

THE SCULPTURED CAVE AT SARIS.

IN the *Quarterly Statement* for 1889, p. 184, Mr. Hanauer has given a short account of a cave near Saris, with two figures sculptured in relief, and the remains of an inscription which had been destroyed by a fellah before the cave attracted scientific attention. A sketch by one of the figures and of the surviving letters of the inscription is given on p. 185. In the following volume (1890, p. 71) is a further account, also by Mr. Hanauer, of the cave, with an enlarged sketch of the head of the same figure. Two other notes upon the cave appear in the same volume: the first by Professor Sayce (p. 44), asking for squeezes of the inscriptions (on which, unfortunately, I can find no subsequent report), and the second by Dr. Hutchinson (p. 332), making a suggestion as to the interpretation of the figures. Lastly, in the volume for 1892, p. 196, is a note with a photograph, upon pottery found by the Freemasons of Jerusalem in the cave.

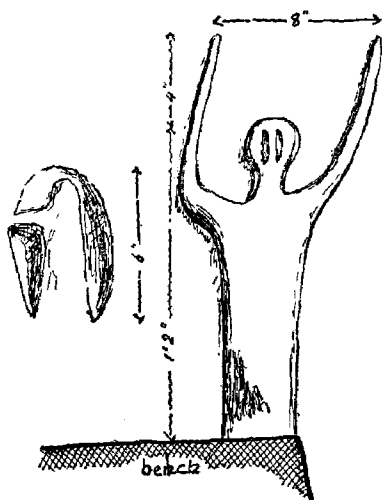
I visited this cave on February 15th, and made a careful study of it. Unfortunately, it has suffered severely since it was examined by Mr. Hanauer. The fever for antiquity-hunting, which in recent years has developed to an alarming extent in Palestine, has spread to Saris, and this cave has been ransacked. I found two young men, who claimed to be sons of the proprietor of the cave, who told me that they had been searching for treasure: an unlucky stroke by a pick had brought down all of the portion of the east wall containing the figure drawn by Mr. Hanauer, and not a single fragment of it is to be seen, either on the wall or among the single fragments of stone strewn on the floor of the cave. I suspect, however, that the destruction of the figure was not accidental, as my guides would have me believe, but intentional—perhaps on account of the Moslem hatred of images, for the second figure has been attacked also, and an evident attempt, which was fortunately suspended, made to cut it out. I fear, however, that the attempt will probably be resumed sooner or later, and the figure will be either destroyed or removed and sold. Though I examined minutely every square inch of the wall, I could find nothing like the marks drawn by Mr. Hanauer, of whose transcript I was provided with a copy. It is to be hoped that the squeeze mentioned (*Quarterly*

Statement, 1890, p. 44) is still in existence, for the characters, if anything, are Old Hebrew.

Questioned as to what they had found in the cave, my guides told me that they had obtained lamps, fragments of pottery (principally saucers), a stone "shaped like a bell," and a stone box. The first of these stone objects may have been a pounder or hammer-stone; the second, no doubt, was an ossuary, a manual demonstration of the size of the object, which they gave me, was sufficient to convince me of this. There is still a good deal of earth in the cave, intermingled with bones.

All the pottery shown in Mr. Lee's photograph above referred to, is characteristic of the archaeological strata which we have now learned to associate with the later period of the Jewish monarchy.

The chief interest of the cave lies in the two curious sculptured figures, and it is fortunate that the sketches illustrating Mr. Hanauer's papers have preserved the appearance of the figure now destroyed. To complete the account I append a sketch of



the second figure; there was not sufficient light to photograph it satisfactorily, and I had no material for making a squeeze.

Mr. Hanauer, in referring to this latter figure (*Quarterly Statement*, 1889, p. 185), says: "The legs, if it has any, must be dug for." As a matter of fact, there are none—the figure is half-length only, and a bench of uncut rock (like the shelf of a tomb-arcosolium) butts against the place where the legs would have been.

The interpretation of the figures is a matter of considerable difficulty, and depends upon the period to which they are to be assigned. The objects found in the cave may be taken as an indication of a minor limit of its date, for it is highly improbable that they were already relics of antiquity when they were deposited. The ossuary is not of great importance in this connection, for it

does not appear that this particular class of articles of tomb-furniture is of high antiquity. The only ossuaries that can be dated with certainty are those whose period is indicated by inscriptions; and all that have been found inscribed bear either Greek or square Hebrew lettering. The earlier Jewish tombs seem to have been provided with ossuary chambers for the reception of the bones of decayed bodies; the portable stone coffer was an invention of a later date. More to the point, in the dating of the cave under discussion, is the pottery represented in Mr. Lee's photograph. This belongs to the period of the Jewish monarchy, and it follows that the cave is, at latest, to be assigned to that period.

As to the figures, it might be inferred that, being *in relief*, they are necessarily of the same date as the walls on which they are cut. But this is not absolutely certain. Careful observation shows that, though there is no formal sunk panel surrounding the surviving figure, yet it is actually in *cavo-rilievo*—that is to say, the outer surface of the sculpture does not project beyond the outer surface of the wall, the relief being obtained by cutting away the background. Evidently the indication of date is as indefinite in such a case as in that of an incuse sculpture. I have added to the sketch of the surviving figure an appearance as though another figure had been blocked out and left incomplete; it is to the west of the surviving figure, and five inches from it. On the west wall are two deep lines, enclosing a space approximately in the form of a human figure, which might be the beginning of another relief. Though I studied these two marks very carefully, I was unable to make up my mind whether or not they were mere pick-marks; it may be admitted that there are no other pick-marks elsewhere upon the walls of the cave quite like them.

Dr. Hutchinson, from an examination of the sketch illustrating Mr. Hanauer's second communication, suggests that these figures represent the Crucifixion. This is a natural explanation, but it is open to several grave objections. There is no indication of a cross. The arms are not outstretched sideways (as might be inferred from the sketch referred to), but upwards; and though representations of the Crucifixion with arms stretched upwards are not unknown, they are so rare that if another explanation be forthcoming it is to be preferred. The eight strokes, taken by Dr. Hutchinson to represent a nimbus, are evidently merely indications of the back-

ground by the artist's pencil, and do not represent actual marks in the sculpture; this is clear from an examination of the previous sketch (*Quarterly Statement*, 1889, p. 185), apparently by a different hand, and certainly drawn on a different occasion. In the latter sketch, the marks in question do not appear.

The odd leaf-shaped face shown in the sketch (*Quarterly Statement*, 1890, p. 71) I would explain as an indication of the nose (by hollows on each side between nose and cheeks) with a fracture above (or possibly an indication of eyebrows (?)). The mouth is not shown. The face in the surviving figure is even ruder.

The most cogent argument against regarding the sculpture as Christian lies in the absence of crosses elsewhere on the walls of the cave. An *argumentum e silentio* is usually unsatisfactory, but traces of the habit which the early Christians of Palestine had of cutting crosses upon wall surfaces are so universal, that the absence of such symbols is presumptive evidence of the absence of early Christians.

Professor Sayce (*Quarterly Statement*, 1890, p. 44) compares the sculpture with the "proto-Phœnician rock-sculpture" he had visited near Tyre. This probably means the Kânâ figures, illustrated and described by Herr Schumacher later in the same volume (pp. 259-264), and pronounced to be of later date than had previously been supposed. If the Kânâ figures be intended by Professor Sayce, the resemblance seems rather superficial: the Kânâ and Saris figures differ considerably, both in attitude and in technique.

Much closer is the resemblance between these figures and the curious sculptures on the wall of the cave known as 'Arâḡ el-Mâ, near Beit Jibrin; it was the desire to compare the two that first attracted me to the Saris cave. A sketch of the Beit Jibrin sculpture will be found in the "Memoirs," vol. iii, p. 267. In these figures the arms are outstretched, not upraised, and the attitude is much more suggestive of a crucifixion than in the case of the Saris reliefs. It is quite possible, however, that the Saris figures may disturb this explanation. If they be non-Christian in period and purpose, the Beit Jibrin figures may have been originally similar, and may have been accepted and preserved by later Christian occupants of the Beit Jibrin caves on account of their resemblance to crucifixes.

The resources of Jerusalem libraries are too limited to enable me to find further examples of similar sculpture with which to compare the Saris figure. A very rude votive stele from Carthage,

figured in Perrot and Chipiez "Phœnicia," vol. i, pp. 54, 80, shows two figures in the same attitude, with hands upraised, presumably in an attitude of prayer. This comparison, to my mind, suggests the direction in which we are to look in determining the origin of the Saris cave.¹

Till all the earth can be cleared from the cave, it is impossible to say with certainty whether it was originally intended as a tomb-chamber, or whether the bones strewed through it and the ossuary are evidences of a secondary appropriation. In the meanwhile, I can only state my impression that the latter is the true alternative.

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EL-EDHEMÍYEH (JEREMIAH'S GROTTTO).

I SEND the following notes about the hill above Jeremiah's Grotto² :—

It is a knoll of limestone, with well-marked strata dipping perhaps 30 degrees, more or less, south to north, and about the same west to east. The rounded top of the hill is made by Moslem interments; and except two ruined welys—one of them reduced to foundations—there are no old buildings to be seen on it. The rock crops to the surface at the north-west side of the mound (towards the Dominican convent). The maximum depth of earth on the top I should estimate at about 10 feet. If the earth could be cleared away I should not be surprised to find part of the rock surface on top artificially flattened towards the south side of the hill; a small shelf of exposed rock, about 1 foot across, on the top of the scarp containing the cave popularly called the "Skull's Eye," has the appearance of being the edge of a rock-cut wine-press or threshing floor.

The excavations, &c., on the face of the hill-slope are as follows, in order, starting from the corner next the Dominicans :—

(1) A projecting boss of rock with a wine-press (?) of three vats with channels, sunk in its upper surface.

¹ [A very similar figure from Idalion is represented in Ohnefalsch-Richter, *Kypros*, taf. li, No. 6.—ED.]

² The modern Arabic name is to be preferred as being at once short and non-committal.