STEPHANI ON THE TOMBS AT MYCENAE.

IN the *Compte rendu* of the Russian Imperial Archaeological Commission for 1877, which has just made its appearance, Dr. Stephani, one of the most learned and experienced of archaeologists, has boldly attacked the antiquity of the graves discovered by Dr. Schliemann at Mycenae. The circumstances of that discovery will be fresh in the memory of our readers. As soon as English archaeologists had an opportunity of examining the various objects discovered by Dr. Schliemann in the graves, they at once gave their verdict, all but unanimously,¹ that what was found belonged to the pre-historic times of Greece. And in this country it is now commonly assumed that the antiquities of Mycenae must form the subject of the first chapter of any account of Greek artistic production. But the reputation of Dr. Stephani is deservedly so great that his entry into the controversy compels us to a reconsideration of the whole problem, and a careful examination of the new light which he has to offer.

This task I have undertaken, not without reluctance. And whatever may be my inferiority to M. Stephani in the matter of learning and experience, I have over him the great advantage that whereas he judges of the Mycenaean treasures from engravings and photographs, I have seen them not once, but many times, have examined them with utmost care, and have for years been seeking in all quarters for anything to throw light on their date and origin. And, moreover, as the treasures of Mycenae

¹ See *Edinburgh Review*, 1878 (Mr. May 17, 1877 (Mr. Newton and Mr. Newton); *Quarterly Review*, 1878; Watkiss Lloyd). An important exception to this unanimity is Mr. *Contemporary Review*, 1878 (Mr. Poole); *Proceedings of Society of Antiquaries*, A. S. Murray (*Nineteenth Century*, March 22, 1877 (Mr. John Evans); 1879).

stand quite apart from all other remains of antiquity, all archaeologists in approaching them are, except as regards scientific habits of mind, somewhat on a level; no one can claim them as especially belonging to his province of study. We must borrow light whence we can, from prehistoric archaeology no less than from that which concerns itself with Egypt or with Greece.

I must first deal with the destructive part of M. Stephani's essay, that part of it in which he tries to show that the treasures of Mycenae cannot belong to the pre-historic ages of Greece. Afterwards I shall have something to say about the positive part of his polemic, in which he tries to show to what period they really do belong. I may at once say that he gives them in the main to the third century after the Christian era, but considers that many objects of earlier date are intermingled.

Now it appears to me that the whole polemic of M. Stephani is led astray by two false ideas, idols, as Bacon would term them, which take their rise in the circumstances of his position. Of these ideas the first is that the treasures from the graves at Mycenae belong to various periods of time, and are dissimilar, one from the other, in character. Now this is a notion which might easily arise from going over the photographs and engravings of Dr. Schliemann, but would surely have been dispersed by a careful examination of the objects themselves. After examining boxful after boxful of the treasures at Athens, the feeling in the mind grew ever stronger and stronger: 'these things are strange, new, almost inexplicable, but they certainly belong to one race and one period.' Between objects which at first sight seemed dissimilar a closer examination discovered curious points of resemblance, some trick of style, or some peculiarity of treatment which bound them together and indicated a common origin. I speak of course of the things found *in* the graves, not of those found in the earth above. This object reminded one at the first glance of India, this of Greece, that of Celtic antiquities, and yet on more careful consideration the likeness was seen to be but superficial. After all, these antiquities were more like one another than any of them was like the works of India or Gaul. They formed a class quite apart, and mirrored a certain phase and degree of civilisation, of which the student even began, after severally examining these objects, to form some elementary notion.

Now it seems to me that this difference between first and second impressions is exactly what must occur in coming upon the works of a new phase of art. Suppose that to an archaeologist who had never seen any of the antiquities of Mexico, a parcel of the pottery and other relics of the ancient people of Mexico were brought for judgment. He would at once say, this object reminds me of early Greek work, that of Celtic, the other is purely barbarous. But he would arrive after sufficient study at the opinion that all belonged to one nation, with whose workmanship he was quite unacquainted. He would find radical resemblances running throughout, and even be able through induction to judge in a certain measure of the degree of Mexican civilisation.

I think, then, that in treating the antiquities from the graves at Mycenae as objects dating from various periods and different countries, M. Stephani does them great injustice. No doubt some of them are in design and execution very superior to others. And sometimes the influence of Egypt is more apparent, sometimes that of the civilisations of Asia Minor, sometimes the style is purely local. Nevertheless all belong, with the exception of a few imported objects,¹ to one age and one race. Thus among all the vessels made of metal, although the shape of some seems to us far more civilised than that of others, there is none which witnesses to any mode of fabrication other than that by the hammer. It would appear that none are soldered;² all are formed of plates of metal beaten into shape and nailed together at the edges. And the gold ornaments, though the designs on them are of the most various merit, are so like in fabric that they evidently came from one set of workshops.

The other notion which appears to me to mislead M. Stephani is his fixed idea that if the treasures belonged to the prehistoric ages of Greece, they would of necessity present the characteristics of archaic Greek art. Repeatedly and constantly he returns

¹ No doubt the Egyptian porcelain was imported, and the ostrich-shell found in one grave. See Appendix to the German edition of Schliemann's *Mycenae*.

² Dr. Schliemann does in some cases speak of soldering, as at p. 236. But

this appears to be a misuse of the term; he informs me in a letter that he did not find in the case of any vase an instance of the process. At the same time I should not regard the occasional use of the soldering process as proof of late date.

to this point. Again and again he observes of this or that object that there is nothing like it among early Greek works. And he points continually to the fact that the art of Mycenae is rather like an art of decline than an art of growth.

We may at once confess that the points of contact between the art of Mycenae and Hellenic art, whether in the archaic or any other period, are but few. And we do not hesitate to add that in the treatment of the human figure, at all events, the workmen of Mycenae do seem to be feebly imitating a better art than their own. In fact there is at Mycenae a great deal of what is familiar to all archaeologists as barbarous imitation. But does it follow that the superior art which set the model in this case was Greek? As early as the tenth and twelfth centuries before our era there were in Egypt and Western Asia schools of art which had reached a high point of perfection. And it was natural that Phrygians, Lydians, Greeks, and other semi-barbarians on the borders of the great empires of the old world should copy their works of art. And that unlikeness to Greek work which is so noteworthy in the treasures of Mycenae is the best of all proofs that the art which was the mistress and teacher of the craftsmen of Mycenae was not Greek at all, but Oriental. What we call archaic Greek art can scarcely be shown to have come into existence at all before the seventh century B.C., and even then existed only in very rudimentary form. How then can we expect to find anything like it four or five centuries earlier? If we maintained that the graves at Mycenae were filled in the seventh or eighth century before our era, then indeed it would be reasonable to search in them for works of nascent Greek art, such as are yielded by Ialysus or Camirus. But putting them as we do three or four centuries earlier, we take them entirely out of the field of Greek antiquity and relegate them to that of Egyptian, Oriental, and Prehistoric archaeology; and an archaeologist who has spent his life in the study of the remains of peoples who inherited Greek civilisation, is really especially liable to error on this point. Much learning may merely mislead him, and put him beside himself.

But I must not be understood to assert that there are *no* points of resemblance between the treasures of Mycenae and works found in places usually regarded as the cradles of Greek

art. The Archaeological Society of Athens expressly claims certain points of likeness between the productions of Mycenae and those found in a grave at Spata,¹ in Attica, the antiquity of which M. Stephani would, I imagine, not deny. And in a most instructive speech delivered before the Society of Antiquaries,² Mr. Newton directs attention to several points of likeness, if not between the work of Mycenae and that of Greece, at least between the work of Mycenae and that of Cyprus, Melos, and other places where Greek art was to arise. In the shape of the Mycenaean vases as well as in the style of their decoration Mr. Newton finds many points of likeness to the unquestionably early vases which come from Ialysus, in Rhodes. He also brings forward the important fact that some of the very archaic lentoid gems which come from the Greek islands were found in the tombs of Mycenae. 'In the tombs of the Akropolis at Mycenae were found four of these rude gems, and the tombs at Ialysos yielded five of the same class.' No one, so far as I know, has denied the justice of these observations. Recently Messrs. Furtwängler and Löschke have reproduced³ the fragments of pottery found in the graves at Mycenae, and whoever will compare them with the early pottery of Camirus and Melos,⁴ will not fail to find points of resemblance. It is of course open to M. Stephani to say that objects of great antiquity might possibly be found in tombs of the third century A.D., but he would scarcely be able to produce satisfactory parallels. Moreover the golden cups, between which and the pottery of Ialysus Mr. Newton finds points of likeness, are just the objects as to the late date of which M. Stephani is most confident.

The criticism of the individual points raised by M. Stephani will not be here attempted at length, partly because several replies to his strictures have already appeared,⁵ partly because the discussion must descend to small detail and be almost unintelligible except to those who follow it with the help of several large works. A few points only will be mentioned.

Certainly the Russian archaeologist could scarcely have started with a feebler argument than that derived from the presence of golden butterflies at Mycenae. Pointing out that the butterfly

¹ See the *Ἀθήναιον*, vol. 6.

² *Proceedings*, May, 17, 1877.

³ *Mykenische Thongefässe*.

⁴ Conze, *Melische Thongefässe*.

⁵ By Prof. Sayce, in the *St. Petersburg Herald*, June 23, 1880, &c.

does not appear in Greek art until the second century B.C., M. Stephani at once leaps to the conclusion that those of Mycenae must belong to an age not earlier than that. After making this remarkable induction, M. Stephani does indeed mention the supposed fact that the butterfly is also absent in Egyptian and Oriental art. But this is not so. It has already been pointed out¹ that there is in the British Museum an Egyptian wall painting of the period of the eighteenth or nineteenth dynasty (not later than B.C. 1450), in which butterflies are portrayed to the life. By a mere chance this particular painting has come down to us. But what do we know of the art of Asia Minor of that period, of the sculpture and painting of the Hittites, the Lydians, the Phrygians? Only the merest wrecks of the artistic productions of these peoples remain; and to assert that they did not represent the butterfly is to make a great assumption. Butterflies at all events then existed. And if these insects may have occurred in the art of prehistoric Asia Minor, why not in that of prehistoric Greece, which seems to have been nearly connected with it?

And this butterfly argument which seems scarcely worth breaking on the wheel of inquiry is yet one that M. Stephani specially relies on. And there are others like it. He singles out of the Mycenaean treasures certain objects which he considers to belong to the prime, and others which seem to him to testify of the decline of Greek art. In the former class he places a silver oenochoe,² the noted bull's head,³ a vase with plant-like pattern,⁴ and the golden handle of a sword.⁵ But the oenochoe is of just the same fabric as all the other vases of Mycenae, and its shape, though elegant, is in no way inconsistent with an early origin. It has no tell-tale ornamentation to testify to its date. The bull's head differs in many respects from the products of Greek art, and on the other hand very nearly resembles the golden vase-covers in the shape of the heads of animals which the Egyptians received as tribute from the peoples of Asia Minor.⁶ Drs. Furtwängler and Löschke in publishing the piece of pottery adorned with a plant, do not seem to have

¹ *Academy*, July 3, by Mr. Murray.

² Engraved at p. 243 of the English edition of Schliemann.

³ Page 217.

⁴ Page 160.

⁵ Page 307.

⁶ See *Contemporary Review*, xxxi. pp. 346-59.

been shaken by its superficial likeness to Apulian pottery. The ornament of the sword-handle consists of spirals, and closely resembles that of all the other objects in gold found in the graves. It does not seem to have struck M. Stephani as remarkable that the sword to which this handle belonged was of bronze, and of quite a different form and size from Greek swords. Yet surely if the sword itself is non-Hellenic, the handle will scarcely be Hellenic.

Yet these are the things of most Hellenic aspect which can be selected from among the thousands of objects from Mycenae. Turning over the pages of Dr. Schlieman's book, from first to last one does not find a single object of which one can unhesitatingly say that it is of Greek origin. And yet Greek work is of so distinctive a character that any competent observer can detect it at a glance. After turning the pages of Schliemann let any man turn the pages of some work full of the products of Greek art, say the Russian *Antiquités du Bosphore Cimmérien*, in which are represented the treasures found in the tombs of the half Hellenised Scythians, who dwelt near the Greek cities of the Crimea. These remains are not purely Greek, and yet I have found by experiment that of all the numerous plates of the vast work there is hardly one which does not contain some article the Greek origin of which we could unhesitatingly and instantly assert.

Of the antiquities for which M. Stephani claims a date in the period of late decline of Greek art, we need speak of but two sets; the masks which were on the faces of the dead, and the rings.

Now the custom of placing masks on the faces of deceased heroes is one which seems never to have prevailed anywhere except sporadically, and as an exception, but the majority of instances known to us date from late Roman times.¹ M. Stephani makes much of the fact that two gold masks found in the tombs of South Russia on the faces of dead persons dated from a period not earlier than the third century A.D. He concludes that the date of the Mycenaean masks must be the same. It appears to me that this argument is almost without force. Of course the moment it was known that gold masks had been

¹ See Beundorf, *Gesichtshelme und Sepulcralmasken*.

found in the graves at Mycenae every one thought of the Russian masks at once. I myself spoke of these latter in a letter to the *Academy* of 28th April, 1877, and before I went to Mycenae made a careful study of the antiquities of South Russia, in the idea that it might be possible to find something like them at Mycenae, an idea which an hour's handling of the Mycenaean treasures utterly dispelled. But M. Stephani is misled by those who inform him that there is any likeness of style between the Russian masks and Dr. Schliemann's. The former may be judged from the admirable coloured prints in the *Antiquités du Bosphore Cimmérien*, and M. Ouharoff's work on South Russian Antiquities. Their style is that of the age of Diocletian and Constantine. The barbarous Mycenaean masks are of an utterly different character. In them the eyes are represented as at once open and shut, the noses are mere square ridges, the mouths are huge slits. The Egyptians at quite an early period gilt the faces of their mummies, and the step between this and putting gold masks on the faces of corpses appears to me a very short one.¹ Nor can we have proof that the races of Asia Minor did not in the twelfth century B.C. thus treat their kings until we find in Asia Minor a number of rich and inviolate tombs of the period which present no trace of such a custom.

In the same way the evidence for the late date of the rings of Mycenae utterly breaks down. How can it be said that their style is Sassanian, when every one who is at all used to Sassanian gems and reliefs must see the difference? Nevertheless I do not go with Prof. Sayce in finding close resemblance between the devices of these rings and those of early Babylonian cylinders. In some details there is a resemblance, but the differences are also striking. On the cylinders female figures seldom appear, never, I believe alone, but in the most curious of the rings there is a group of none but female figures. The dresses of these figures, which seem to consist of a series of flounces, are of Babylonian type, but there the resemblance ceases. In fact the rings are quite *sui generis*, which is only another way of saying that the links which must at one time have existed connecting them with the artistic activity of some

¹ Professor Sayce says that a gold mask now in the Louvre was actually found on the face of an Egyptian king of the eighteenth dynasty, *Academy*, July 17.

people of the *Levant* have perished. And is this wonderful if they are really early? What did we know of Assyrian art fifty years ago? What of Cyprian art twenty years ago? Troy, Mycenae, Spata, have each lifted a curtain and displayed to us a new phase of semi-civilised work which seems to stand by itself. We need a hundred more such glimpses before we are able fairly to trace the history of art in Asia Minor and the *Levant* during the obscure centuries which preceded the rise of the Lydian kingdom and the spread of the Greek colonies.

But it is time to examine the theory which M. Stephani himself brings forward as to the date and origin of the Mycenaeae treasures. He reminds us that twice the Peloponnese, and especially the district about Corinth and Argos, was laid waste by the Goths. In A.D. 267 some Heruli sailed thither straight from the sea of Azov,¹ and after mastering most of Peloponnese were set upon by the Athenians, under Dexippus, and destroyed. In 395 Alaric² with his bands wandered for six months through the same district, capturing Corinth and Argos. M. Stephani thinks that on some occasion one or other of these swarms of barbarians, having lost some of their leaders in battle, buried them at Mycenae with their families, and heaped into the graves not only the works of the Gothic smiths, but also the spoils of the conquered cities. He suggests that as part of the troops of Alaric were Christian, and no Christian emblems are found at Mycenae, it is more probable that the graves belong to the nation of the Heruli. He thinks that these may, during their stay in South Russia, have learned some of the burial customs there prevailing, such as that of covering the face of the deceased with a mask of gold, and his person with gold ornaments.

Now without taking up the historical difficulties which inhere in this theory, or displaying the weakness of the analogies on which alone it is based, I will mention but four objections to it, of which each one taken by itself appears to me of far more weight than the whole mass of objections brought against the extreme antiquity of the Mycenaeae treasures.

In the first place then, how is it, if, as M. Stephani maintains, the graves at Mycenae were partly filled with the spoils of Greece,

¹ Syncellus, *Chronogr.* p. 382 C, ed. Par. Trebellius Pollio, *Gallienus*, 13.

² Zosimus *Hist.* v. 6, 8.

there was not found in them one single article of which the Hellenic origin was clear and unmistakeable? What Greece was in the third century A.D. we know very well from the descriptions of Pausanias, who travelled there about a century earlier. Every city and every temple was a perfect storehouse of works of art, dating from all the periods of Greek culture, archaic, fine, and late, and in all materials. How is it there is no figure whatever of Greek god or Greek man, no figure even of an animal fashioned by Greek hands, not even a pattern of undeniable Greek design? In the finds of treasures which belong to the time of the barbarian inroads such indications are, I believe, never wanting. Even in Russia and Germany when Gothic and Hunnic chiefs were buried, in their graves was placed something telling of Greek and Roman art and civilisation. In the grave at Novotscherkask, on the sea of Azov, the contents of which M. Stephani compares with those of the graves of Mycenae, there was found a golden Eros and a bust of the City of Chalcedon, as well as a gold vessel with the artist's name in Greek characters. It is inconceivable that a barbarous band spoiling Peloponnese and heaping the spoils into their tombs, should have contrived to avoid all objects of Hellenic character. If it were granted that they would melt down and re-fashion the objects of precious metal, yet they would scarcely throw away gems and ivory and amber carved with Greek design, and scarcely deem them unworthy of a place in the tomb.

In the second place, the metal-work and other work of Mycenae is not only not Greek, but it is as unquestionably not Gothic. What Gothic work is like we know very well from the testimony of a hundred museums and a thousand tombs. Take once more the treasures found at Novotscherkask. These are described and engraved by Linas.¹ The most striking characteristic of their style is that almost every object is made up of gems set in gold. The figures of stags, of goats, of hares, and other creatures which there abound, are cut out with sharp edges, and the interior is diversified with stones of various colours let in, and with enlaced designs such as one finds in early Saxon and Merovingian work. All this is quite in the style of the barbarian conquerors of Rome, but where at Mycenae is anything

¹ *Les origines de l'orfèvrerie cloisonnée*, II. pp. 135, seqq.

of the sort? I only find in Dr. Schliemann's engravings a single specimen of the in-letting of precious stones. This is the remarkable handle of a sceptre formed of gold and rock-crystal,¹ which stands quite by itself, but the appearance of which reminds us of the east, not of the north.

Thirdly, it is quite notorious that the barbarous invaders of the Roman Empire were acquainted with the working of iron, and in particular made their swords of it. In fact after the Christian era, none of the military nations of Europe used any other metal for swords.² And the Greeks, as is well known, imported much of their iron from the Euxine Sea. Aeschylus speaks of Σκίθης σίδηρος in the fifth century B.C., and it is utterly impossible that a people coming from Scythia seven hundred years later should bring bronze swords. But all the swords found in the Mycenaean graves are of bronze, nor was there discovered in any of those graves the least trace of any object made of iron. I attach the greatest importance to this fact. Even in Homer's days iron was coming in as a material for weapons, swords in particular; and its superiority, when well tempered, over other metals in edge and temper, must have made it rapidly supersede bronze. The Greeks of historical times used bronze for knives and arrow-heads, but either never or very seldom for swords. The Goths would certainly not use bronze swords. What is the testimony of M. Stephani's South Russian graves? At Koul Oba, amid relics of the third century of our era, one sword was found, of iron, as well as iron darts, and arrow-heads of bronze.³ In another tomb, dating from the fourth century B.C., M. Aschik found an iron sword.⁴ In a third tomb it is recorded that a short iron sword was found.⁵ I observe no instance in which a tomb of the Greek period yielded a bronze sword, though of course I am not in a position to say that M. Stephani cannot produce an instance. I may add that in the fourth grave Dr. Schliemann found a number of arrow-heads of obsidian, chipped with great labour and skill, and of a type, as Mr. Franks informs me, of which the antiquity is very great indeed. Already in Homer's

¹ Engraved at p. 287.

p. 27.

² Sir J. Lubbock, *Prehistoric Times*, pp. 7—12.

⁴ Page 69.

⁵ Page 73.

³ *Antiq. du Bosphore Cim.*, Introd.

time the Greeks used none but bronze arrow-heads, and the Germans and Goths of the third century after our era used bronze or iron arrow-heads. The art of making such arrow-heads as those of Mycenae was lost in Greece and the rest of Europe in pre-historic times.

In the fourth place, there is in the tombs at Mycenae a total absence of coins and of inscriptions. The two great inventions of writing and of striking coin made their way into general use in Greece probably about the same time, in the seventh and sixth centuries before our era. And although a rich grave belonging to a subsequent time may sometimes be found without either writing or coin, yet it is very unusual to find a series of graves yielding rich spoils and yet with no trace of either. Considering the richness and variety of the treasures of Mycenae, one may say that the total absence of inscriptions and coins would be, if they were more recent than the sixth century B.C., without precedent and morally impossible. We are therefore compelled to place them above that epoch.

To sum up: M. Stephani maintains that the treasures of Mycenae were buried by the Heruli about A.D. 267, and that they consist partly of the spoils of Greece, and partly of the work of Gothic hands. In reply, I have shown that there is nothing which unmistakeably indicates a Greek source, and that there is nothing which testifies to Gothic handiwork. Among the spoils of Greece there must needs have been coins, inscriptions, figures of deities, or some such objects as are yielded by Greek tombs. Among Gothic works we must have found inlaid jewels and the well-known national patterns. The swords of Goths would have been of iron, not of bronze, and their arrow-heads of iron or bronze, not of obsidian.

Much more might be said, but the case against M. Stephani seems to me quite strong enough already. It is a wonder that such a theory as his can be supported by so experienced an archaeologist. No doubt there is a certain analogy between the Crimean graves about which he knows so much and those of Mycenae. Both sets of graves contain a great deal of the precious metal, with which the faces and the dresses of the dead are covered. But there the likeness stops. This profuse dedication of gold to the dead seems to be a sort of vulgarity of wealth which has recurred at various periods of the world's history among

the barbarians on the borders of civilisation. The Tartar hordes of the middle ages wrapped their dead in sheets of gold, the Scythic princes of the Crimea smothered their heroes with ornament.¹ The Etruscans were scarcely less profuse. So the people of Greece and Asia Minor, when they were barbarians on the confines of Lydian and Egyptian kingdoms, acquired more gold than the living needed, and bestowed it on the dead. All this proves nothing about race or period. Some of the tombs of the Crimea, that opened at Koul Oba for instance, are, as M. Stephani explicitly states, in design and construction almost exactly like the ancient building called the Treasury of Atreus at Mycenae. M. Stephani would not venture to complete his theory by supposing that the Heruli erected this Treasury also.

We naturally revert to the theory which has been put forward by many archaeologists both in England and the Continent, each introducing slight variations, but the general outlines remaining the same. It would appear that the graves of Mycenae belonged to a wealthy race who ruled in that city at a period not later than a thousand years before our era. The treasures themselves betray a close connection with Asia Minor, and at least occasional intercourse with Egypt. Therefore we gladly accept the aid of the Greek tradition which tells of wealthy Phrygian kings in Peloponnese in pre-historic times. And though we must not be betrayed into the error of treating Homer as a historian, we gladly allow that Homer rested on a historical tradition when he made Argolis the seat of the mightiest of Greek kingdoms, and applied to its chief city that most felicitous phrase *πολύχρυσος Μυκῆνη*.

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¹ *Antiq. du Bosphore Cim.*, Introd., p. 39.