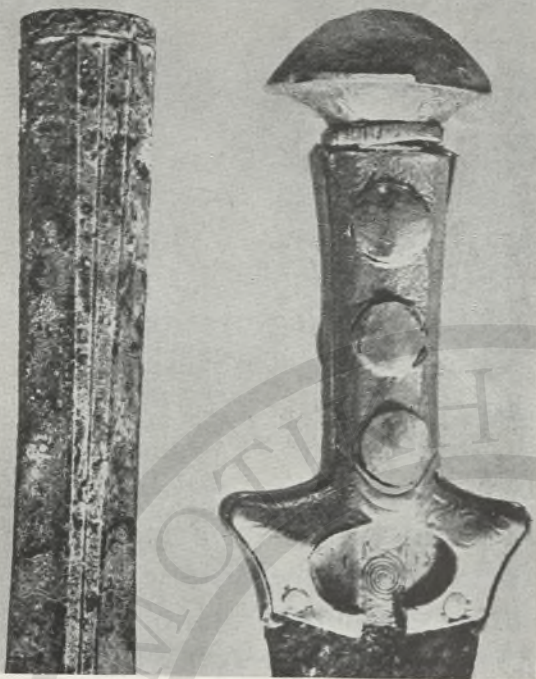
"We are now passing back through the eighteenth century," he announces in a solemn voice, "when there were turf-cut Mazes or 'Troy Towns' on

OF MAZES AND LABYRINTHS

many an English common or village green. A maze, as you may know, is a meandering path about a foot wide, cut in the grass, which twists and turns within a confined space so that it requires great skill to reach the centre without treading over the edges of the path. If you care to go to Saffron Walden in Suffolk you will actually find one on the common there, and if you try to 'tread' its mile-long twisting path, you will certainly be *amazed*." His voice dies away in a suppressed chuckle and there is a long silence as we move steadily backward through the centuries until once again the old, old man gives solemn tongue.

"We are now in the first century. Instead of treading the maze, which they leave to the country folk and children, the Romans play the Troy Game. Even in this first century, the Game is already an





Magnificent weapons found in a Minoan tomb of the 15th century B.C. at Knossos. Base of a bronze spear-head engraved with a butterfly (left) and the gold-plated hilt of a 2 ft. sword.

ancient custom. Patrician youths on horseback engage in make-believe combat, approaching and retreating, interweaving and turning upon an intricate pattern on the *campus*."

The next mile-stone in our time-journey would seem to be the City of Troy, for now—surely—the old, old man is quoting from Virgil's *Aeneid*.

"Father Aeneas commands all the thronging people to draw back from the long arena. . . . The youthful warriors advance. . . . Three troops and three leaders gallop hither and thither. . . . They gallop apart in equal bodies and each breaks up its companies with parted bands and again at a signal they wheel around and charge with levelled spears. . . . They interlock hither and thither and in arms present the image of a battle. . . . As in the days of old the Labyrinth of lofty Crete is said to have possessed a way immeshed in baffling walls and entangled mystery of a thousand paths. . . . So the sons of Troy entangle their paths at a gallop and interweave flight and combat in sport."

Here is the hint for which we have been waiting. At last we begin to discern some shadowy con-

ON THE HIGH ROAD TO KNOSSOS

nection between Shakespeare's lines and the island of Crete and, as we do so, realize with a start that we are no longer moving. The great gilded grille turns slowly outwards, our aged companion beckons us to follow and, somewhat fearfully, we step out onto a broad roadway bathed in brilliant sunlight—the warm sunlight of the island of Crete.

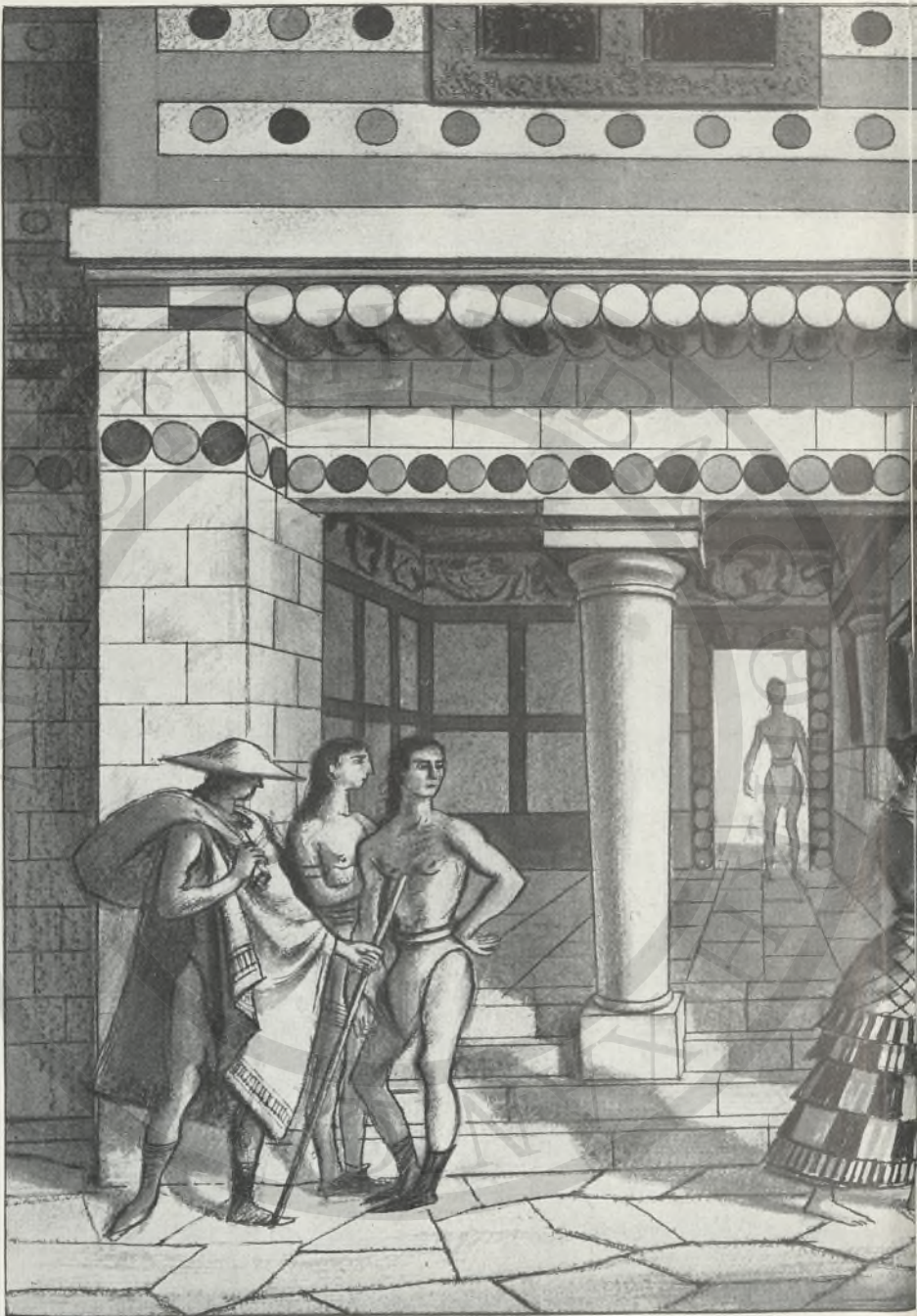
“WELL! we have arrived,” proclaims the old, old man, rubbing his hands with satisfaction, “though we are not quite at the place I had expected.”

“And what are you going to show us now that we are here?” we enquire.

“The first thing is this high road on which we are standing. It leads from Phaestos, on the hill yonder, to the City of Knossos and the great Palace of Minos in the north of the island. You will notice that it is paved in the centre, not at the sides. Why? Look, here is some great man being borne along in his palanquin by two bearers, who walk smoothly in the centre. If ever one of their great chariots comes this way the heavy wheels span

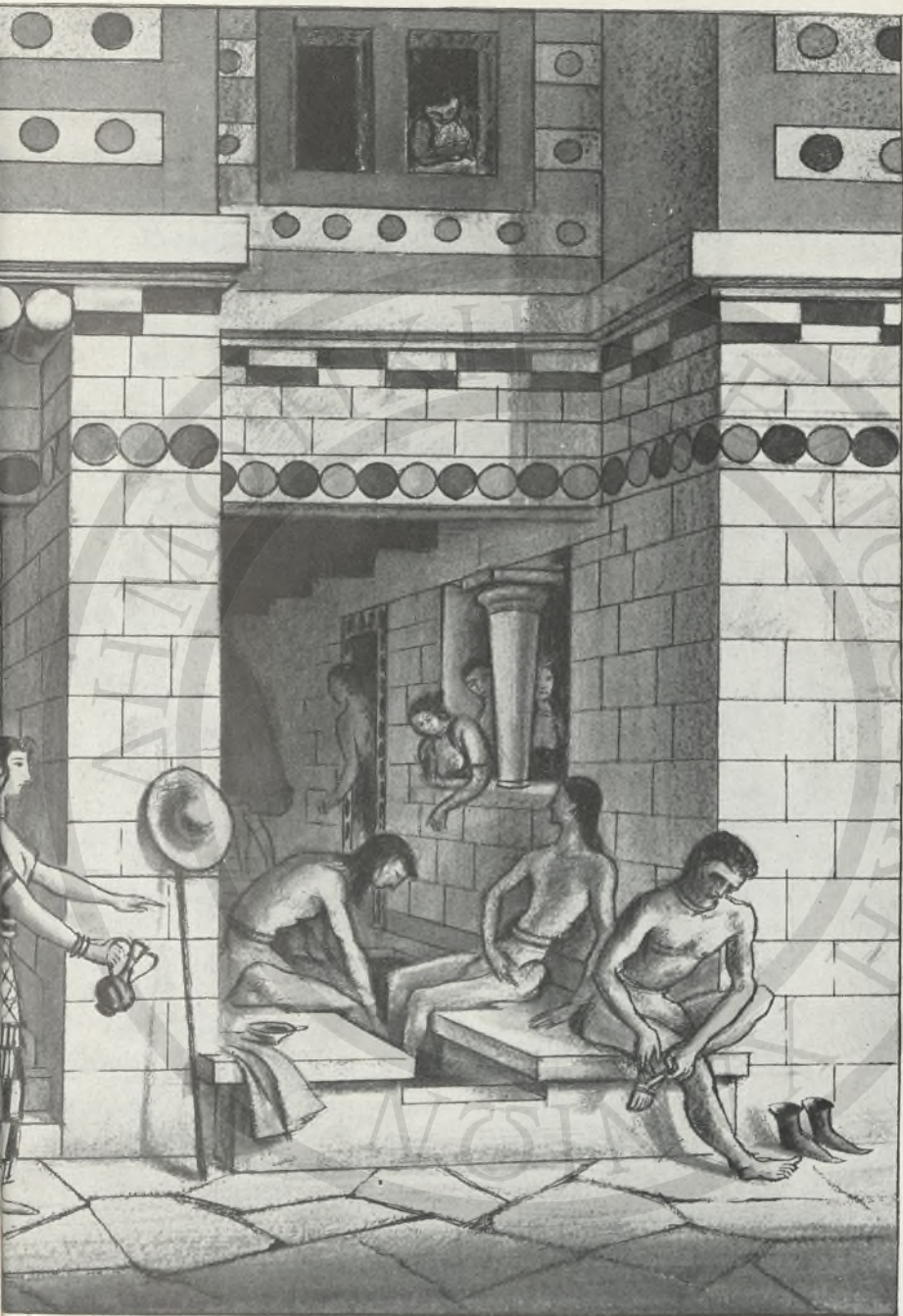
Helmet of a Minoan warrior discovered near the weapons shown opposite. Of thin bronze, it has separate cheek-pieces and a knob on top to hold a horsehair plume.





In Minoan times the ordinary Cretan traveller had to journey from place to place on the island on foot, since horses and chariots were few, and only those of high estate were in a position to ride in palanquins. Thus at strategic points on the roads there were hostelries whereat the wayfarer might obtain refreshment and accommodation for the night.

Specially drawn by



Of notable repute among these was the hostel at Knossos, at the end of the highway between that city and Phaestos in the south. This comfortable port of call was situated by the road to the Viaduct, south of the Palace of Minos, and—as seen here—boasted an entrance pavilion with a bath (*right*) in which the footsore traveller could wash his feet.

Alan Sorrell, R.W.S.

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the middle path and the horses—of which there are very few—run upon the pavement. As for what else I am going to show you, that depends upon what you would like to see. There on the hill, as I say, is the palace of Phaestos. Not far away is a splendid Royal Villa by the sea. Then there is the Palace of Knossos, twelve hours' journey from here and, of course, other towns, if you wish."

"WE would like to see the Labyrinth first," we tell him. At this the old, old man appears to hesitate and we listen with surprise when he confesses that he does not know exactly where it is.

"We shall have to ask the way of someone," he says. So we start off along the road, passing well-cultivated fields of wheat, peas and strong-smelling beans. Plane trees, silver-leaved willows and tall cypresses shade the way and groves of gnarled olive and fronded fig trees grow here and there. We can pick out little settlements, scarcely to be called villages, in one or two directions, and presently we reach a house set in a tiny

The legendary story of Theseus and the Minotaur—here depicted on an Attic black-figured amphora of the mid-6th century B.C.—is thought to have had its setting in the Palace of Minos at Knossos in Crete.



pasture where sheep and goats are grazing. Though small, the house is strongly built of rubble stones and picturesquely surrounded by bushes of golden brown and rose-coloured oleanders. The peasant owner receives us hospitably, but he seems embarrassed when we enquire the way to the Labyrinth.

“YOU see,” he explains, “no one knows for certain if there is, or was, such a thing. It is so long since the first King Minos lived that the legends they tell of him are not very clear. I have seen old coins on which the Labyrinth is represented, but that does not prove anything. Some say that it was a name given to the Palace itself, with its underground rooms and intricate network of passages, and that Minos used to keep the fabulous Minotaur there, sacrificing the annual tribute of boys and girls from Athens until Theseus delivered them with the aid of the fair Ariadne. Others hold that it was in a great cave that the beast—half man, half bull—was kept. We do not know. But up on the hillside at Gortyna there is a cavern which people hereabouts



Most sacred Cretan symbol was the Double Axe, here seen in the form of a small votive offering set in a stone base.



In its early form, Minoan writing was purely pictographic, as seen in this clay disk from Phaestos (*left*). Later the linear script inscribed on narrow tablets (*above*) was developed: so far it has not been deciphered.

call the Cave of Minos. If you wish to visit it I can supply you with lamps and a ball of thread—otherwise you may never find your way out again.”

Such an intriguing suggestion is too good to ignore and it is not long before we are ready to set off. Armed with a small lamp apiece we leave the cottage and, following the main road according to the peasant's directions, in about two hours we reach the spot where a dark hole is to be seen in the face of the rocky hillside. We make our way up to it, anchor the end of our thread firmly outside and, paying out the line as we go, enter its gloomy portal. For what must be close upon three hours

THE CAVE OF MINOS

we grope our way through intricate passages eight or ten feet wide and round the walls of spacious chambers in the depths of the hill until we are completely bewildered by the tortuous windings which seem clearly to have been made puzzling by intention. As we progress, a sense of apprehension lest we lose our way settles upon us. Every ten yards or so a blank wall is encountered where we must choose between turning to the right or to the left. In some places no less than four passages make such choice more difficult. Some of these are cul-de-sacs and we have to retrace our steps. The tiny glimmer of the earthenware lamps fed with olive oil scarcely penetrates the gloom of the cavernous chambers and we constantly disturb colonies of dusky bats, the flapping of whose wings re-echoes in the recesses. Though we discover no traces of the Minotaur, there are remnants of broken jars and other fragments which lead us to surmise that these extensive dry galleries are probably designed for the safe storage of corn and other valuables in times of trouble.

IT is late when, tired and dirty, we at last get back to the peasant's house and we are glad to find he has prepared a repast for us in the small stone-paved living room. We sit on rough benches round the walls to enjoy this simple but satisfying meal—a wild hare stewed in a large three-legged pot over the fire in one corner of the room, lentils, bread and figs, served in shallow bowls and eaten with the fingers.

While eating we talk of the purpose of our visit

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and the old, old man insists that our first objective must be Knossos. The Great Palace, it seems, is not merely a palace. It is a Royal town, consisting of an enormous number of apartments connected by corridors and inhabited by the King, his household, courtiers, a host of lesser officials and numerous craftsmen and servants who work for them. There are audience halls, living quarters, workshops for carpenters, metal-workers, potters and weavers, storage vaults for oil and wheat and the treasures of the King, baths, shrines and a theatral quarter.

TWO things, Krates—our host—tells us, will probably strike us as unusual. One is the absence of any walls or defences, since his is an island people who depend for protection upon the sea and their ships. The other is that there are no temple buildings such as their neighbour Egypt has. They worship their gods in private, though there are shrines on the summits of some of the hills.

“Our religious ceremonies,” he explains, “are held in the chapels you will see in the Palace itself, for Minos is not only King, but High Priest and mediator between the Great Mother Goddess and the people. She is ‘Mother Nature’ from whom everything proceeds. She is Goddess of Earth, Air and Water, of mountains, streams and forests and is represented by a pillar-stone, a tree or by our most sacred insignia, the Double Axe. Doves, stags and serpents are her special emblems and a symbol called the Sacred Horns is the sign of consecration employed on altars and all shrines. You will find that the Palace is crowned with them, telling us that it is

SECRET OF MINOAN WRITING

consecrated to the worship of the Great Mother.”

Since we are to start for Knossos early the following morning, Krates gives us a small tablet of clay on which he inscribes a few strange signs. This, he assures us, will secure a friendly reception from his brother, who is in charge of the hostel on the south side of Knossos, close to the high road. Turning the tablet over curiously, we ask if this is



Like the peoples of the Indus Valley and of Sumer before them, the Minoans displayed the highest artistic skill in the engraving and design of their seal-stones, as these impressions show. Being a sea people, they frequently favoured a marine motif. (See also pages 38 and 39)

the usual mode of writing and our host informs us that, though very few except the nobles master the art, many learn a few signs which enable them to send messages as he has done. In early times important matters were recorded by means of a kind of picture-writing but, in the course of centuries, a more lineal script has been developed. Writing upon the clay tablets is done with a sharp instrument while yet the clay is moist and, if the

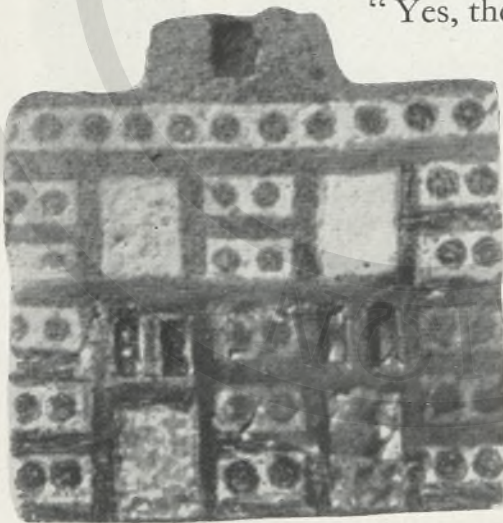
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record is to be preserved, it is then baked. Accounts, receipts and other business documents are stored in wooden chests and sealed with seal-stones which are carried suspended round the neck or upon the wrist. Less valuable documents are sometimes written on palm leaves with a brush such as the potters use to decorate their wares.

“**Y**OU cannot hope to master our script in a short time,” Krates continues, “but at least it is easy to learn our system of counting. Units are expressed by vertical strokes, tens by horizontals and a circle with a cross in it stands for 100. It is very necessary that our merchants should keep accounts for we trade regularly with the Egyptians, the islands of the Aegean Sea and the towns of the Greek mainland.”

“It is your flourishing trade which is the source of all your wealth?” we venture to suggest.

“Yes, the revenues of the State go to support the whole social fabric: one-third to cover public expenditure, one-third for the upkeep of the priests and shrines and one-third for providing public meals. Revenue is collected in kind and trade is by barter. Vast stores of wheat, oil, pottery, metal utensils and



Front of a Minoan town house with double-paned windows, as modelled in a brightly coloured faience plaque found in the Palace at Knossos and here shown twice its actual size.

SUBURBAN HOUSES OF KNOSSOS

other necessities are kept in reserve. There is no reason why anyone should go hungry or be without a roof over his head, for the State looks after that."

NEXT morning we are on our way as soon as the sun looks over the mountains. The thoughtful Krates has supplied us with provisions for the journey—slices of wheaten bread spread with a soft cheese made from curds and a flask of wine diluted with water. On the long walk we meet few, except the police guard stationed at intervals along the road. Most people do not make long journeys since, except for the very important persons who may use a palanquin, all travelling has to be done on foot. In the fields a few slaves dressed in the usual loin cloth of the lower orders are ploughing with a primitive wooden plough or sowing their crops. But much of our way lies through somewhat dreary and rough country. Not until we reach the neighbourhood of Knossos in the late afternoon do we begin to see signs of human habitation. By this time the road is skirting a great hill and a few suburban houses, built of limestone or blocks of gypsum, are dotted about. As we round the hill to the north the houses increase in number until they form a continuous suburb. In structure they are varied, but they all exhibit pleasing facades towards the high road and we note that nearly every one is of two or three stories, with horizontal bands of light and dark material and many windows, each of two, four or six panes. Some of these windows have wooden frames, others are set directly into the masonry. Glass being apparently unknown, a number seem to be

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closed with a kind of red material—perhaps oiled parchment. All these dwellings have flat roofs and some have attics.

NOW we begin to meet people on the road. Most of the men wear a simple loin cloth and girdle in which is tucked a knife or dagger, but certain others have long embroidered cloaks falling from their shoulders and shoes of hide. The women's dress is much more elaborate and appears to consist of a skirt held by a girdle and a close-fitting bodice which, while cut away in front, rises behind like a pointed collar. We see some who are richly robed in flounced petticoats trimmed with embroidery. They have large eyes and red lips, and their dark hair, with curled fringe, falls over their shoulders. Their hats with up-turned brims are tied by ribbons and they wear shoes with heels. While no two dresses seem to be exactly alike, all are bright in colour—yellow, purple and blue predominating.

Outside the north-western corner of the Palace at Knossos (seen here on the extreme right) is the Theatre where games, dances and other performances were held. Between the two banks of shallow steps, on which the audience sat, is the central bastion that supported the "Royal Box".





Hair styles and costume of Minoan ladies of the 16th century B.C. as depicted in the famous "Ladies in Blue" from Knossos (above) and another Cretan fresco (right). A short open jacket, or bolero, would seem to have been popular.



At length our road enters a ravine, beyond which we catch our first glimpse of the colossal Palace of Minos whose gleaming walls of limestone and gypsum rise story upon story on the hillside, covering many acres. And here we find the hostel for which we are bound where a pleasant little man, Zakros by name, welcomes us heartily upon receiving his brother's tablet. The hostel is entered by a pavilion the walls of which are painted with brightly coloured designs of large birds. There is a bath in the pavement where we wash our tired feet in running water and exchange our boots for sandals, as is the custom. A room nearby contains bath tubs of hot and cold water for the use of travellers. The

living quarters are small but cosy, a charcoal brazier burning in each, except the kitchen or living room—for it is both—where there is a blazing fire upon the hearth. In preparation for our entertainment a serving man sets upon the fire a great cauldron in which is a flank of mutton. When the joint has been made tender by stewing it is impaled upon a wooden spit and roasted.

WHILE awaiting this appetizing meal we have a look at the variety of utensils used in a Minoan kitchen. An ingenious pottery saucepan especially takes our fancy, since it has a lid so designed that it condenses the steam and prevents the water boiling over. There are copper cauldrons, jugs of various shapes, basins, ladles, cups, a vessel with a strainer at the bottom for separating curds and whey and special cups with strainers for making infusions of the *salvia* plant, which are drunk with a sweetening of honey. At the request of Zakros we try some of this beverage but find it little to our liking.

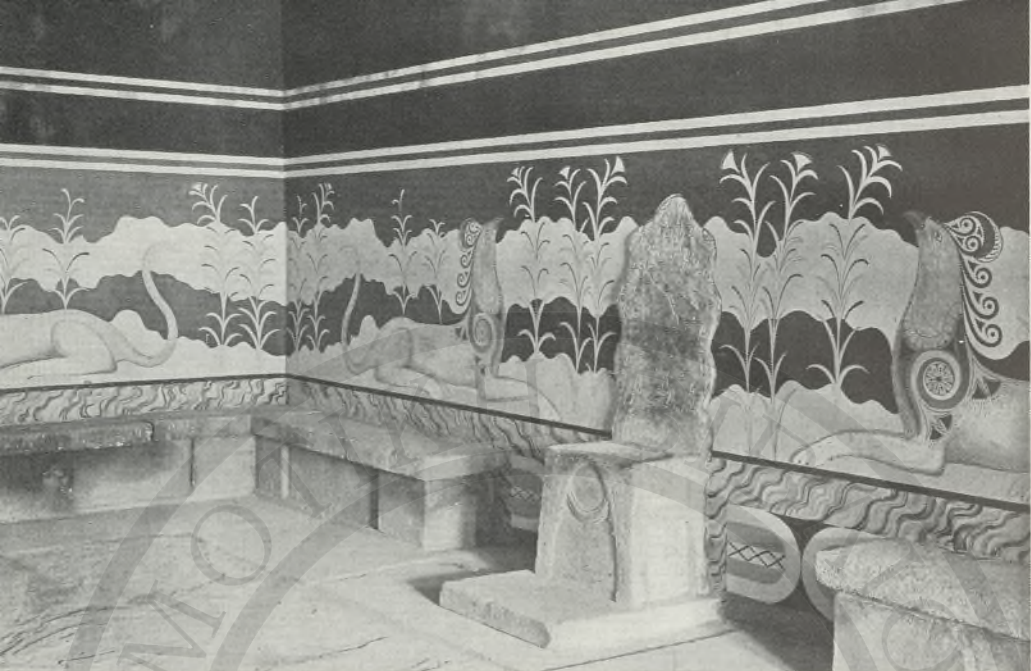
At the meal, when it comes, the roast mutton is served with boiled beans and bread, and is followed by apples, figs and dates for dessert. As we eat, we





The main entrance to the Palace at Knossos was on its northern side. Here you see the western aspect of the North Entrance passage as it is today, with the partially reconstructed portico.

discuss our plans for the morrow and Zakros volunteers to show us such parts of the palace as are open to public inspection. For this we are grateful



The Royal Throne Room at Knossos has now been restored to resemble its original appearance. Flanking the leaf-backed throne are stone benches whereon the King's advisers doubtless sat when in council.

for we had been wondering how on earth we should get on without such a guide. Soon after sundown we retire, very weary, and sleep well despite the fact that our beds are couches of gypsum covered with rugs.

NEXT morning, after a warm bath and an early breakfast of boiled mullet, bread and diluted wine, we set forth. Crossing the ravine by a stone viaduct and passing the southern or Processional Entrance to the palace, we skirt the great building in order to approach it by the northern or principal entrance. We are thus able to see at close quarters the great walls of limestone and gypsum surmounted in places by representations of the Sacred Horns, which tell us that besides being a palace this huge structure is also a shrine of the great Mother Goddess.

At the north-west angle we pass a building on our left which Zakros calls the Theatre. It is open

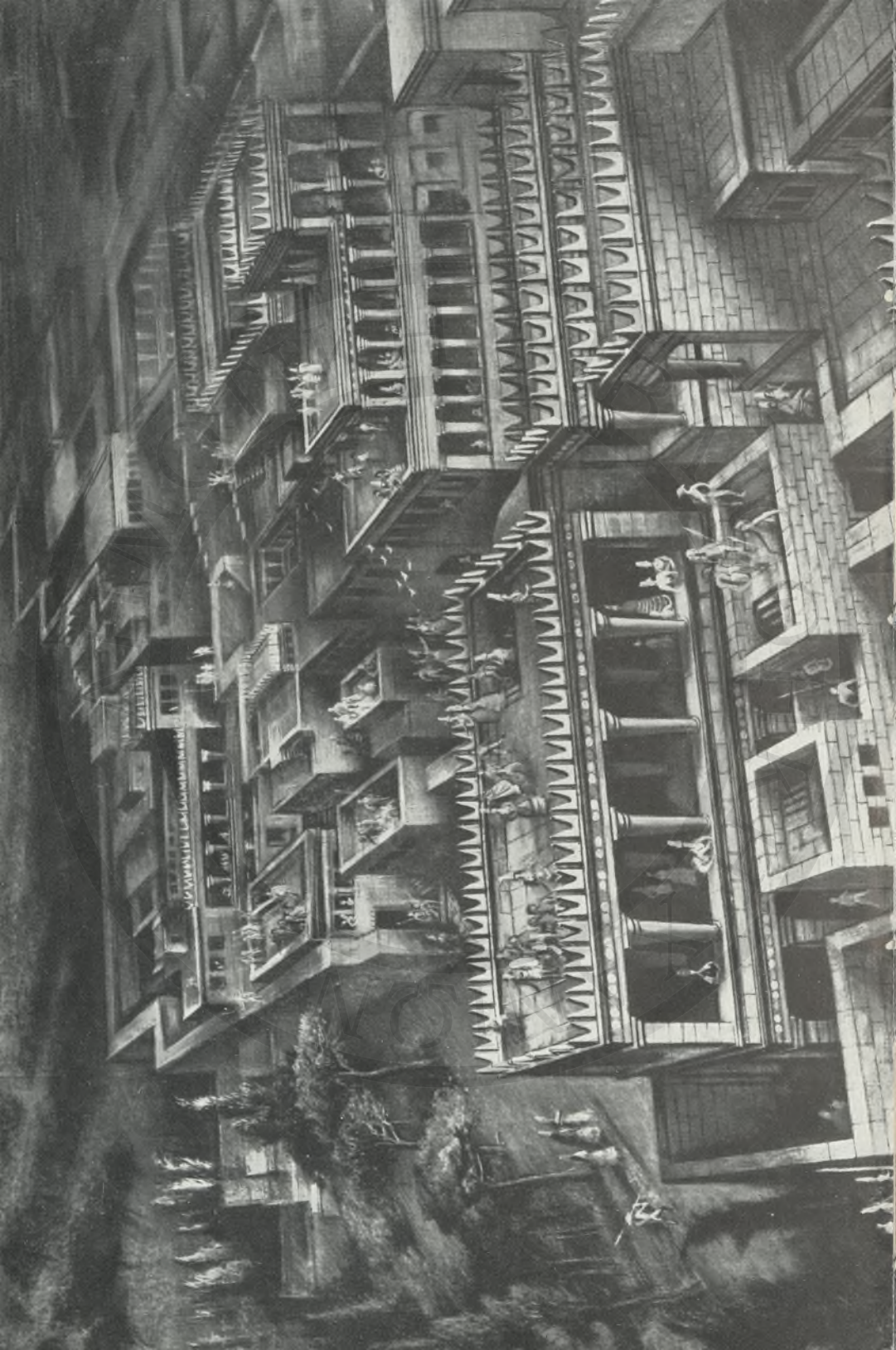
ARIADNE'S DANCING FLOOR

to the sky and consists of a flight of broad steps with a lesser flight at one side, above which is built the "Royal Box". The audience occupies the step-like seats to watch various performances—gymnastic games, dances and bull-grappling—which are the chief recreations of the people and which take place in the cemented arena in front.

"It was here", Zakros proclaims impressively, "that the famous architect Daedalus made a dancing floor for Ariadne. Here Ariadne and Theseus met and fell in love. Here, ever since, the youth of Knossos have performed a rhythmic commemora-

After 3,500 years—rows of massive stone storage-jars still line the walls of compartments of the Royal Magazines in the Palace at Knossos. Their "cordage" decoration imitates the rope slings once used for manhandling smaller jars.







An impression of the Palace at Knossos in the 16th century B.C. Looking almost due south, it shows only a section of the vast group of buildings, including the Initiatory area (*bottom right*), the North Entrance passage (*centre right*) and, beyond the Pillar Hall (*centre left*), the South-East Magazines.

From the drawing by Alan Sorrell, R.W.S.; courtesy of the City of Liverpool Public Museums

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tive dance, turning and twining in imitation of the windings of the Labyrinth from which Theseus escaped by Ariadne's help."

Apparently as content to listen to the knowledgeable Zakros as are we, the old, old man has been

strangely silent since we arrived in Knossos though he has stood up to the arduous walking with surprising vigour. Now, at Zakros's words, he flashes us a keen glance full of meaning—and at last we grasp the relevance of those lines from Shakespeare that sent us here.



Delightful creations of the Minoan potters that have survived as memorials to their artistry and skill. The handsome double-spouted, bridge-spouted jug (*above*) is of a polychrome ware, decorated with a "marguerite" pattern; it stands $7\frac{1}{2}$ ins. high and dates from c. 1800 B.C. The "octopus" vase (*right*) is $8\frac{1}{2}$ ins. in diameter and was probably fashioned some 200 years later.





The Hall of the Double Axes in the Palace at Knossos as it is today. Only the bases of its entrance columns remain (*top right*): the Throne stood against the northern (*left-hand*) wall of the Audience Chamber (*centre*) immediately in front of the square-pillared screen. The crooked passage to the women's apartments led from the southern wall (*right centre*).

We pass up a slope to the guarded outer gate of the palace, through a grand hall of twelve columns and so, by a long corridor, direct to the great central courtyard around which the palace is built. Zakros tells us that beneath our feet there is a comprehensive drainage system and terra-cotta pipes conveying fresh water to the domestic quarters. As we enter this central court the full majesty of the mighty building bursts upon us, its facades rising three stories high with balconies supported by columns, and diversified by entrance porticoes and shrines.

One of the first rooms into which we are led

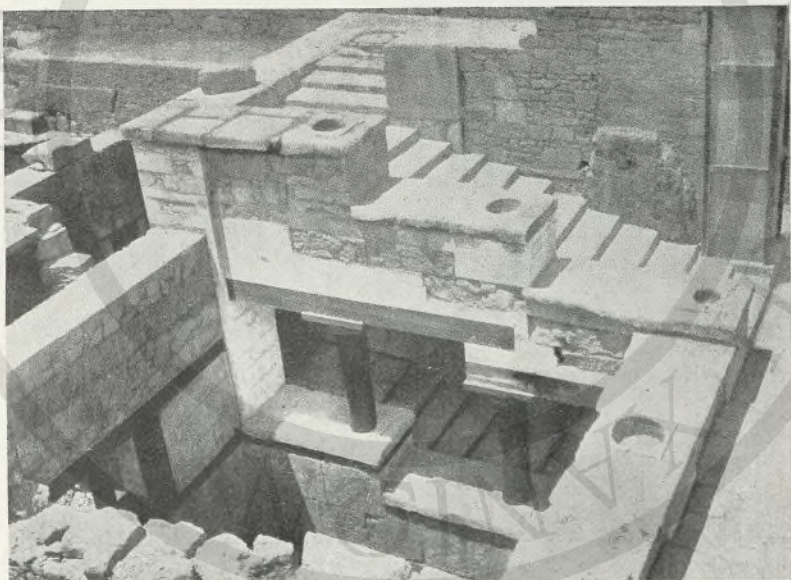
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reveals that the Minoans are well skilled in the decoration of their buildings. There are fresco paintings everywhere and the walls are sheathed in alabaster panels of great beauty. In this chamber the artist has depicted a shrine of columns before which is seated a large number of men and women. These last wear flounced skirts, tight-fitting, low-cut bodices with short sleeves, head-bands round their well-dressed hair and beads round their necks. But what surprises and intrigues us most is that, while the men appear to be intent upon some ceremony, the women are obviously engaged in lively conversation with each other. In the adjoining room a large painting shows a youth plucking crocuses (saffron flowers) from the rocks and placing them in shallow bowls.

THENCE by devious ways, Zakros brings us into an ante-chamber from which we pass into the Royal Throne Room. To the right as we enter we see the carved and painted alabaster Throne of the King. It stands against the wall which is decorated with a handsome fresco of crouching gryphons on a blue field with wild papyrus plants and waving bands of white. This is the hall where Minos sits in council. On either side of the Throne are benches for his advisers and on the end wall are two more gryphons facing the entrance to a small shrine. Opposite the Royal seat is a tank sunk in the floor ; it is protected by a balustrade, has steps leading down into it and is obviously used for certain initiation ceremonies. Soon after leaving the impressive Throne Room we find ourselves in a long corridor at the foot of a



The Grand Staircase of the Palace at Knossos—partially restored—seen from above the Hall of Colonnades (*below*); note the circular recesses to hold the bases of upper pillars and the window of a private staircase (*left*). Part of the 4th flight of the staircase (*above*): there are indications that a 5th flight extended still higher.



flight of steps, out of which open numerous narrow compartments the walls of which are of patterned alabaster. We count fifteen, but there may well be more.

“These are the Royal Magazines”, announces



A remarkable polychrome faience statuette in shades of brown and cream from the Central Shrine of the Palace at Knossos. It represents the Great Mother as Queen of the Underworld, with spotted serpents twined around her waist and arms.

other rich persons, who treat these "vaults" as safe-deposits. Even as we watch, stalwart men, with almost naked perspiring bodies, carry smaller jars full of the precious juice of olives from oil presses in the vicinity. We notice that their jars are bound with a network of stout ropes—a feature which the makers of the big stone jars have imitated

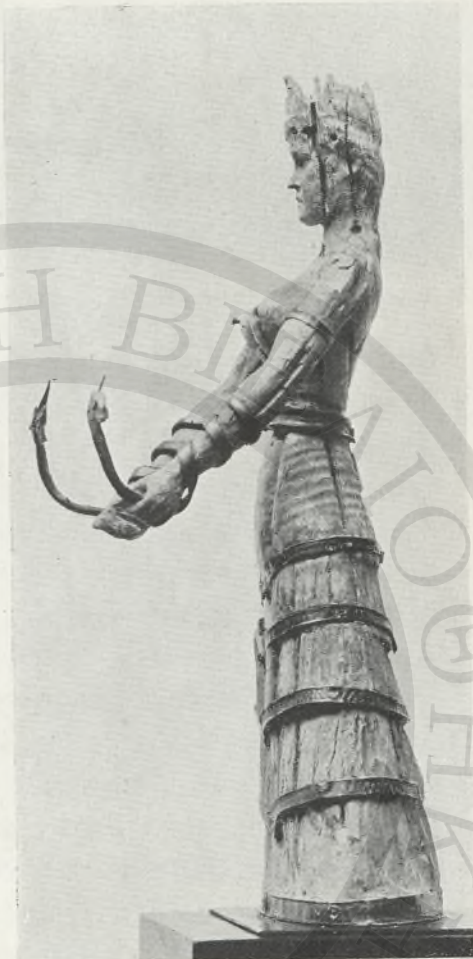
Zakros. But we scarcely heed him, for here before our eyes are row upon row of huge stone oil-jars, even larger and more wonderful than the one which originally aroused our curiosity. There is a guard on duty at each of the magazines, for their contents are precious, and one of them tells us that some of the jars contain the valuable olive oil which is the chief source of Minoan revenue. Others are used for the storage of wheat or other solid produce. He points out, too, the stone "chests" beneath the floors. These compartments contain the treasures of the King and

in their carved decoration.

Here, also, we are shown the Royal Pottery Stores where, thanks to the presence of Zakros, we are able to examine some of the immense variety of wares reserved for the use of King Minos. There are splendid libation cups in the shape of bulls' heads, stately vases, bowls, pots with handles and other vessels of egg-shell thinness, vases painted to look like ornamental stoneware, fruit stands, vessels adorned with insects, shells and other natural

objects in relief and many more. All are of beautiful shape and harmonious colouring, many being painted with decoration based upon floral patterns.

"All this pottery," Zakros tells us, "is made here in the Palace, as are the stone jars. Extensive workshops in the lower floors accommodate craftsmen permanently employed in producing such



Here again the Great Mother is shown grasping the necks of encircling serpents. The lovely modelling of face and hands coupled with the transcendent grace of this ivory and gold figurine rank it as an outstanding masterpiece of Minoan art.



Perhaps the most charming and effective of the surviving wall frescoes at Knossos is that known as "The Partridges", seen above.

things for the King's use".

At the far end of this corridor a guard directs us through a doorway leading into the crypt of the Central Shrine of the Palace. It consists of two rooms, the roofs of which are supported by square piers of gypsum whereon we see the sacred symbol of the Double Axe, emblem of the Great Mother. A minute or two later we are in the shrine above—a square room with a bench on either side. A short flight of steps leads to the sanctuary, beyond two alabaster pillars and a double gate of bronze. Beyond this again are two long troughs—for offerings—against a low balustrade. Raised above all is a square altar with a Double Axe standing on a pyramidal base to right and left. The centre of the altar itself is occupied by an equal-armed Cross of veined marble before which is set a small libation table, vessels for pouring libations and other cult objects.

BUT our attention is chiefly taken by two figures of polychrome pottery. One we call the Snake Goddess, represents a special aspect of the Great Mother as Queen of the Underworld. She has spotted serpents twined about her. On her head is a high cap with another serpent raised above it. She is dressed in a richly embroidered bodice and a full, flounced skirt



Executed in turquoise and shades of brown in the 17th century B.C., it is a faultless combination of realism and decorative design.

and wears a short double apron. Her extended arms grasp the head and tail of one serpent, while two others are curled about her waist. The other figure wears a much more elaborate costume and instead of twined serpents, *she* grasps a smaller snake in each hand. On *her* head is a hat surmounted by a small lioness sitting upright. All about the altar are sea shells painted in bright colours, which remind us that these Minoans are a sea-faring race.

FROM this strangely simple and impressive shrine, we find our way once more to the central courtyard and, crossing to its opposite side, make towards the Domestic Quarter. On this, the residential side of the Palace we meet with officials and servants hurrying about their business. They take no notice of us as we traverse an open court and a corridor and pass beneath a pillared portico into the great Reception Hall. This Zakros names the Hall of the Double Axes because so many of these symbols are carved on its pillars. A Throne of wood stands upon one side of this stately apartment, sufficiently proclaiming its purpose.

From here a crooked corridor takes us to the Queen's apartments which are entered through a porch giving light to the interior. With separate entrance, bedrooms above, bathroom, treasury,



The Processional Entrance to the Palace at Knossos was on its southern side and part of the West Bay of the Propylaeum, or Vestibule, has been restored, as seen here. On the wall are replicas of frescoes depicting cup-bearers with their attendants.

shrine and a private staircase, it is a self-contained suite. We are struck by the beauty of the reception room, the only part upon which we are allowed to intrude. Indeed, we only get this far by the courtesy

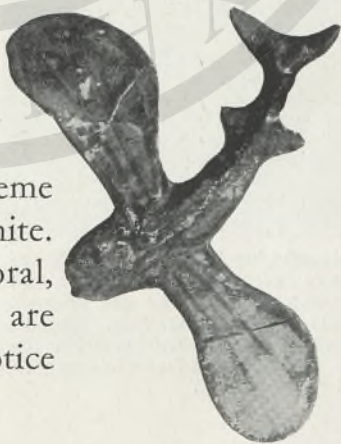
A MINOAN GMEE OF "DRAUGHTS"

of two young women whom we discover seated upon a low couch playing a game like draughts. A word of apology from Zakros and they motion us to approach, while they continue their play. The richly ornamented board of inlaid ivory, gold and crystal has an arrangement of rosettes, four at the top and ten below, separated by ribbed bands of blue, silver and gold showing through clear rock-crystal. The pieces with which they play are of sugar-loaf form; the moves appear to be governed by the throw of little seals marked with circles and dots, and used as dice. The purpose of the game seems to be the storming and capture of a "citadel"—the topmost circle—surrounded by its three supporting "bastions."

WHILE watching this fascinating game we have opportunity to observe that the room has a delightful air of seclusion, with an inner apartment beyond, divided off by square pillars. Both ceiling and walls are finely painted, the walls with a most beautiful design of almost life-size dolphins and other fish in a colour scheme of blue, orange and white. Around this is a border of coral, shells and sponges. We are particularly delighted to notice



Faience votive offerings in the form of a scallop-shell and a flying-fish: they were placed in a shrine to remind the deity of a suppliant's prayer.



WHAT WAS *THEIR* LIFE? ∞ CRETE

that the artist has shown little air-bubbles flying off the fins and tails.

LEAVING this charming place with regret, we return to the Reception Hall and gain another corridor, the walls of which are, to our surprise, painted with a design of repeated labyrinths or mazes. This leads us past a hall of fine columns and a light well to the Grand Staircase. Clearly this is the most imposing part of the Palace, for flight after flight goes up to unknown suites of rooms above

and down to lower stories. Each flight is flanked by stepped columns and on each landing is a window.

“You see,” explains Zakros, “this part of the Palace is on a steep slope of the hill and some rooms are built below the level of the great central court.”

Once more we are piloted through bewildering corridors, past stores and workshops where we stay a while to watch potters throwing their vases, weavers busy with their shuttles and masons carving massive stone jars. Then we find ourselves in the



A surprising feature of the Minoan sport of bull-grappling is that women took part as well as men. This wall-painting from Knossos portrays a girl leaping from the back of a bull.

midst of another group of magazines. We pass them as we traverse a final corridor and a guard room, to reach at last the pillared hall whence we started. We know that even now we have seen but a small part of this vast palace of the Sea Kings of Crete but, as Zakros remarks: "You cannot hope to do more. We could spend days wandering about its intricate passages and still not see it all. For of course the inhabited parts are private and must not be intruded upon. "AND now," he continues, as we leave the precincts of the Palace, "as you seem interested in wall paintings, I will take you to see a friend of mine who has lately had his house decorated in a very modern style. We call it the House of Frescoes."

So we set off down the hill, only stopping on the way to observe an ancient olive tree set within a



Equipment of a girl bull-jumper is shown in this masterly statuette of ivory and gold. Wearing protective apron and strapped corselet, she is about to catch a fellow athlete after his somersault. (See page 40.)



Impression of a chalcedony seal-stone of the late 16th century B.C. It shows two of the tumblers whose "turn" often preceded a bull-grappling performance.

low wall. Set around it are roughly made little figures of human beings and animals and even models of legs and arms, while pieces of coloured rag are tied to many of its branches.

"It is a sacred tree", says Zakros, "in which the Great Mother Goddess lives. The figures and rags are votive objects. When anyone falls sick or has an animal with an injury, he invokes the Great Mother. Man of himself can do nothing. Only she who gives life to all can cure such ills. So we appeal to her. The votive objects are to remind her of our petitions so that the ailing may get well again."

"Then you have no men with a knowledge of how to cure sickness?" we ask.

"No. The priests of the shrines tell us what to do."

PRESENTLY we reach the House of Frescoes; and need hardly have been told that these are quite newly painted. The owner of the house is very proud to exhibit them, for they are unlike any in the Palace. He is a lover of wild life and no human beings find a place in his decorations. Birds and beautiful flowers—roses, lilies, iris, crocus and myrtle—make his rooms gay and entertaining. In one fresco the artist has depicted a group of monkeys plucking flowers in a wild landscape of rocks and jungle.

After admiring this delightful "art gallery" we

SOCIAL EQUALITY OF WOMEN

are introduced to his wife and children. Minoan family life seems to be built upon sound ideas of social equality. It is quite evident that the mother is the most important member of the household, the more so that inheritance is in the female line and children assume the mother's name. Women take an active part in public affairs and mix freely in work and play on a level with men. Even in that sport of sports, Bull-Grappling, women take part regularly, we are told.

"What exactly *is* bull-grappling?" we enquire mystified. Even the old, old man appears to be puzzled.

"Is it bull-fighting?" he asks.

"No. Bull-fighting *is* sometimes engaged in ;

Vivid portrayals of a bull-jumper in action. In the impression from an onyx seal-stone (*right*) he has grappled a bull drinking at a cistern and, twisting backwards over its head, lands on its back, as in the bronze group (*below*.)





Thrills of the Minoan bull-ring preserved for 3,500 years in a dramatic fresco from Knossos. A girl athlete (*left*) has grasped the horns of the charging bull preparatory to leaping over its head. On the beast's back, a boy-jumper has just landed and is about to take off again in a back-somersault into the arms of another girl (*right*) who waits to catch him. (See page 37.)

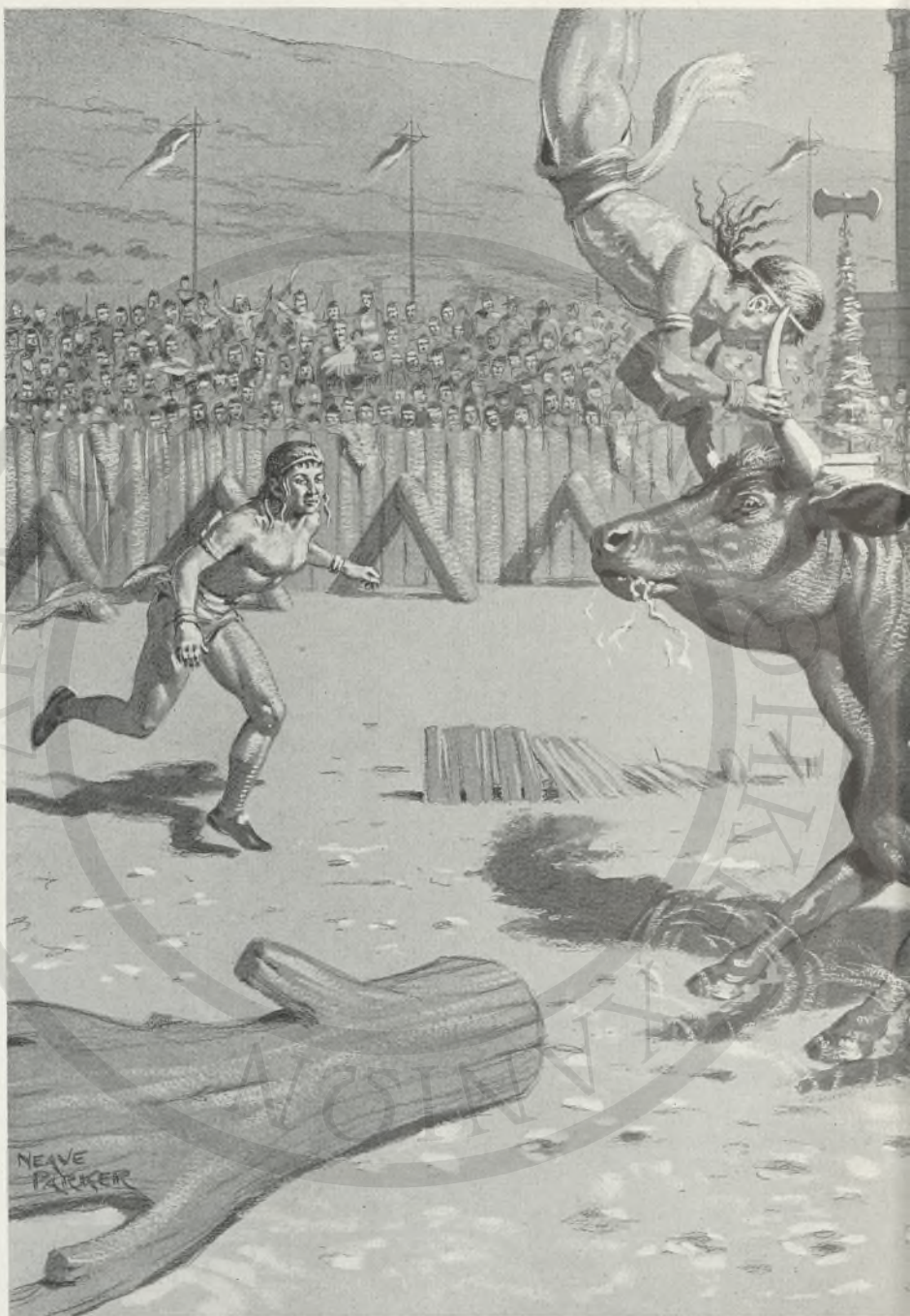
CURTAIN-RAISERS IN THE THEATRE

but bull-grappling is a highly skilful acrobatic performance, quite as dangerous as bull-fighting, but even more exciting. You must certainly see a performance before you leave Crete". With this to think about, we take our leave and with Zakros make our way back to the hostel.

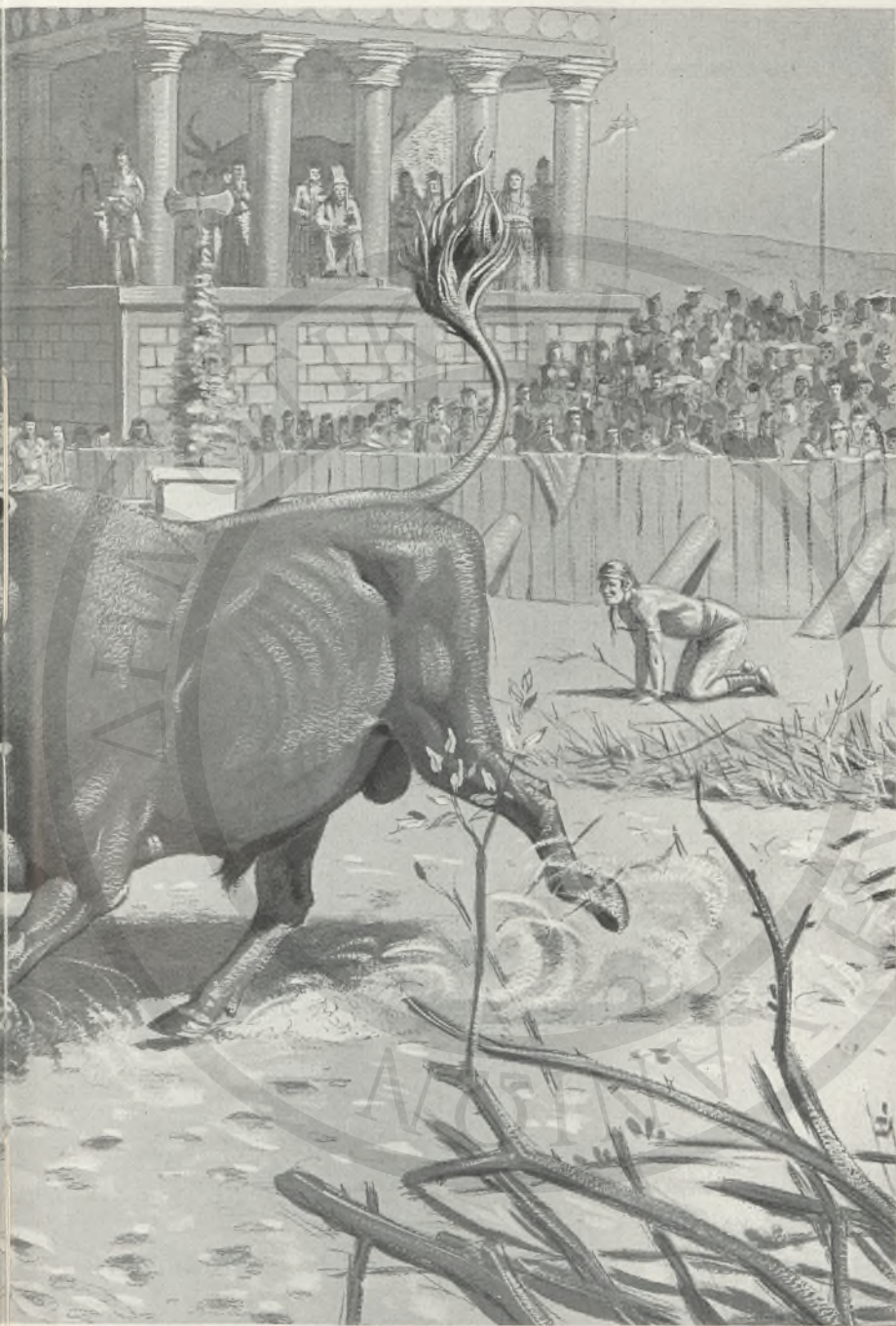
ON the following day our chance comes, for a display of bull-grappling is to take place that very afternoon. We pass the morning playing "knuckle bones" with the daughter of our host. The *astragali*, as they call them, are five bones from some small animal and we soon realize that we are familiar with the game as "five stones." It is a favourite with the children of Knossos.

The afternoon finds us in our seats in the theatre which is crowded to capacity, the front seats, by custom, being allocated to the women. Before the chief event, we are entertained by wrestlers, boxers, tumblers and jugglers. Women are among those who take part in the acrobatic posturing of the tumblers and, with the jugglers, there is one woman who, while performing a graceful dance, juggles with two, three or four balls.

THE arena has been fitted up for the occasion with wooden barriers within which the feats are to take place. The highly trained athletes, men and women, wait beneath the Royal Box. But before they start, an important ceremony has to be performed, since the bull-grappling is apparently connected in some way with the worship of the Great Mother Goddess. At one side of the arena a small altar has been set on which are two tapering, tree-like shafts surmounted



It was in such a setting as this that the Minoans watched their favourite sport of bull-grappling. Perilous and exciting in the extreme, the whole performance was organized to the last foreseeable detail, the athletes working together in highly trained teams ; to enhance their difficulties, tree trunks and other obstacles were scattered in the arena.



Here a jumper is giving a solo "turn": he has seized the horns of the infuriated bull and is about to turn a back-somersault so as to land on its back. In the background, the King—or some other notability—looks on intently from the pillared "Royal Box", while on either flank the packed ranks of the audience are protected from danger by wooden barriers.

by Neave Parker

Polychrome Cretan cups (right) of the pottery known as "egg-shell" ware, which has been described as "almost unbelievably fine . . . a triumph of the potters' art". They were probably made in about the 18th century B.C. The bull-shaped *ryhton* with paint decoration (below left) is of similar date; the amphora with a plant design (below right) is some 200 years later in origin.



by Double Axes of bronze, a libation bowl and other cult objects. A procession of priests, cup bearers, musicians and the gymnasts themselves approaches and before the altar sacrifice is made of a calf, whose blood is caught in a cone-shaped cup and solemnly poured into the libation bowl upon the altar. Meanwhile the priests chant an invocation accompanied by the music of the sistrum, syrinx, double flutes and a seven-stringed lyre. Then all raise their hands in supplication and the ceremony comes to an end.

While this has been going on, several great bulls have been led to a pen at one end of the arena and,



at a signal, one is released by a keeper. It comes forward at a trot and is met midway by one of the gymnasts who, making a running leap, lands upon the back of the beast and somersaults to the ground. Surprised, the bull breaks into a canter and is met by another of the team. This man unhesitatingly faces the big beast and, as it lowers its head, seizes the horns with both hands, twists himself upward and backward and lands upon the animal's back facing its tail. Another somersault and he is on the ground again. By now a third gymnast is ready and, as the bull gathers speed, springs towards him from the side grasping one horn with his hand, rests the other upon the bull's head and is carried thus almost horizontally the length of the arena.

AS this performer drops off and turns for applause, still another meets the animal. It lowers its head to gore him, but he steps aside and jumps completely over the creature's back. Amusement is caused when the next entrant, reaching the standing position upon the back, sits down upon the bull's head with his legs astride the formidable horns. And so the thrilling spectacle goes on. Another bull is brought forward ; obstacles in the form of tree branches and stakes are placed in position to make things more

WHAT WAS *THEIR* LIFE? ∞ CRETE

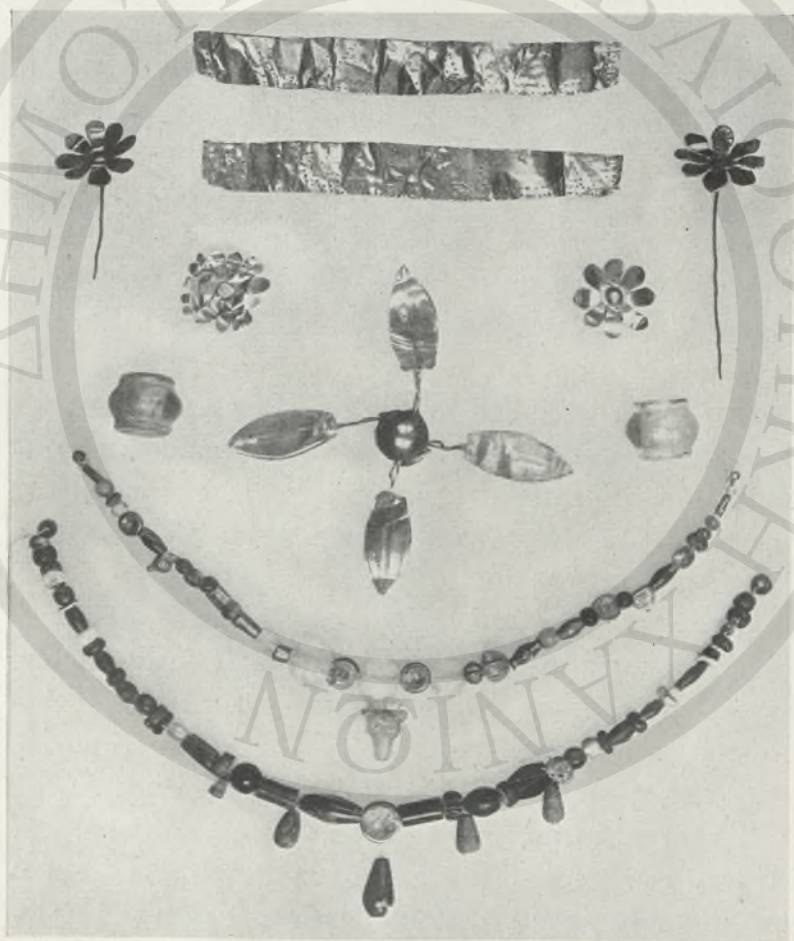
difficult. Two posts and a cross-bar greet this new arrival and the gymnast, having somersaulted to its back, guides it towards them. Then, as the animal thunders underneath, the man, with a spring, goes above the bar and ends as before with the final somersault to the ground.

THE women gymnasts who, like the men, are dressed in short breeches with a bright yellow sash falling from the waist, bracelets and laced boots, now come forward. To our astonishment they prove in every way as skilful as the men, particularly when, grasping the horns of the rushing bull, they are carried the full length of the course. But in all their feats, we notice that where a back somersault from the back of the enraged animal may seem particularly difficult, one or other of their companions stands alert to catch them should they fall.

Throughout this vigorous performance the spectators, who have their favourites among the gymnasts, applaud, shout and wave their hands in high enjoyment. Exciting it certainly is and we can well understand that it calls for the highest training and no small physical courage to go through the strenuous feats that we have been witnessing. That such events were not always without accident was shown by one of the final "turns" of the day. Two bulls were in the arena together and one, which had been thrown by getting its legs tangled in an obstacle, shot its intrepid rider over its horns. The second bull following and attempting to jump over the fallen animal, likewise threw its rider, to the excitement of the audience.

TRUTH ABOUT THE MINOTAUR

As we return to the hostel, our conversation is naturally about what we have just seen ; and we receive from Zakros a plausible explanation of the myths, not only of the Labyrinth, but also of the fabled contribution by Athens of youths and maidens to be sacrificed to the dread Minotaur. Reminding us of the important place which the symbol of the Double Axe occupies in the religion and art of his



Personal adornments affected by Minoan ladies of fashion. They include armlets of beaten gold (*top*), marguerite-shaped gold pins, bead necklaces (*bottom*)—one with a bull's head pendant—and other gold ornaments : all are from Mochlos.

WHAT WAS *THEIR* LIFE? ∞ CRETE

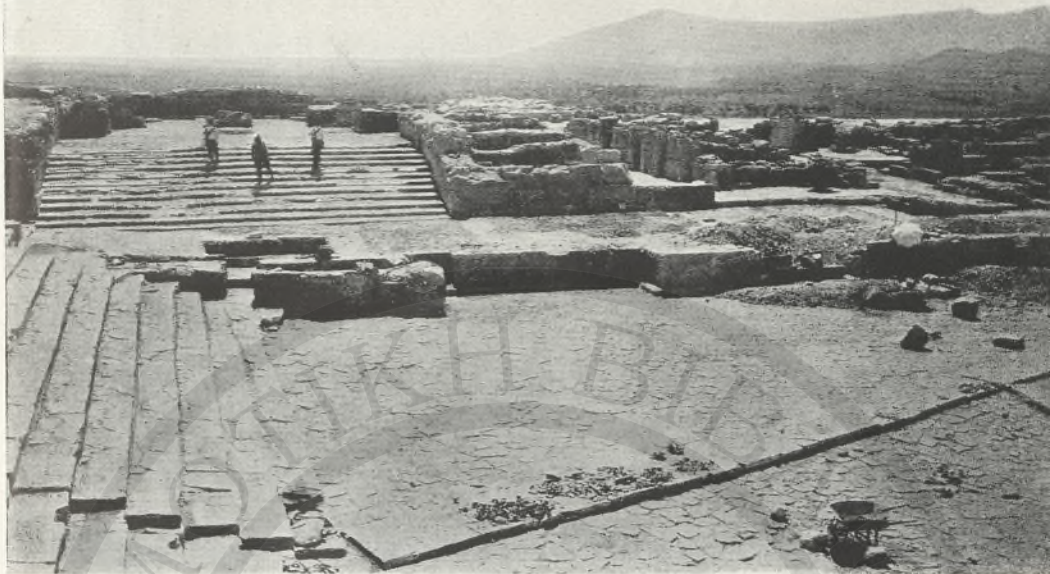
people, he speaks of it as *labrys* and suggests that this may well be the origin of the word *labyrinth*. Then, recalling the fact that athletes of both sexes are trained in that spectacular sport, he puts forward the idea that, in the days long past, the Athenian youths and maidens may well have been dedicated (with religious ceremonies) to the ranks of the gymnasts who pit their skill against the brute force of *taurus*, the bull.

AS we pass over the great stone viaduct en route for the hostel, we look back at the wide, porticoed flights of steps leading up to the Processional Entrance of the Palace. This is our last glimpse of the great Palace of Minos, Priest-King of Crete, for before dawn on the morrow we shall have bade farewell to our good friend Zakros and be upon our way south towards the palace at Phaestos.

Darkness has fallen by the time we reach Krates's farm once again and we are glad to spend the night with him. During the evening meal he tells us that we shall find this second palace less ancient, not so large, but just as interesting and impressive. It is much less official and more domestic in its arrangements, more compactly built and more easily understood. Again he writes upon a clay tablet; this time it is addressed to one of the palace officials, with the request that he will show us round.

"You will find him a man of much knowledge," Krates assures us. "He has one weakness. He is inordinately proud of his collection of rare examples of pottery."

On the following day we cover the ten miles to



The Palace of Phaestos, built on a hillside overlooking the plain of Messara in about 1800 B.C., may have been the centre of a separate kingdom but more probably was the alternative residence of King Minos. This is its entrance stairway.

Phaestos by noon. Here, as at Knossos, we pass a theatral area almost at the gates of the Palace. Its broad, low ranges of step-like seats are not unlike those we have seen before.

WE climb the wide, white steps of the Palace and show our tablet to the guard who conducts us to an apartment in the west wing, leaving us in a pleasant homely room overlooking a splendid panorama of the Messara plain and the grand masses of Mount Ida in the distance, for Phaestos is built on the brow of a hill. We are welcomed by a friendly, dignified man who regales us with a cup of wine while he learns the reason for our visit. Being an enthusiast where his collection is concerned, it is not long before he is enlarging upon his pet subject ; and inevitably we are soon led down a short flight of red stone steps to his treasure house. Here he shows us with pride precious objects in great variety, but especially his exquisite examples of earthenware,

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each differing from the other in size, shape and decoration. All are of the finest Kamares and other wares—a connoisseur's selection indeed !

There are water and wine jars, fruit stands, bowls, cups and a great many other types of ceramic wares, many decorated in relief or painted in rich colours with leaves, rosettes, double axes, flowers and fishes. Not a few are of such delicacy that they may be compared with egg-shells for texture. Several vessels



A libation table of terra-cotta with moulded decoration and libation vessels still in their recesses. It was found at one side of the altar in the interior courtyard at the Palace of Phaestos.

are in the form of animals, including one in the likeness of a bull—a curious reminder of the strange scenes we have so recently witnessed.

Eventually, having shown us the cream of his collection, our host takes us back to the living quarters above. The room we had left is now occupied. Two young girls crouch on the ground, a picture of pleasant domestic happiness. They are playing with astragali beneath the portico of a belvedere. They wear fine red and white embroidered garments, with a broad band of Greek key-pattern at the edges of their skirts and bodices.

DISASTER AT PHAESTOS

Their feet and arms are bare, except for bracelets upon the wrist and upper arm. One girl has thrown up the knuckle bones and is catching them on the back of her hand. Beside her, a vase of virginal lilies on a low table gives an air of daintiness to the scene.

Suddenly there is an ominous rumble beneath our feet and the solid walls seem to crumple. From all around we hear the sound of crashing masonry, as parts of the palace collapse.

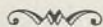
“It is an earthquake,” cries the old, old man. “Follow me!” We rush from the room towards the open court where a scene of destruction greets our eyes. We lose sight of our host and his daughters. Together we clamber over heaps of rubble and, covered with dust but thankful to be alive, try to make our way towards the wide steps of the palace. Smoke is now coming from parts of the ruins. People are rushing in all directions, taking no notice of anything but their immediate surroundings, their one thought to get away. Reaching the top of the stairway we begin to descend. The smoke is now billowing around us in dense clouds. We cannot see anything at all nor tell in what direction we are going, but we know that we are still moving—floating along on a sea of smoke. Then, as from a great distance, we hear very faintly the voice of the old, old man. What is it he is saying?

“My old bones ache; here’s a maze trod indeed!”

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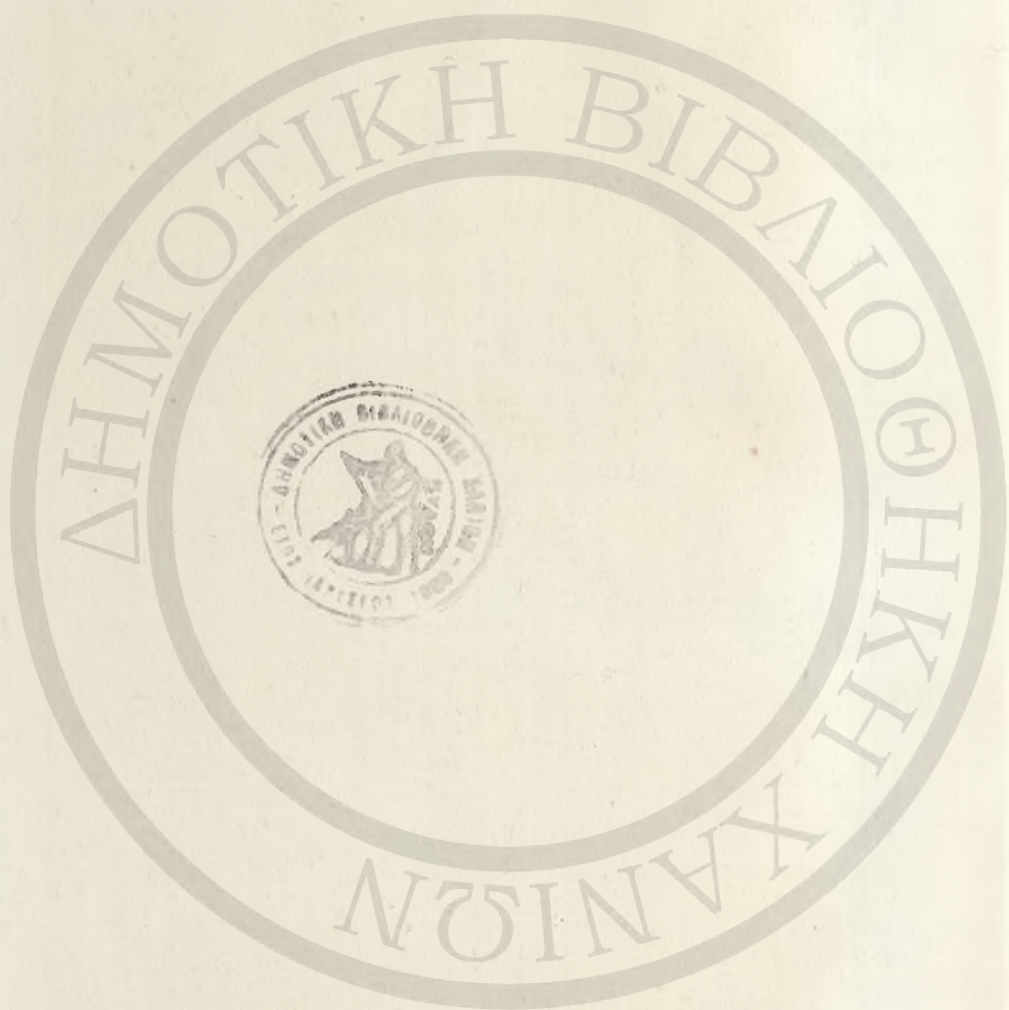
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