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Palestine: Archæology.

Peet.

Primitive Stone Buildings in Sinai. By T. E. Peet.

87

While working with Dr. A. H. Gardiner on the Egyptian inscriptions copied in Sinai by the explorers of the Egypt Exploration Fund in the winter of 1904-5 I found it necessary to read carefully through the volumes of the *Ordnance Survey of the Peninsula of Sinai*, 1869. This great work deals with almost every scientific aspect of the peninsula, and, in particular, gives some description of several kinds of rude stone monuments which occur there and are evidently to be ascribed to a remote antiquity. These buildings naturally deserve consideration in connection with the question of megalithic monuments in the Mediterranean basin, and in view of possible relation between their inhabitants and the early Egyptians. It is therefore worth while to rescue them from the oblivion which seems to have overtaken them, and to place them again on record in a form in which they can be directly applied to the two problems mentioned above.

The monuments of Sinai seem to be of three distinct types—firstly, the so-called *nawâmîs*, or beehive tombs; secondly, tomb circles; and thirdly, hut circles.

A.—NAWÂMÎS, OR DOMED TOMBS.

Captain Wilson, who is responsible for the portion of the *Survey* in which they are described,* records a tradition of the Sinai Bedawin that the *nawâmîs* (broken plural of the Arabic *nâmûsa*—"a mosquito") were houses built by the Israelites during the exodus to protect them against the mosquitos. Each is in plan a rough circle, or an ellipse with diameters approximately equal, the difference being seldom more than a foot or 18 inches (Fig. 1). A typical example measured by Captain Wilson was 13 feet 3 inches by 12 feet 3 inches. The walls are from 2 feet 7 inches to 3 feet thick, rise perpendicularly for 2 feet, and are then corbelled inwards to a small hole at the top, which is closed by a slab. The door is small, about 1 foot 9 inches wide and 1 foot 8 inches high, with a rude lintel block $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, and occasionally side posts. The stones are flat and carefully selected. They show no tool work and are laid in horizontal courses, though in rare cases a large boulder is engaged in the wall. One example in the Wadi Barq had a covered stone passage 5 or 6 feet in length leading to the door.

As to their distribution, Wilson says that they frequently occur in groups of two or three, more rarely in larger groups of 20-30. The most important of these groups lie at the heads of Wadi Hebran and Wadi Umm Gorfain, and on the banks of the eastern Wadi Nasb† and Wadi Solaf, but they are indeed scattered all over the peninsula from Ras Muhammed to the Tih plateau (see Fig. 2). They lie generally on lines of water parting or slopes of hills; there are none in the valleys, where

FIG. 1.—SECTION AND PLAN OF A NÂMÛSA.
AFTER CAPTAIN WILSON. SCALE ABOUT $\frac{1}{8}$ IN.

* *Survey*, Part I, pp. 194 ff.

† There are two Wadi Nasb in Sinai. The western lies in the mining district frequented by the Egyptians. See Petrie, *Researches in Sinai*, p. 27.

they would have been in danger from the occasional heavy floods.* Wilson thought them to be dwellings, partly because in many of them no bones had been found and partly because in the proximity of others pieces of cultivated land occurred (*see below*). Having made the mistake of taking the *nawâmis* for dwellings, Wilson proceeded to admit that some of them were afterwards used as tombs by closing the doors and removing the roof stones, and he describes a double burial found by Holland in such a tomb. Here he is impugning the accuracy of Holland, without giving his reasons, since the tomb to which he refers is described by Holland not as a ruined *nâmûsa*, from which, indeed, he carefully distinguishes it, but as a small tomb circle.† Thus we must not take it as certain that Wilson ever found burials in the *nawâmis*. He does, however, give us the interesting piece of information that the Bedawin of to-day still occasionally bury both in old *nawâmis* and in the monks' tombs.‡ The two bodies found by Holland he takes to be those of Christians of monastic times buried in old disused dwellings.

Holland and Lottin de Laval, both famous explorers of Sinai in the middle of the last century, agree quite closely with Wilson in their description of the *nawâmis*. Lottin§ describes two "cemeteries" of *nawâmis* in the eastern valleys on the road from Dhahab to Akaba, one at Hameid and the other on the Gebel Zeleka. At Hameid they lay on a hillside, which they literally covered. They were of red sandstone or granite, all of about the same size, some forty paces in circumference. On Gebel Zeleka he excavated two, but came upon solid rock at once, whence he supposes either that the dead were burnt or that they were laid on the bare rock. At both places the entrance was usually, if not always, to the east. Lottin ascribes the tombs to the Israelites, and notes that his guards called them *dyâr afrangî*, European dwellings.

Holland|| describes a group of nearly forty buildings lying within a mile along the banks of a dried watercourse near Gebel Hadid. Some were in clusters, some solitary. These buildings were of two types, *nawâmis* and stone circles. In the *nawâmis* the dome was 5 feet high, and the diameter inside from 5 feet to 6 feet. The walls were 4 feet thick, and the doors, generally to south or west, about 3 feet high and 1½ feet broad. In one he found a few bones (he does not state whether they were human or not), a sheep's tooth, and a piece of crystal. Of the stone circles we shall speak later. Holland ascribes both types of remains to the Amalekites.

Fortunately two later travellers have left us a detailed account of the *nawâmis*. In the winter of 1904-5, when the Egypt Exploration Fund was engaged in work in the western valleys of Sinai frequented by the Egyptians, two of the party, Mr. Currelly and Mr. Frost, undertook a journey in the south of the peninsula, during which they came across remains of various stone buildings which they have described.¶ In the eastern Wadi Nasb they excavated a group of *nawâmis*.** A typical section is given in Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (Fig. 174), with excellent photographs (Figs. 176-8). The doorways—always to the west—were too small

* The phenomenon of the *sêl*—a sudden valley flood caused by rain out in the desert—occasionally witnessed in Egypt, is not uncommon in Sinai. The description of such a *sêl* actually observed by the party of the Survey gives a better idea than any I have read of the amazing suddenness and violence of these floods.

† This point is discussed below.

‡ Both Wilson and Holland carefully distinguish the *nawâmis* from the tombs of the monks, the latter being, of course, later in date, built with mortar, and occasionally rectangular in shape.

§ Lottin de Laval: *Voyage dans la Péninsule Arabique*, pp. 268-72.

|| *Journ. Roy. Geog. Soc.*, XXXVIII, pp. 237 ff.

¶ Petrie: *Researches in Sinai*, pp. 242 ff, and Figs. 172-9.

** *Op. cit.*, pp. 243-4.

to be of service, but were filled up with a flat stone to keep animals from entering. The excavators do not appear to have found any skeletons, but in Fig. 179 they reproduce a number of objects from these tombs. These include three small tools of almost pure copper, a piece of spirally-twisted copper wire, several flint arrow heads with chisel edge, formed apparently not by fine chipping, but by splitting off a large flake from each side,* a discoid carnelian bead of a type common in Egyptian predynastic tombs, an armlet cut out of a large shell, and a number of shell beads and shells bored for stringing.

In the Wadi Hebran† several well-preserved *nawâmîs* were seen, and others were found at the head of the Wadi Umm Gorfain,‡ and near the entrance to the Wadi

FIG. 2.—SKETCH MAP OF THE SINAI PENINSULA.

Solaf.§ Of these last, two were regarded as sheikhs' tombs, offerings of some plant of the grass type being made in front of the openings, though the Bedawin admit that they are tombs "of very long ago—before the days of Islam." All the tombs in Wadi Solaf lay on the sides of the valley, some distance up from the bed, to avoid floods. Mr. Currelly adds: "There was also a tomb made by modern Bedawin

* This technique recalls on a smaller scale that of the *tranchets* or *coupoirs* typical of the Campignien civilisation of France, which also occurs in the neolithic period in Scandinavia and at certain Italian sites.

† *Op. cit.*, p. 246.

‡ *Op. cit.*, p. 244.

§ *Op. cit.*, p. 260.

"in imitation of one of the beehive tombs. The form of the doorway was carefully copied, but the ability to make a beehive structure out of rough stones is not possessed by the modern inhabitants of Sinai."

Such is the evidence available with regard to the *nawâmis*. It is certain that they are tombs, and that they are of prehistoric date in the ordinary sense of the term. Unfortunately we do not know what the method of burial was or how the body was placed.

B.—TOMB CIRCLES.

Wilson gives us an accurate description of the tomb circles of the peninsula.* In the centre is always a cist of four large stones sloping a little inwards, with a heavy covering slab difficult to raise. Immediately round the cist is a circle of standing stones marking the edge of a stone cairn, and outside this one or even two concentric circles of standing stones. The average cist measures 4 feet by 2 ft. 5 in., with a depth of 2 ft. 6 in.; the covering slab was probably flush with the ground, and the cairns were of small stones. The size of the outer circles is variable. In the Wadi Nisrin, where 14 or 15 of these tombs are grouped so closely together as almost to touch, the outer circles are from 10 feet to 20 feet in diameter. In the Wadi Wa'ara are five circles of from 30 feet to 35 feet diameter, with remains of a passage 2 feet to 2½ feet wide between standing stones, while a circle in the Wadi Engaib el 'Arais measures 45 feet in diameter. The stones are granite or sandstone, according to district, projecting from 3 feet to 4½ feet above the surface of the ground, and each is in contact with those on either side of it. Besides the localities already mentioned, there are tomb circles at the north end of Wadi Nagb Hawa, in the lower part of the Wadi Feiran, on the desert of El Ga'ah, and on the hills near Tor.

Within the cist lies the body, in the contracted position on the left side, over a flat slab of stone. The cists have no fixed orientation. In a cist in the Wadi Wa'ara some shells of genus *Conus* were found with the body. According to Wilson it was in such a cist in the Wadi Sidreh that Bauerman and Lord in 1868 found a small bracelet of copper, associated with lance and arrowheads of flint, and a necklace of beads formed of spiral marine shells bored for stringing. I cannot find in Bauerman's article† quoted by Wilson any evidence as to the type of the tomb in which these finds were made. It was the only unopened tomb of a group in the Wadi Sidreh, but we are not told whether it was a beehive tomb or a cist, and though Wilson may have tested this detail in conversation with Bauerman, we must regard the evidence as under suspicion. That Wilson and Bauerman met and discussed these tombs may, however, be regarded as confirmed by Wilson's further statement that all the bodies in them were contracted, a fact not mentioned in Bauerman's report, which is mostly concerned with geology.

It is important to note that *nawâmis* and tomb circles sometimes occur together. Thus Wilson states that in the northern end of Wadi Nagb Hawa there are five circles—he does not tell us whether they contained cists—and several *nawâmis* in and around a circular enclosure, the walls of which contain higher stones at intervals. Similarly in the Wadi Engaib el 'Arais there are *nawâmis* and circles, and a rectangular court 70 feet by 50 feet, also straight walls 3 feet to 4 feet high, and passages connecting the various remains. In neither case does Wilson definitely state that the tomb circles are true tomb circles with cists, but anyone who reads his description will, I think, agree that he implies this, for these two valleys are in the list of localities which he gives at the outset as containing "stone circles," and the sentence which follows this list states that the circles always have a cist.

* *Surrey*, pp. 194

† *Journ. Geol. Soc.*, XXV, Part I, pp. 17 ff.

In this connection we have to deal with the difficult point raised by Holland's description of circles containing burials but no cist. These are among the 40 buildings observed by him near Gebel Hadid and mentioned above. Of these buildings some were *nawâmîs*. Others he describes as being generally near the former, stone circles 14 feet to 15 feet in diameter, 3 feet high, and without roof. He found human bones in all he opened. In one there lay two skeletons* side by side, one of them on a flat bed of stones. The circles were half filled with earth, then the bodies were laid in, and finally more earth and heavy stones were added above. Holland states that both circles of this type and *nawâmîs* are found all over the south half of the peninsula, and he mentions circles 15 yards to 30 yards in diameter, and one in the Wadi Nagb Hawa as much as 125 yards in diameter.

We are here confronted with a problem. Wilson speaks of *nawâmîs* and of tomb circles with a cist; Holland of *nawâmîs* and of tomb circles without a cist. Are there, then, two types of tomb circle, one with and the other without a cist, or is there some error in Holland's observation?

Wilson inclined to the latter hypothesis, for without a word of explanation he assumes that Holland's tomb circles without cists are nothing more than ruined *nawâmîs* turned into tombs by the removal of the roof stones and the blocking of the doors. Here he may just possibly be right, though he was not justified in making the statement unless he first carefully examined the circles in question, which he shows no signs of having done.

Messrs. Currelly and Frost mention several groups of stone tomb circles. One occurs in the Wadi Gow,† but unfortunately the travellers give but little description of it. Apparently each circle enclosed another circle, in one case only 53 inches by 37 inches in diameter, "and with a little stone pavement around it and stones "placed on end." This is figured in Fig. 173, but it is not made clear whether the outer line of stones in the figure is the "stones placed on end" or the outer circle of the monument.‡ Near this was another kind of monument§ which "had a "straight row of stones placed on end with another row more or less parallel to "it; the two ends were rounded and then the whole space had been filled in "with large stones. This had the appearance of a burial place but we did not "find any bone remains." Unfortunately the dimensions are not given. Near these stone circles was a smelting furnace.

With the lack of proper description and measurements it is almost impossible to hazard an opinion as to the use of these circles. We have included them under the heading tomb circles only because the small circle in the centre suggests the idea of a cist and would hardly occur in a hut of any practical design.

With regard to tomb circles in general, we may conclude that the existence of cist tombs containing contracted bodies and surrounded by one or more concentric circles is beyond doubt. Other types of tomb circle without a cist or with a cist of type other than the simple rectangular may have existed, though the evidence on this point must be regarded as unsatisfactory.

C.—HUT CIRCLES.

Wilson has little to say on this head. Of hut circles as such he does not speak, though he records at Erweis el Ebeirig a few stone houses and circles of

* Wilson assumes that the bodies lay in the extended position, but Holland never actually says so.

† Petrie, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

‡ I am inclined to think the former is the true interpretation, though in the absence of measurements we are helpless. The whole account of these circles is obscure.

§ *Loc cit.* A sentence on p. 244 seems to refer to the existence of tomb circles (as well as hut circles) in the Wadi Umm Dheleh.

stones not on end. Holland does not expressly mention hut circles. Currelly and Frost* describe a large number of circles in the Wadi Umm Alawi, near the Wadi Nasb, bordering smooth bits of ground. "We dug over these and found a considerable depth of ashes, and in some of the spaces was a quantity of fragments of hand-made pottery and one worked bit of stone. At the end there was also a pile of stones under which we found some bone fragments and some more of the hand-made pottery. These, I think, were hut circles." Here again the lack of detail, especially as to dimensions, prevents us from testing the correctness of the excavators' diagnosis. The same writers describe some hut circles at the head of the Wadi Umm Dhelleh.† No dimensions are given, and as I am not clear as to the meaning of the description I quote it *in extenso*. "At the head of the Wadi Umm Dhelleh there is another large stone circle of the regular hut-circle type. Inside the ring of stones the ground is raised several inches. The doorway has two large stones, one at each side; but the other stones vary considerably in size. I did not see as many of the hut circles as I did of the tomb circles, which were very numerous. No very large stones were used in the construction of either hut or tomb circles. The largest stones were in some groups of stone-work that I could not quite explain, unless they were cemeteries with the stones very thickly grouped together. The finest examples of this last class are in the Wadi Hebran. The stones have almost the appearance of a fortress from the outside, but inside they look like circles touching each other, and piled over with loose stones." We at least gather from this paragraph that there is a definite hut circle type in Sinai and that it has a doorway with side posts.

CONCLUSIONS.

With regard to these remains two main questions suggest themselves, firstly, what is their relation to the civilization of Egypt, and, secondly, are they connected with the megalithic civilization of the Mediterranean basin?

On the first point there is little to be said. The exploration of these Sinaitic buildings has in the main been due to travellers who have gone to Sinai with much to do and little time to do it, and it will have to be carried out on much more complete and systematic lines if it is to be of any value. We do not even know what was the burial rite of those who used the *nawâmis*, though we have a few of their products. On the other hand, we know that the bodies in the tomb circles were contracted, but we have none of the objects buried with them. Thus we cannot even say whether the two types of tomb are to be attributed to the same or to different peoples or periods.

Contracted burial is the invariable rule in pre-dynastic Egypt, but this proves no direct racial affinity between the inhabitants of Egypt and Sinai, since this peculiar method of burial prevails among neolithic peoples over a very wide area in Europe and elsewhere. We cannot even take it as a proof of early date, for, although in some regions it disappeared comparatively early, as, for example, in Egypt, in others it lasted on until very much later, as, for example, in Nubia. We are thus thrown back on the few objects found in *nawâmis* by Currelly and Frost. The majority of these tell us nothing, for shells and shell beads are used as ornaments by all peoples with access to the sea. They are extremely common in Egyptian pre-dynastic tombs. So, too, are the small armlets cut from large shells, of which the *nawâmis* gave a good specimen.‡ The chisel-shaped arrow points of flint appear to be quite unknown in Egypt. The forms of the small implements of copper are not clearly discernible in

* *Op. cit.*, p. 243.

† *Op. cit.*, p. 244.

‡ Ayrton and Loat, *El Mahasna*, p. 33.

the photograph, and no detailed description of them is given. They are either borers or fine chisels. In either case they are implements of types frequently found in pre-dynastic Egyptian tombs. Mr. Currelly states that spirally-twisted copper wire, such as that found in one of the *nawâmis*, was known during the pre-dynastic period in Egypt, but I am unable to find any confirmation of this. As for the single discoid carnelian bead it is indeed of a usual pre-dynastic type, but it is a type which lives on through almost the whole of Egyptian history.

The evidence thus amounts to this. Among the objects from the *nawâmis* are some which would be quite in place in Egyptian pre-dynastic graves, but none are of so special or peculiar a character as to prove any direct connection of race or commerce between Egypt of that date and Sinai. Had we found these objects in Egypt we should at once class them as pre-dynastic, but the lesson of Nubia has taught us that in a corner so remote as Sinai from the great centres of Egyptian civilization such objects may in reality belong to a much later date. We must, therefore, until such time as further excavation can be made, leave the question of date quite open.

In favour of a connection of some kind with Egypt might possibly be mentioned the existence of a stone circle out on the desert not far to the east of Edfu.* This unfortunately remains an isolated find, and we have no details as to the exact nature of the circle. It is to be hoped that further search will be made for such monuments in the eastern desert, for it is here, on the old desert routes to the Red Sea, that connections with Sinai are most likely to be found. We know nothing of the relations of the Egyptians with Sinai until the reign of Semerkhet, of the First Dynasty, when the records of the great expeditions in search of turquoise (not copper) begin. From the inscriptions left in the peninsula by the various kings it is clear that the people of Sinai were regarded as foreigners by the Egyptians.

We have secondly to consider the possible connection of our Sinaitic buildings with the megalithic monuments of the Mediterranean basin. In the first place, we must guard against the assumption that corbelled buildings or stone circles *ipso facto* belong to the megalithic group properly so called. Corbelling is, after all, one of the simplest ways of roofing a space, and a circle is the most economical and symmetrical way of walling round a tomb. Moreover, Sinai consists almost entirely of rock, so that the rise here of a rough type of funerary and domestic architecture in stone would be nothing more than a perfectly natural phenomenon.†

Moreover, the more specialised features of the true megalithic system are not to be observed in Sinai. There are in the first place no dolmens, for the cists in the tomb circles can scarcely claim to be considered as such. In the second place, there is no use of really large stones, and in the third we find no combination of the use of large orthostatic slabs and corbelled courses of horizontal masonry such as we find in the so-called temples of Malta and the Giants' Tombs of Sardinia. These facts cannot be considered as quite decisive, especially as they consist of negative arguments which future exploration may upset. At the same time we may

* De Morgan, *Recherches sur l'origine de l'Egypte*, p. 239, Fig. 398. This figure is never referred to in the text.

† Dr. Rivers (*Essays Presented to Wm. Ridgeway*, p. 486) attributes to me the belief that the megalithic monuments of the world are the work of one people. I have never made such a statement, and if I have anywhere expressed myself so carelessly as to suggest that such was my belief, I take this opportunity of correcting the error. The megalithic monuments of the Mediterranean basin and of Europe in general I do take to be due to a single race, and it is quite possible that those of India and Japan should be brought into the same connection, though the evidence is here less conclusive. I see no reason for believing at present that the megalithic monuments of other parts of the world have any connection with this group. It is not impossible that building with large stones should have arisen in more than one centre. What I cannot believe is that it was either a phase through which all or many primitive peoples passed, or that it was spread from a single centre by trade.

with safety say that at present we lack evidence for connecting Sinai with the Mediterranean megalithic area.*

ADDENDUM.

Wilson gives several instances of the occurrence of "cup-markings," often found in connection with megalithic monuments. He relates that in the plain of Er Raha there lies a granite block, apparently fallen, with several cup-markings from 1 inch to 3 inches in diameter and 1 inch deep scattered irregularly over the surface. The stone is now a Bedawi landmark, and the natives relate that when the Gibiliyeh and the Aulad Gindi were both servants of the great convent and quarrelled about the limits of their land, they fixed the stone as a boundary, and the head of every family made a cup-mark in it. Similar markings occur in the Wadi Nagb Hawa and the Wadi Feiran.

T. E. PEET.

REVIEWS.

Egypt: Archæology.

Jéquier.

Histoire de la Civilisation Egyptienne. By Gustave Jéquier. Paris: Payot et Cie. 1913.

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This book gives in a comparatively small space a pleasantly-written account of the Egyptian civilisation from the earliest period to the times of Alexander the Great. Some of the ideas put forward are interesting and little known in this country; for instance, the kitchen middens are considered to be the remains of the villages of the predynastic period, and it is noted that predynastic graves are always found in the immediate vicinity of the kitchen middens. Again, stress is laid on the comparatively small number of polished stone implements that have been found in Egypt. But, stimulating as the author is in matters archæological, he is no safe guide when he deals with physical anthropology; the predynastic Egyptians were not brachycephals, it is not generally believed that their hair was brown or chestnut coloured, and there is no reason to think that they suffered from syphilis. The numerous illustrations are well-chosen and clearly reproduced.

C. G. SELIGMAN.

India: Archæology.

Archæological Survey of India. Annual Reports, 1909-10 and 1910-11. 2 Vols. Calcutta, 1914.

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The Annual Reports of the Archæological Survey of India for the years 1909-10 and 1910-11 have been both issued in 1914. Prompter publication appears to be unattainable by the Indian Government. The contents of these two volumes are, however, in compensation, both varied and interesting.

In the volume for 1909-10 the chapters on the conservation of the forts and palaces of the Mughal Emperors at their former capitals of Agra, Lahore, and Dehli show that this urgent and necessary work has been carried out with care and discrimination. The neglect or misuse of these noble monuments of our predecessors in the Empire of India is no longer a reproach to the British Government, a change which may be dated from the Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon, to whom all acknowledgement is due. To archæologists, however, the greatest interest attaches to the excavations of the remains of early India, and in this case especially to Dr. Spooner's account of the excavations at Sahr-i-Bahlöl, which are now fully described and illustrated. The discoveries of buildings and sculptures in this region of the Ancient Gandhāra are of great importance, as the plates (XIV to XXII) bear witness. The sculptures

* The closest Mediterranean analogy to the *nawâmîs* is to be found in the *sesi* of Pantelleria. These, however, are of truncated conical form, and often contain several tomb chambers. The *bothan*, or beehive houses of the Hebrides (*Proc. Soc. Antiq., Scotland*, III, pp. 127 ff.) offer certain points of similarity to the *nawâmîs*.