XVII. *Description of an ancient Temple near Crendi, Malta. In a Letter from J. G. VANCE, Esq. to NICHOLAS CARLISLE, Esq. K.H., F.R.S., Secretary.*

Read 19th November 1840.

SIR,

Palace, Valetta, April 2, 1840.

HAVING at the request of his Excellency Sir Henry Bouverie undertaken the superintendence of the excavations near Casel Crendi in this island, he has suggested to me that a short description of them, illustrative of the ground plan, taken for him by Mr. Foulis of the 59th Regiment, might be an acceptable present to the Society of Antiquaries. I have therefore taken the liberty of forwarding it to you, accompanied by a lithograph of the images.

I have the honour to be,

Yours, &c. &c.

J. G. VANCE.

NICHOLAS CARLISLE, Esq. K.H., F.R.S.
Secretary.

THE remains of ancient architecture lately excavated at the expense of the local Government, are situated on the south-eastern coast of the island, exactly opposite the small island of Filfla, about one mile and a half from the village of Crendi, and six from the city of Valetta. The assemblage of huge perpendicular stones which still remain unshaken in their original position, have for some time been objects of peculiar attention, and have not failed to awaken that degree of interest and curiosity which the mind is wont to be affected with, when contemplating the relics of antiquity, and investigating the manners of a people who lived in an age of darkness and super-

stition. The eminence on which the building stands, is up to this day called by the natives "Haggiar Chim," or the Stone of Veneration: but whether this name has been handed down to our times through a long posterity, or whether it is of a more recent date, we have no authority for stating: neither the memory of man, or the pen of the historian, furnish any information on the subject.

On observing, from a little distance, that side of the edifice which is furthest removed from the sea, and consequently the most perfect, its original exterior form is easily recognised; and it is not improbable, that in addition to the circle of stupendous stones which immediately surround the sacred area, there was an outer one of smaller dimensions, which embraced the whole, including the detached group of chambers on the north-western boundary. On a close examination of the environs, we cannot avoid remarking the number of well proportioned blocks which are scattered about in different directions; some lying in heaps, others singly, according to their bulk, yet evidently unconnected with the main structure. Although it would be difficult to ascertain with any certainty their original purpose, I think there are just grounds for presuming that they must have once formed the component parts of certain rude dwellings; places which have long since fallen a prey to the ravages of time. The distance of this barren and bleak situation from any casal, or place of shelter, make it evident that the people by whom the worship was conducted must have lived on the spot, or at any rate have possessed some covered habitation to screen them from the violence of the wind, and the bitter effects of a storm on so exposed a coast. Indeed I do not hesitate in pronouncing with a good deal of confidence, that a village of considerable extent at one period occupied this site. We were much disappointed at finding no inscription or coin which could in any way tend to elucidate the age in which this monument was erected, or even transmit to our times the names of its founders. Consequently it has occasioned much speculation: some people have conjectured that it was constructed at two different periods, grounding their supposition partly on the dissimilarity of appearance between the exterior of the building, which is of the rudest imaginable description, and the interior, which has a certain uniformity in its system, though not sufficiently decisive to denote its parti-

cular order ; partly on the difference of shape and quality between the altar standing in " No. 2 " chamber, and those at the entrance of " No. 4." But if we consider that the object of the outer circle of rough unhewn stones was merely to act as a defence to the interior : to keep together, as it were, the more important range ; that it was a method peculiar to the ancients to throw up large masses of stone around their most revered spots, without regard either to their symmetry or workmanship, we need not feel surprised if the exterior does not partake of the same features as the interior : if the one does not coincide in point of grandeur or magnificence with the other. The dissimilarity between the altars is likewise easily accounted for. On looking down into the body of the Temple from one of the high stones, the eye immediately perceives that it is chiefly divided into two ovular sets of apartments, having communication with each other by means of passages. On a closer examination we find that nearly all the walls on the northern division bear evident marks of the action of fire, some of them, indeed, being quite rotten and having the red appearance of brick, whereas those on the southern portion are perfectly firm and untarnished. In the northern division a great quantity of burnt charcoal and ashes was buried, more especially in " No. 12 " chamber, which seems to me to have been separated for the purpose of supplying fire. The southern division exhibited no signs of fire ; but contained nine images, (five of which were lying near the foot of the altar, and four in the semicircular chamber adjoining,) also many fragments of very ancient pottery in the shape of bowls, small jugs, lamps, and other utensils.

From the foregoing remarks it is, I think, obvious that a kind of service was performed in the one part different from that in the other : each had an altar adapted for its peculiar ceremonies. The two rudely cut tablets, which are of a hard species of stone, received the sacrifice ; the victim being very likely tied through the holes cut in the pedestal ; whereas on the neatly executed altar, which is ornamented, the idols or objects of their veneration were placed and adored, subsequently or previous to the propitiation of the gods by sacrifice in the other part of the building. The one division might perhaps have been appropriated to the worship of the natural gods or imaginary spirits, who being of earthly origin were to be

appeared by the sacrifice of animals: the other to the veneration of the celestial, who were alone to be adored by hymns and praises, the involuntary ebullitions of an upright and honest mind.

Some people have perceived a resemblance between these remains and those excavated at Gozo some years ago, and have on that account classified them under the general term "Cyclopian." I shall prove nothing by drawing a strict comparison between them, as little being known with regard to the origin and uses of the one as of the other; I shall merely say, that, however much the rough outside may correspond, the plan pursued in the interior arrangement is widely different; add to which, the style of pottery found at Gozo does not lay claim to so ancient a stamp as that at Crendi. I am willing to allow that they may have been constructed by the same people, or by a branch of them, but decidedly not at the same era. There is a tradition, to which I am inclined to attach but little credit, that an enormous stone, of similar form and size with that marked "F" in the plan, formerly stood by the side of it; but being marked with hieroglyphics it was broken up and taken away by the natives as a matter of curiosity. It is quite clear that the situation in which it is reported to have been fixed, would not admit of such a mass without interfering with the angular-shaped stone which was supported in the inside by a pillar, and evidently not intended to be concealed from the view.

On examining the bones which during the process of excavation were dug up in great quantities amongst the rubbish, we were led to suppose that the victims offered generally consisted of small animals, such as sheep, lambs, or even birds: there are, nevertheless, some which belong to a larger species of carnivorous quadruped, as also a few human remains; from which we may infer that the life of man was on peculiar occasions required to form a part in a mysterious and barbarous ceremony.

After having mentioned the few conjectures offered by others respecting this very curious relic of antiquity, and having shown certain reasons why they appear to be untenable; it may be expected that I should hazard some theory of my own concerning its origin, uses, and appropriation. I do not for a moment hesitate in pronouncing its extreme age. The appearance of the remaining high stones, which are in most cases almost eaten through

and worn away at the top by the action of the wind and weather, would of themselves warrant this assertion. But it is not on this alone that I am inclined to build my arguments. The lapse of two, three, or more centuries might effect that change on their summits on so exposed and elevated a situation. It is very certain that the earliest monuments of which we have any record, were composed of large stones standing perpendicularly out of the ground in circular arrangement: such is more or less the form of those remains at Avebury and Stonehenge in Wiltshire, Carnac in France, and many others, the uses of which have never with any certainty been ascertained. It is in this respect that they all bear some resemblance to each other. The interior arrangement therefore, the style of the altars, and other appendages to a place of worship, which we may chance to meet with in excavating, are the only guides by which we may hope to unravel their history. Happily there are two or three characteristics in this Temple which hold forth some assistance in forming an opinion respecting it. I can compare it with no other remains that I have ever seen or read of: I consider it to be quite unique and dissimilar to any discovery hitherto treated of.

The seven large images, which are made of the soft limestone of the island, although somewhat different in size and shape, all partake of the same character; representing the body of a stout female in a sitting position, and are, I conceive, significative of abundance and comfort. None of them can at present boast of any head-piece; in the necks of two or three a small cavity is discernible, in which it is evident that a head of some metallic or other substance was fixed by means of pins or rivets passing through the breast, and perhaps changed according to the innumerable forms under which a polytheistic people might wish to picture their imaginary deities or mythological heroes. They bear a very strong resemblance to the several figures under which the Hindoos represent the various attributes of the chief god Vishnu, or his principal emanations. In those chambers which contained charcoal, or otherwise showed proofs of the use of fire, we generally found a round stone about one foot in height, and half a foot in diameter, with a hole drilled through the centre, decreasing gradually and slightly as it approached the bottom. That these occupied some place either directly or indirectly in a mysterious worship, is, I think, unquestionable;

and although it has puzzled many antiquaries and others who have been induced to offer speculations on these ruins, to assign any use to them, or identify them with any other symbol employed by the ancients, I do not conceive that it requires any stretch of the imagination to assimilate them to the "Chakru," or Gnoit, recognised by the old Egyptians and Hindoos of the present day, as an inspired vessel by means of which their fabled Vishnu is supposed to elicit the holy flames.

The plans of the doorways in that part of the building which I have conjectured to have been entirely devoted to the vocal adoration of the deities, are somewhat peculiar and claim a remark. The one is about three feet eleven inches high, by about two feet one inch wide; the other four feet four inches, by about two feet eleven wide, of a sufficient size to admit of a man's passing comfortably through with a moderate inclination of head and back. They are cut out of the centre of a large block; on each side of the aperture two holes are bored in a slanting direction and meet each other, apparently for the purpose of running ropes through as hinges or fastenings to the doors. Specimens of this kind of doorway are, I believe, not uncommon in many of the temples now extant in the East Indies.

It is very clear that no part of the building was ever roofed in, with the exception of the three recesses in "No. 3 chamber," each of which seems to have been covered with a single stone, but which are now in every instance cracked near the centre by the weight of the masses of broken pillars which rested on them.

In contemplating these ruins many circumstances present themselves to notice, which induce me to believe that the spot was appropriated to the worship of the heavenly bodies. About a quarter of a mile distant from this site, rather in a hollow than on an eminence, we are enabled to trace the lines of another temple, apparently of a similar form and size with this which I am now describing, previous to its excavation. It was not an uncommon practice amongst those nations who paid homage to the sun, moon, and stars, to dedicate separate temples to each of the two great luminaries, of a like form and contiguous. The most lofty stone, which is raised on the eastern side of the edifice, serves also to strengthen the idea

that I have conceived. On climbing up to the summit of it, a difficulty easily counterbalanced by availing oneself of the notches cut on either side, (without doubt originally intended for the same purpose, inasmuch as they are rounded off at the edges by frequent use, and present rather a polished surface,) we arrive at a small bowl or trough excavated to the depth of about eight inches, not unlike, either in form or workmanship, to that lying at the entrance at the outside of No. 1 chamber, which, by some oversight, is not given in the plan. Its appearance is however rather singular, and deserves our notice, the inside being rendered quite white by the action of the sun's rays on some fluid poured therein. It is a well-known fact, that the idolatrous worship of the heavenly bodies was universally performed in the open air, and in the most elevated situations, partly from the conviction that it was impious to confine those all-seeing powers, who had the whole expanse of the world as their habitation, within the narrow limits of a temple; partly from the notion that the eye could thence embrace a wider scope and take better observations of them; and partly from the desire of being as near as possible to the visible objects of their veneration, who would on that account be more inclined to mix with them and receive their offerings. It is then, I think, quite within the bounds of probability to suppose that this stone was raised for the purpose of tracing with greater accuracy the motions of the different planets, and also to contain the libations which were more or less acceptable and efficacious in proportion to the distance at which they were removed from the earth,—the grosser and more impure part of the creation.

I shall here say a few words on the stone which stands in a line with, and about a foot from, the altar in No. 2 chamber. It is of an oblong form supported by two narrow stones, the front of which is, like itself, ornamented with dots. At the upper end of this slab a ledge projects to the distance of about one inch and a half, and bears under its centre an oval ornament very like the lower section of an egg or lemon: from the top of which a line in relief curves gradually inwards, then outwards, growing narrower towards the end, and giving one the idea of a coiled spring, or serpent.

There can be no doubt that this decoration was designed to symbolize either the sun or moon, as being the two great causes of nutrition and gene-

ration, or the whole globe of the earth in its widest extent. The egg by itself was employed to represent the great mother of the creation when associated with the serpent, to typify that zodiacal circle in which the father of all Pagan mythology described his everlasting revolutions.

It is to the Phœnicians that I am inclined to attribute the erection of this monument. The device of the palm-tree, which forms the chief feature and ornament on each side of the altar, is the first argument that I shall bring forward in proof of this assertion. This circumstance at once gave me a strong hint, and opened a path to the solution of a difficulty which might perhaps have otherwise remained for ever unexplained. Is it not natural to suppose that a people partial to their own country, although migratory and obliged to quit it for commercial pursuits, should continue to worship the gods of their ancestors, and at the same time testify their recollection of it by representing on their altar, and perhaps adoring, the peculiar plant in which their native soil abounded, and from which their forefathers derived their very names?

I have hitherto purposely omitted making any mention of the two remaining images, which are exceptions to the description given of the other seven with respect to the material of which they are formed. They are cast in "terra cotta," well polished and of a reddish fleshy colour. The one is, like the others, remarkable for the exaggerated proportions of its limbs and body, differing only in size and the posture in which it lies. The second is a naked upright figure, alike headless, but of a beautiful shape and admirably executed. The breasts are rather large and hanging, resembling those of a matron in her natural state. The one is supported by the left arm, which is placed across the bottom of the chest; the other rests slightly in the hollow of the right in the inside of the elbow, the hand of which gracefully protects that part which characterises the sex. I conceive this to be the symbol of the "Venus Urania," the goddess universally adored by the Phœnicians, who were assuredly the first who invented her fabulous history, and to the casts of which I have but little doubt that the famous "Venus de Medicis" is indebted for its origin. The Phœnicians, if not the first, were certainly very early settlers in Malta. This has been proved by many authors, as also by the learned Bochart,

who believes them to have been the same as the Phœnicians mentioned in Homer.

In addition to many quotations which it would be needless for me to recall to memory, this island still boasts of many coins and inscriptions, amongst which two medals preserved in the University Library claim a pre-eminent place, as evidence that this people for a considerable time retained a firm footing on this rock. I do not hesitate in pronouncing that their manners and customs during their dominion differed but little, if at all, from those of their brethren the Egyptians. The case of a Mummy taken from a tomb in the Bingenna mountains, resembling both in shape and size those found in Egypt; and more particularly the figure of a woman carrying a child in each arm, which is sculptured on the stone peculiar to this island, and covered with hieroglyphics, will, if not prove, go very far to establish this point. These specimens are also to be seen in the University Library; and there are many others which I could adduce in confirmation of my assertion if necessary; but these are sufficient for my purpose. Such being the case, we may also be assured that their religious ceremonies partook of some of the same peculiarities. This being granted, I shall labour under no difficulty in working out the remainder of my theory, by accounting for the curious shape and appearance of the images which I have before stated to resemble the different representations of "Vishnu," or his descendants, under their various denominations.

Many points of similarity between the religious system of the ancient Egyptians and Hindoos have been already recognised; too many, indeed, and too forcible to admit of a doubt of the intercourse which at one period must have existed between them. The affinity between their language, their doctrine with regard to the soul, namely, its independent action, its transmigration into other bodies after death, their contempt for corporeal substance, in contradistinction to their respect for spiritual essence, their veneration for their peculiar rivers, in the one case the Nile, in the other the Ganges, the corresponding conical form of the pagodas and pyramids, the adoration of the cow, and finally, the very exact form of several of their respective deities, are too well authenticated for dispute.

Since then we have ascertained that the manners, customs, and religious rites practised by the Egyptians resembled those of the Hindoos, and the Phœnicians those of the Egyptians, we may also infer that the Phœnicians resembled those of the Hindoos. All these were equally addicted to the idolatrous worship of the heavenly bodies, to whom they sacrificed and paid homage under innumerable forms of gods and goddesses.

Whether this Temple has gradually fallen into decay, whether it was purposely filled up by the Phœnicians previous to their departure from the island, or whether it was desecrated by their successors who were of a different religious persuasion, must ever be enveloped in mystery. If I might venture an opinion, I should say that its dissolution was natural. The thin loam in which it was buried seems rather to be the accumulation of ages than earth brought for such a design. The heads of the idols I consider to have been broken off by their original possessors, with a view of preserving their worship in other countries.

I have thus given a condensed, but it is to be hoped a clear account of the peculiarities belonging to this edifice, and although the speculations which I have advanced may be considered fanciful and fallacious, they cannot extenuate the interest which this curious and extraordinary relic of antiquity must engender. The mind will involuntarily pass over centuries, and hurry back to those ages of ignorance, when this dreary spot was illuminated with sacred fire : when their altars were warm with blood, and the voices of a devoted people were fervently engaged in extolling the praises of those deities through whose medium they supposed that the government of the world was conducted. I shall merely say in conclusion, that wherever we discover the oval shape predominate in an ancient temple, encompassed by circles of stone, that, far from being the work of Cyclopians, as derived from "*Κύκλος*," or any other fabled race of giants, they are simply significative of the rotundity of the heavenly bodies, or of the egg, on which the whole system of ancient religion was based.

By referring to the Ground Plan, drawn with great accuracy by Mr. Foulis, it will be easy to comprehend the present form of the Temple ; but, as I have not given the dimensions of the chief stones, I shall proceed to

make a few remarks on each chamber, with a view of illustrating it, and making what I have already said more clear.

See the PLATES, XXIII. to XXVIII.

No. 1. Is a narrow apartment about 18 feet long and 2 wide; standing on the right-hand side of the entrance passage which runs through the body of the building.

No. 2. Is an oval chamber 43 feet 6 inches long, by 18 wide. It has two partition walls; the one 12 feet 6 from the east: the other 10 from the west end. Near the north-west corner of the centre division the altar is placed. It is composed of a single stone 12 feet 4 inches high. It has a flat circular top $15\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, resting on a square pedestal. The four wide grooves, into which the circumference of this altar is shaped, bear each a basso-relievo sculpture of a palm-tree springing out of its base. In the south-west corner of this chamber facing the altar there is a flat slab, in which a little further back than the centre a conical hole is cut, about 10 or 12 inches in depth. This was doubtless connected in some way with the service of the altar, but for what purpose I can form no idea, except that of containing a libation. The average height of this chamber is at present about 7 feet.

No. 3. Is 65 feet 6 inches long, about 13 or 14 wide. Near the centre of the north side are two stone tablets standing on each side of the passage leading into No. 4. At the east and widest end of this chamber, an apartment, which sinks a foot lower into the floor than the rest of the chamber, is partitioned off and surrounded by 13 or 14 thin stones of the average height of 3 feet 2 inches. The large stones on the south side of this chamber average 10 feet 3 in height. Those on the north side about 7 feet 6. On the south side of this chamber there are two recesses extending from the passage entering No. 2, to that entering No. 8. The first is 11 feet 6; the second 9 feet 4 across the entrance. Opposite this last there is a third recess, similar to the others, with the exception of being roofed with a stone of greater thickness.

No. 4. Is 11 feet long by 6. Near the south-west corner is a small recess

covered by a thin flat stone. In this chamber a number of stone hemispheres were lying, measuring about 5 inches in diameter, and an oval figure of the same material, twice the size of a hen's egg.

No. 5. The adjoining chamber is 6 feet 6 long, by 5 feet 6 wide, containing a table 3 feet 5 long, 2 feet 3 in diameter, and 2 feet 4 high, resting on a pillar. The action of fire on it has had the effect of making it quite rotten, so much so that it was only by digging with great care that we were enabled to preserve its shape. At the foot of it another altar was lying of similar form, but smaller than the two stone tablets described in No. 3.

No. 6. Is a chamber on the left of the chief entrance, corresponding with No. 1.

No. 7. Is a chamber 10 feet long. The greatest width 6 feet.

No. 8. Is a chamber 31 feet 8 inches long, 15 feet 4, and 17 feet 10 wide. At the north-east of this chamber are four steps, by which we are enabled with ease to descend into No. 3, which is 2 feet 9 inches lower than the floor of No. 8. About three or four feet to the south of this chamber stand the four stones marked A, B, C, D; they are all very rugged and much worn by the weather.

No. 9. Is a triangular chamber, 18 feet long, by 10 feet 6 wide. The height irregular: it averages, however, almost 9 feet. The stones to the south-west are much decayed, and appear to have been formerly considerably higher than they are at present.

No. 10 chamber, is 28 feet 8 inches long, and 23 feet wide; it is in a very imperfect state. There are, nevertheless, two or three things in it worthy of remark. There is a stone at the south-west end having five holes bored in it. The two upper and lower, curved inwards, meet at the depth of about eight inches. They seem to have been for the same purpose as before described, namely, for fixing doors. The centre one, must, I think, have been made with the intention of passing a bar or bolt across to support the door. About eight or ten of the stones, of which this chamber is composed, are perforated by holes about the height of the ring in the manger of an ordinary sized stable; and I do not think it improbable, that animals for

sacrifice or other purposes were kept in this chamber, attached to these holes by ropes or halters.

No. 11. Is a long narrow chamber; it is also in a very imperfect state. About its centre are four large stones which appear to have fallen from No. 12.

No. 12. Is an oval chamber 31 feet long by 12 wide. This is the chamber which I have thought to have been separated for the purpose of supplying fire. The walls and flooring are quite reddened and otherwise damaged by the action of fire. At the north end, is a passage leading to the north boundary. In the slab which forms the flooring, two round holes are cut, similar in shape to that cut in the slab facing the altar. About six feet to the north-west of these there is a third hole of larger dimensions; we likewise observed two more on the outside and to the north of No. 4 chamber.

No. 13. Is an apartment open to the east. It is 16 feet long by 11 wide. An angular stone 2 feet 9 high, and 2 feet 4 wide at top, and 1 foot 6 at the base, stands about five feet from the west end. It is ornamented with dots, and supported by a rude stone pillar, measuring 7 feet in height.

No. 14. Is an apartment 6 feet 6 long, 8 feet 8 high. The stone which divides it from No. 13 is dotted on the side nearest to the angular stone.

E. Is a rough stone, measuring 20 feet from the level of the ground. It is wider at the base than at top.

F. Is the largest and longest stone in the building, measuring 22 feet 2 inches in length, 10 feet 9 inches in height, and 3 feet 7 in thickness.

G. Is eight feet 5 high, 5 feet 6, and 3 feet 6 wide.

The remainder of these ruins consists of four chambers, situated about 100 feet to the north of the main building.

No. 15. Is an oval chamber composed of 18 stones, 1 foot thick and 6 or 7 high. The stone which forms the partition between this and the next chamber is ornamented with dots.

No. 16. Is a chamber 22 feet in length by 15, composed of ten stones, somewhat higher than those around the west end of No. 15.

No. 17. Is a small chamber to the north of No. 16, about 9 feet wide, consisting of six or seven stones in circular arrangement.

No. 18. Is a chamber 10 feet by 9, composed of about six stones, the highest of which are about eight feet.

No. 19 and 20. Are two apartments, composed of 15 or 16 stones, the largest of which is about $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet long by 5 feet high.

All these chambers are almost on a level with the surface of the ground, and floored with a kind of hard cement.

PLAN
of the
ANCIENT RUINS,
near Crendi
MALTA.

W. Poulis Esq. 53rd Reg^t. Malta, 10th March 1842.

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J. Busse, lith.

Nº 3. Chamber.

View of Nºs 1 and 2 and Part of Nº 6 Chamber.

Nº 4.

Nº 5.

Nº 6.

Nº 9.

Nº 10.

7 and 8

View of the Ruins from West of II Chamber.

N^o 12.

N^{os} 13 and 14.

Altar in N^o 2 Chamber.

Section of L and top of E.

Centre Division of N°2 Chamber

View of A, B, C, and D, from outside.

View from the East of Numbers 15, 16, 17, and 18.