

THE DOUBLE AXE AND THE LABYRINTH.

IN the paper on 'Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Worship,' (above, pp. 99 foll.) and in the various discussions of the Cretan discoveries, several theories and interpretations are put forth which have been too hastily accepted.¹ I do not propose to deal with the whole question here, but to call attention to the fact that a great part of the evidence has been overlooked. It is not unnatural that, in the enthusiasm of a great discovery, the happy discoverer should be taken by an interpretation which is ingenious and in many respects alluring, since it offers a key to mysteries long unexplained. Nevertheless there are other facts to be reckoned with.

The theories I refer to are these: (1) that the double axes carved in the Cnossian palace have a religious significance; (2) that they are the symbol of Zeus; (3) that the pillar upon which several of these signs are carved was worshipped; (4) that the Labyrinth derives its name from the word *λάβρυς* the Carian name for an axe of this kind, and (5) that the palace of Cnossos was the Labyrinth, which means the House of the Double Axe. These theories are supported by the following evidence: (1) that the statue of Zeus at Labranda in Caria was described as holding in his hand a double axe, the local name for which was *λάβρυς* (Plutarch, *Quaest. Gr.* 45); (2) that double axes of bronze were found in the Dictaeon Cave, where Zeus was worshipped; (3) Mr. Evans also collects a large number of facts to illustrate the worship of pillars, and apparently of axes also.

Before adducing the evidence which I think is fatal to the whole series of theories as applied to the Cnossian palace, I wish to say a word on the question of divine symbols. It is unfortunate that 'symbol' is sometimes used loosely in English, to mean either an attribute, that is an accidental mark, or something which, when alone, can be treated as equivalent to that which it symbolises, or as embodying its essence. Seeing that we shall have to consider whether or not the axe was a symbol in the true sense, I prefer to use the word attribute in the meanwhile, not to beg the question. Incidentally I note that in 'Pillar Worship' the point at issue is frequently assumed in such phrases as 'divine axe,' 'symbol of Zeus,' and so forth. Now we know that in the classical types of divinities certain attributes commonly occur: Zeus holds a thunderbolt, Apollo a lyre, Poseidon a trident, Hermes a caduceus, Athena spear and shield. On the other hand, these gods are often represented without attributes. Many statues called Apollo have not so

¹ They are accepted in full, and stated as if proven facts, by Mr. Hall in his new book, *The Oldest Civilisation of Greece*.

much as a stitch upon them; the Hermes of Praxiteles has no caduceus; Athena is often not armed, Aphrodite is. How unnecessary the attributes were to the conception of the deity, is clear from the votive statuettes discovered in many places. On the acropolis of Athens, the goddess appears hundreds of times as a figure seated or standing without attributes, often again with shield and without spear, holding a fruit, a bird, or what not.¹ The statuettes of Demeter found at Eleusis might often quite as well be Athena. The same vagueness is seen in Tegea, where the discoverers hesitate between Demeter and Athena.² So too with the heroes, ancestor-spirits, who appear to have been worshipped by the rural population of Greece at the earliest period, and may turn out to have been the Mycenaean gods: they have their lance or sword, and their horse, but there is no uniformity of treatment; no Pheidias fixed their type for ever. The attributes of heroes and gods are things of every day: arms and armour, dress, a bunch of grapes, a corn-bundle, a hat and boots, a musical instrument, a tool. The armed god or hero represents the divine protector in his strength; Demeter and her sheaf, the deity in her beneficent aspect; Poseidon, the fisherman, who speared his prey with a trident as in the Aegean he does to this day, with a reminiscence perhaps of the goad.³ The Greeks would be as likely to worship a trident or a bunch of grapes as to worship a pair of top boots; and to regard these things as symbolically sacred would be to worship them. Savages may make a fetish of a collar-stud or a knife, but there is no reason to doubt that such exaggerated superstition was alien to the Greek intellect.⁴ Isolated indications of the ruder superstition cannot outweigh the general tendency of Greek worship towards sanity and away from symbolism. Among these attributes the single exception is the thunderbolt of Zeus. There seems to be little doubt that the Greeks of the classical age believed that what he held in his hand was the thunderbolt. It is possible that the original type held in his hand a double three-pronged or two-pronged dagger, with a grip in the middle; but I do not insist on this now. It is natural that Zeus, who was certainly the Thundering God, should hold the thunder; but a figure holding a war-weapon might convey the idea of the Thundering God, as Thor does with his hammer; and this is the explanation which I suggest of Carian Zeus with the double axe. There is nothing holy or even recondite about this kind of axe. It is the war-weapon of the Amazons, who hold it in their pictures; it is held by the local heroes in Asia Minor, in place of the sword or spear of the Dioscuri;⁵ also by Apollo himself in the same region;⁶ it was used to slaughter the sacrificial victim by the Hittites⁷ and at Pagasae;⁸ it was dedicated as war-spoil.⁹ The type is descended from two-headed axes of the stone age, which are common enough, through a

¹ *Arch. Anz.* viii., 140 ff.

² *Mitth. d. d. Inst. Ath.* iv. 170 ff.

³ If proof is asked of the use of tridents in fishing, see the sixth book of the Anthology (30, 38); and the express statement of Eudocia, p. 571 (Teubner).

⁴ There are, however, a few traces of the superstitious worship of thunderstones; see

below.

⁵ *Mitth. d. d. Inst. Ath.* x. 12 altar, θεοῖς δούλοισι καὶ δικαίοισι *Bull. d. Corr. Hell.* iv. 294, θεῶν σώζοντι ἐρχήν.

⁶ *Cat. of Berlin Sculpt.* 680.

⁷ Perrot and Chipiez, *Hist. de l'Art*, iv. 637.

⁸ Ridgeway, *Early Age of Greece*, i. 270.

⁹ *Plut. Quaest. Gr.* 45.

copper intermediary¹ Moreover, it has no special connexion with Zeus: it appears in the hands of Dionysus or one of his train;² it was dedicated to Apollo as spoil of war in Delphi,³ and to Artemis at Lusoï in Arcadia,⁴ and is carved on an altar from Coloë which was dedicated to Apollo Tarsis.⁵ A female figure, explained as a priestess in a sacred place, holds one in each hand, as figured on a metal belt lately found in Crete.⁶ Finally, it appears on the coins of Pherae,⁷ and of Tenedos, where no Zeus has ever been heard of, and double axes of gold were found at Mycenae. It was therefore an article of everyday use, in peace, ritual, or war; and its occurrence on altars dedicated to Zeus Labrandeus⁸ need not signify anything more than it appears to do on the altar dedicated to Apollo,⁵ where it seems to commemorate the sacrifice of an ox. Even if this be denied, all these altars are late and show late Asiatic influence, so that no argument can be drawn from them for the early Greeks or Mycenaean. In drawing out this comparison, I would add, that all the dedications mentioned fall in the post-Mycenaean period; and so do those in the cave of Dicte according to the explorer's estimate.

It will now easily be understood that the Greeks would not be likely to regard attributes held by deities as sacred, or to worship them. It is easy to say that axes here or wine-bowls there, represented on coins, are symbolic and sacred; but that has never been proved, nor has it been proved that these things were ever worshipped by the early Greeks.⁹ No trident-worship is recorded, no reverence or sacrifice paid to the sword or the spear, the caduceus, the wine-jar, the torch, the hammer, or Hermes' wide-awake hat as symbols of the deities who use them.¹⁰ If this were likely in any case, it would be likely for the thunderbolt, which was not commonly used by warriors of the earth; yet there is nothing of the sort but the superstitious regard for meteoric stones and the like, which are often worshipped by savages, and which the Greeks no doubt regarded as things of mysterious origin and power, without reference to the attributes of any deity. If a Zeus Keraunos is found in Arcadia,¹¹ there are inscriptions to Athena Hygieia at Athens; it is the deity who is worshipped in each case, and the noun added

¹ Cp. Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 51.

² Stephani, *Compte-Rendu* 1863, p. 128 ff. (quoted by Frazer).

³ Plut. *l.c.*

⁴ *Jahreshefte des öst. arch. Inst. in Wien*, iv. 59.

⁵ *Arch. Zeit.* 28 p. 38, *Cat. Berl. Sc.* 681: ἀνθέστησαν οἱ Ἀρτέμιονος βολὴ τὸ καταχθὲν στηλλάριον ὑπὸ τοῦ Βοδῆς Ἀπέλλωνι Ταρσί. So at Eleusis, in the same late age, are carved torches crossed, sheaf of corn, cista, and basket, along with a large rosette.

⁶ *Ἐφ. Ἀρχ.* 1900, 37.

⁷ Mr. G. F. Hill has called my attention to these: *Brit. Mus. Cat.* Troas, &c., p. xlvii. Head, *Hist. Num.* 261. The schol. on ll. xxiv. 428, mentions that Dionysus was called Πέλεκυς at Pagasae; 'from the sacrificial axe used in sacrificing to him' (Head). This is not a con-

vincing explanation, but I am not prepared with a better without knowing more of the cult.

⁸ *Mitth. d. d. Inst. Ath.* xv. 259.

⁹ A more rational suggestion is that worked out by Ridgeway, *Origin of Currency*, 317 ff.: that the coin represented a unit of barter in kind.

¹⁰ Prof. E. A. Gardner in *J.H.S.* xvii. 305 quotes a schol. to the *Iliad* who describes how Caeneus set up an ἀκόντιον in the agora and bade the people count it a god. Whether Prof. Gardner is right or not in regarding this as the may-pole, it is clear that the object was not a symbol of a deity who bore the spear.

¹¹ *Διὸς Κεραυνῶ*, Farnell, *Cults* p. 149, Collitz, *Gr. Dialektinschr.*, i. 1197. This I suggest is equivalent to Zeus Bronton, e.g. B.C.H. xx. 117; but if any prefer to regard it as genuine fetish-worship, this proves nothing for the axe.

is merely a differentiation. If, in the Hellenistic age, divine honours were shown in Asia Minor to the thunderbolt,¹ what does that prove for Greece or Crete a thousand years before? It well suits a place and period which could worship such monstrosities as *Zeús 'Osoγῶς Ζηνοποσειδῶν*.²

I turn now to the second piece of evidence: the dedication of axes in the cave of Zeus, which are supposed to have been there dedicated because they were symbols of Zeus. If they stood alone this could not be assumed, because there is no recorded instance of the dedication of a divine attribute to a deity because it was his attribute. I can speak with confidence, because it so happens I have been for some years collecting and classifying votive offerings, and I set out with the expectation of finding many such; I thought then that these attributes must have something holy about them, mislaid no doubt like others by the analogy of the Cross. But amongst many thousands of dedications, collected from all sources, I have found not a single one. Spears, helmets, and shields are dedicated to Athena, but only because they are articles of use or spoil of war; wine may be offered to Dionysus, and corn to Demeter, but as tithe or first fruit; and the offerings are not confined to one particular deity. No thunderbolts are dedicated at all and no caduceus.³ Axes were dedicated to Apollo, as I have shown, as war-spoil. An axe is dedicated to Hera by a butcher, as tithe of his profits, which can only mean that the axe was offered as an article of value.⁴ So Tenedos paid an offering at Delphi in axes, as we should expect.⁵ For the same reason, no doubt, they were offered in Crete. Some of the Cretan axes, like those found at Olympia and in Arcadia, are in miniature. These may have been toys, which were frequently dedicated; or they may have represented a

¹ Appian, *Syr.* 58.

² *Mith. d. d. Inst. Ath.* xv. 260.

³ I do not imply that meteoric stones were not consecrated in temples. If they were, the principle was that anything strange or rare was fit for consecration. But if they had been offered as symbols, they would have been offered to Zeus only. There is the stone of Cronos at Delphi, not a thunderbolt; but an egg-shaped stone is dedicated to Aphrodite in Gaul (Röhl, *I.G.A.* 551); a conical stone, not a thunderbolt, in Corcyra (*Ath. Mith.* xix. 340); a *χρυσῆς λίθος* at Athens to Athena (C.I.A. ii. 676. 9). The formless stones called Love at Thespieae (Paus. ix. 27. 1) and Diana at Ephesus if thunderbolts were not dedicated to Zeus.

⁴ Röhl, *I.G.A.* 543 τὰς Ἡρας ἱερός εἰμι τὰς ἐν πεδίω. *Φυνίσκος με ἀνέθηκε ὄρταμος Φέργων δεκάταν* (archaic).

This is really additional evidence to the truth of Ridgeway's explanation of the axe of Tenedos. A butcher does not make axes; nor were axes sacred to Hera; the offering was a tithe of his profits. Therefore this butcher dedicated this axe as representing the value of his tithe or part of it. It does not prove that

the axe was a unit of currency; but as cumulative evidence it is something. Axes are still used as currency in Africa, instead of money; in Cyprus the 'silver axe' appears as a unit of exchange: Collitz, *Gr. Dial. Inschr.* i. 60 etc. I should add, that Mr. Hill kindly refers me to coins of Tenedos which show an axe supported on a base; on another, a wine-jar is tied to it by a fillet (*Zeitsch. f. Num.* xx. 274). The fillet I endeavour to explain below. To poise an axe on a base is not to make it a sacred symbol. Votive offerings of all sorts were so placed: vases, tripods, torches, ceremonial headdress, carvings in relief. These are dedicated, but are not sacred symbols; therefore the base cannot prove that anything is a sacred symbol.

⁵ Plut. *De Pyth. Or.* 12: for a catch of crabs. Plutarch's own explanation is that the axe was chosen because the pattern on the crabs' back resembled the axe. Those who wish may believe this; but in Plutarch's day all the meaning of votive offerings had been lost. At all events there is no Zeus in this axe; and the axe of Tenedos had the same shape as the Carian labrys.

fraction of the axe-unit in value. Such is the use of miniature double axes in Mexico.¹ Miniature axes have been found in tombs at Hallstatt² along with other valuables.

I shall return to the cave of Dicte anon: but first a few words about the pillars. It is not easy to believe that the *baetylus*, whether *lingam* or meteorite, could have developed into a structural part of an edifice; and it does seem to me that the pillars depicted by Mr. Evans are more likely to have been meant simply to support the roof (*e.g.* Figs. 61, 66). But granting their sanctity for the sake of argument, what does it prove for a square pillar? And is it not rather far fetched to suggest, by the epithet 'pillar-like,' that the handles of the axes on p. 109 were sacred because of their resemblance to a pillar? It reminds one of Cleon's oracle, which was so satisfactorily interpreted by Demosthenes:

ὁ δράκων γὰρ ἐστὶ μακρὸν ὃ τ' ἀλλᾶς αὖ μακρόν.

All the evidence, then, vanishes on examination; and it would be easy to point out other assumptions which need proof, but no proof is given. What proof is there that Zeus Labrandeus was so named because he had a *labrys*? Plutarch's opinion on etymological points does not go for much. Labrandeus can only be derived from Labranda, the place of his worship. The town indeed may have been named from the axe; but if I am told this makes the axe sacred, I ask whether celery was sacred because Selinus was named from it.³ Very likely axe-making was the trade of Labranda, as sword-making was once of Damascus. Again, what proof is there of any connexion between the Cretan and Carian worship? Caria only comes late under Mycenaean influence, and certainly was not the source of it. What proof is there that Cnossos worshipped Zeus at all? Zeus was no doubt post-Mycenaean there as he was at Olympia. If Mr. Evans' chronology is right, and I do not question it, Cnossos was destroyed five hundred years before we hear of a Zeus in Crete, and when he arrived Zeus no doubt took over the Cave with the other fixtures, as Apollo did at Delphi. To cap all, Mr. Evans has just found another fresco, which depicts a shrine, the roof supported by 'sacred pillars' (why sacred?), and containing no Zeus and no double axe, but a female divinity.⁴ Further, why must the axe be regarded as a sacred symbol whenever it appears on a vase, whether upright and tied with string, or the head alone, and not equally the head of the sacrificial ox, or indeed the cuttlefish and the lotus? Is there no such thing as a decorative motive? The string or fillet serves to connect the offering with the god: so in the case of Cylon's conspiracy, the conspirators who took refuge in the shrine fastened themselves by a thread to the statue of Athena, but it has never been maintained that they were sacred symbols on that ground.⁵

¹ Ridgeway, *Early Age*, p. 443.

² *Op. cit.* p. 420.

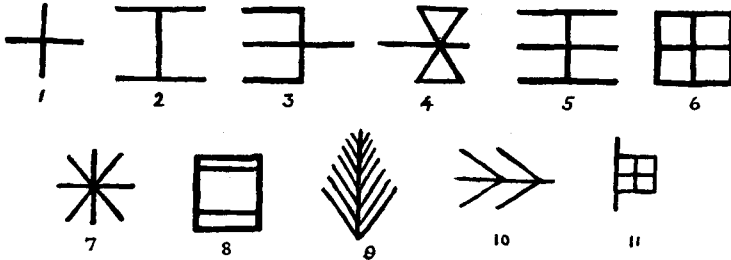
³ That Selinus was so named because celery growing was a staple industry, is proved by the fact that as Metapontium and Heraclea sent a


golden sheaf of corn to Delphi, so Selinus sent golden celery as a tithe: Plut. *De Pyth. Or.* 12.

⁴ Letter to the *Times*.

⁵ Plutarch, *Solon*, 12. So in other cases: Herod. i. 26, Thuc. iii. 104.

Having shown, as I hope, the essential weakness of the theories, I now proceed to the most serious argument of all: namely, that they neglect the greater part of the evidence. To read the paper, one would imagine that the palace at Cnossos was full of double axes, and nothing else; as a matter of fact, there are in the corridor and adjoining chambers no less than eleven different signs:



These are engraved in different positions, not only nor chiefly on 'corner stones,' but without rule or regularity. They come together in groups: thus we find the first seven all close together, 11 + 7 on one slab, 6 + 7 + 4. on another, 11 + 11 on another, thus  and so forth. In the

corridor and store-chambers axes occur seven times, other signs twenty-nine times. Are all these divine symbols? Is No. 3 the Cretan Poseidon, No. 7 the star of the Cretan Dioscuri, No. 9 the thyrsus of the Cretan Dionysus? It is not legitimate to pick out one of those symbols, even if it occurs a dozen times on one pillar, and explain it by a theory which takes no account of the rest, especially as they are arranged precisely as they would be arranged if they were letters or literary signs. Moreover, there is Phaistos to reckon with. There last summer another palace was unearthed, exactly similar to this of Cnossos, with corridor-chambers, courtyard, and gate, and with similar signs engraved upon the blocks. This is not explained as another Labyrinth or House of the Double Axe; but what are the axes and tridents and so forth doing there? Finally, nearly all these signs occur on the gems which have already been found, and have been interpreted by Mr. Evans already as literary signs; they may be seen on the tables given in vol. xvii. p. 384-6 of this *Journal*; and some at least, including the double axe—perhaps all, I have not access to the documents—occur on the inscribed tablets found at Cnossos.¹ It is even possible that all these signs were covered up with plaster when the place was inhabited; one, in the bath, is seen just emerging from behind a coat of it.

So also with the cave finds. The nineteen axes form but a small fraction of the whole number of articles found: besides these were here found 20 lance-heads, 25 darts, 160 knives, with pins and tweezers, a car drawn by oxen, animals, human figures in bronze and lead, draughtmen or something of the sort, and

¹ Nos. 8, and probably 2 and 3, may be seen on the Plate, *Annual Brit. Sch. Ath.* vi. Plate II.

earthenware vases. There is no more reason for holding that the axes were dedicated as the symbol of Zeus, than for calling the lance-heads symbolic of Ares, or the hairpins of Aphrodite. All these offerings can be paralleled elsewhere, and fall into well-defined classes; and the axes belong to the class of things useful or valuable, the smaller ones may be models or toys or fractions of the unit of value. All these were dedicated, and in that sense sacred: but there was not one sanctity of the knife, and another of the lance, neither did axe-head differ from hairpin in holiness.

It is clear, then, that whatever any one may think about the sanctity of the things which deities hold in their hands, or are clothed in, that idea cannot be brought in to explain the axes carved in the palaces of Cnossos and Phaistos, nor those dedicated in the Dictæan cave. I wish to lay stress on this, because I am aware that the sanctity of symbols is believed in by many scholars; but if (*absit omen*) the whole of my argument on that head were proved to be wrong by the discovery of a battalion of new authorities, such a disaster would not make it lawful to isolate and sanctify the axes of the Dictæan cave, or those of the Cnossian pillar. With that falls the whole argument in a heap. No one would have dreamt of canonizing that particular pillar but for the significance attached to the axes carved upon it; no doubt it would have been regarded, like that exactly similar one which at Phaistos stands in the store-corridor, without signs, as having served the humble if necessary purpose of supporting a roof. But for these signs, the suggestion of Mayer that Labyrinth comes from *labrys* would have been allowed to rest in its obscurity. All ancient authorities agree that the Labyrinth was a kind of maze; and the palaces of Crete are the very last thing one would describe as a maze. The visitor doubtless would be impressed with fine open courtyards and straight corridors; for the rest, any house looks confusing when the walls are just beginning to rise, and the place in its present condition looks like a collection of cellars. If the Labyrinth must be identified, better dub with this name that series of tortuous caverns, like the 'Labyrinth' at Gortyn, which exists three miles above Cnossos in the hill, but is now closed by a landslide.¹ There is nothing to suggest *labrys* in the legendary labyrinth, except the sound of the name. No attempt is made to analyse the word Labyrinth, to explain the ending, to justify the metathesis of *v* which is unexampled. On the same principle Fluellen undertook to prove that Alexander the Great was a Welshman: there is a river in Monmouth, and there is a river, look you, in Macedon also. Crete has yet ninety-eight cities left to explore; it is too soon to explain everything.

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¹ Spratt, *Crete*, i. 66. Strabo calls a catacomb near Nauplia 'labyrinth,' viii. 369. In one legend the Minotaur is represented as hav-

ing found a cave in the mountains, in which he had his lair (Eudocia, 253).