CHAPTER VII

THE CRETAN AND MYCENAEAN CIVILIZATIONS

About 3500–1000 B.C.

I. The Remains; the Population

81. Recent Discoveries. — Till recently historians have begun their account of Greek affairs with the eighth century B.C., some of them precisely with the year 776;[1] and for the first century and a half they have given hardly more than a few bare dates. But all this has been changed by explorations in the Aegean area. The pioneer in the work was Heinrich Schliemann (Shlee'mahn). In his boyhood he learned the stories told by the Hellenic poet Homer of the deeds of mighty heroes during the Trojan war;[2] and thinking them real history, he believed the ancient city of Troy might be found buried beneath the earth. To achieve this task became the inspiration of his life. After amassing a fortune in business, in 1870 he began digging on the hilltop where, from Homer's description, he concluded Troy must have stood. This hill is in northwestern Asia Minor, not far from the sea. The result more than justified his hopes. On this spot he and his successor in the work unearthed the ruins of nine settlements, built above one another and belonging to different ages. It is calculated that the lowest settlement, a rude village, was inhabited about 3500 B.C., and that the sixth, which shows a highly developed civilization, flourished 1500–1000. Afterward Schliemann excavated Tiryns and Mycenae in Argolis, Greece. They were contemporary with the sixth city at Troy. Mycenae showed such signs of wealth and culture that he believed it to have been the centre of the civilization which flourished at that time on the shores of Greece and in Troy. Hence he called the civilization Mycenaean.

[1] § 105, n. 1. [2] § 113.


CRETAN AND
MYCENAEAN
CIVILIZATIONS
Suggested Area of the Civilizations
Famous Centres of the Civilizations
BLACK SEA
PROPONTIS
Strymon R.
THRACIAN SEA
AEGEAN SEA
Hellespont
Troy
IDA MT.
ASIA MINOR
GREECE
PINDUS MTS.
Peneus R.
THESSALY
Iolcus
Pagasae
Pagasaean Gulf
Ambracian Gulf
Malian Gulf
Achelous R.
Orchomenus
Delphi
LESBOS
AEOLIA
Hermus R.
CHIOS
IONIA
TMOLUS MT.
Cayster R.
Maeander R.
CARIA
LYCIA
SAMOS
IONIAN SEA
Corinthian Gulf
PELOPONNESUS
Mycenae
Tiryns
Argolic Gulf
Alpheus R.
ACHAEAN LAND
Eurotas R.
Gerenia
Messenian Gulf
Athens
ATTICA
CYCLADES
MELOS
AMORGUS
THERA
Ialysus
RHODES
Cnossus
Dicte
CRETE
Phaestus
20°
22°
24°
26°
28°
30°
41°
39°
37°
35°
28° Williams Engraving Co., N.Y.

After these discoveries it was necessary to begin the history of Greece as early as 1500 B.C. But even this date has more recently been found altogether too late. Since 1899 Arthur Evans, an English archaeologist, has unearthed a great palace at Cnossus, Crete, and other scholars have made similar though smaller discoveries in other parts of the island. These explorations prove the Cretan civilization to have begun far earlier than the Mycenaean; to be, in fact, as old as that of Babylonia. In brief, they make it necessary for us to begin our study of European civilization at about 3500 B.C.

These dates we do not get from the records of the Cretans, for their writing has not yet been deciphered. They are based on Egyptian chronology, which is fairly certain back to 3500. There was an interchange of wares between Egypt and the Aegean area; and by a comparative study of these objects we can reconstruct the dates of Aegean culture.[1]

82. Earliest Inhabitants. — Greek myths preserved the names of some pre-Hellenic tribes long after they had become extinct. As an example we may name the Pelasgians, who were merely one of the many primitive tribes. The pre-Hellenic inhabitants had no common name, and we do not know to what race or races they belonged. We can only trace the progress of their civilization by means of their works which still survive.

II. The Cretan Civilization

83. Beginnings. — As early as 3500 B.C. there were village settlements over the entire Aegean region. The inhabitants lived in round huts, made tools and arms of stone, and formed and decorated rude pottery by the hand without the help of a wheel. Even at this early time, there was commerce with Egypt. Among the villages of the period were the oldest settlements at Troy and at Cnossus, Crete. This was the Stone Age.

It would be possible to trace the civilization of the region from

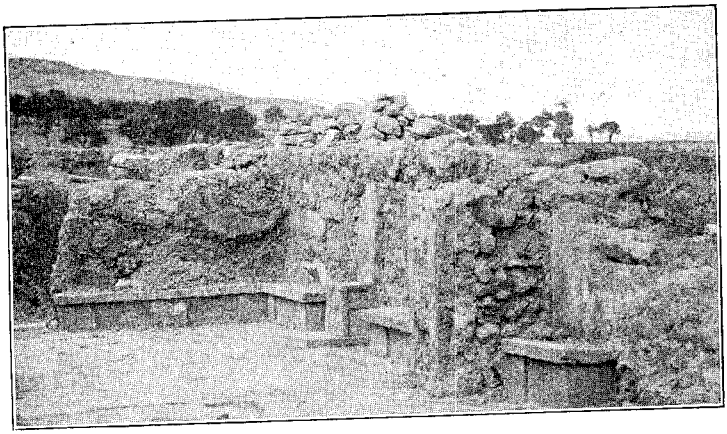
[1] It should be borne in mind, however, that all the dates in Greek history before about 700 B.C. are merely approximate. Some of those given may be even two or three centuries too early or too late.

this point through successive stages of progress and decline. We could see the gradual improvement of pottery, the introduction of copper and then of bronze wares, of gold and silver, of the art of writing, the growth of architecture, and of many other embellishments of life. Crete, in close commerce with Egypt, led this movement. Without following it in detail, we shall take a brief

A Corridor in the Palace at Cnossus
The large jars were evidently for the storage of provisions.
(From a photograph)

view of Cretan life at the height of its development — about 2200–1500 B.C.

84. **The Palace and the Court People.** — The king of Cnossus lived with his courtiers in a palace which for vastness would compare with the great works of Egypt. It comprised large rectangular courts, long corridors, and a multitude of chambers and store-rooms. In one of the rooms was found the throne on which the king once sat, with benches against the walls for his noble councillors. Another

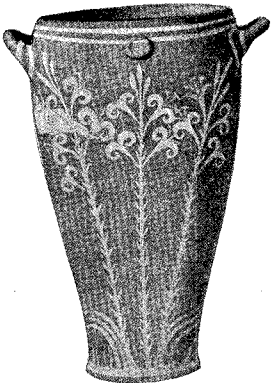


THE THRONE ROOM IN PALACE AT CNOSSUS

A stone chair for the king; on both sides stone benches for the guests.

(From a photograph)

room, fitted up with benches, seems to have been used as a school. The frescos on the walls picture the brilliant court life of the period. "Sometimes the dependents of the prince march into the palace in stately procession, bringing their gifts; sometimes the court is filled with gayly-adorned dames and curled gentlemen, standing, sitting, gesticulating vigorously, and flirting. We see the ladies, like Oriental women, trying to preserve the fresh whiteness of their complexion. Again the people of the court are watching a troop of bull trainers,"[1] — composed of youths and maidens. The nobles pictured in these scenes were accustomed to fine clothing, jewellery, and furniture. They had vases of beautiful form and finish, delicately cut



A CRETAN VASE

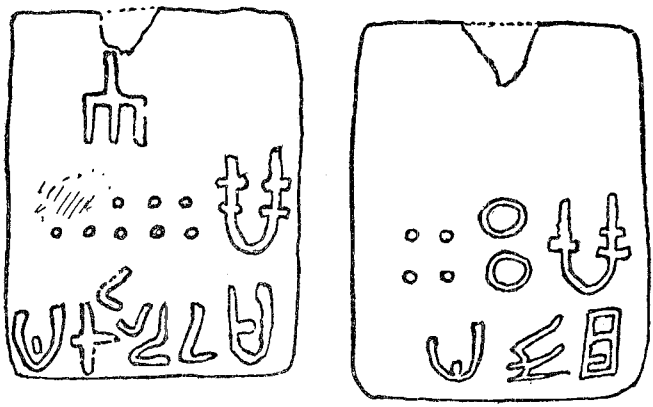
Decorated with lilies.

(From *Annual of the British School at Athens*, x. p. 7.)

[1] From a report by Dr. Arthur Evans.

and engraved gems as seals, and dagger blades inlaid with the precious metals. In artistic taste and skill they far surpassed the Orientals. The forms of men and animals in their art are especially graceful and true to nature.

85. Writing. — They had two systems of writing, the earlier hieroglyphic; the later a simple linear script. Thousands of little clay tablets have been found in one of the rooms of the palace, covered with this writing. Doubtless they are accounts of receipts



CRETAN LINEAR WRITING ON CLAY TABLETS
(From *Annual of the British School at Athens*, ix. p. 52.)

and dues; some of them may be a record of events. A larger tablet, found elsewhere, seems to be a list of offerings to a deity. In a word, their script was used for religious, business, and possibly historical purposes. When scholars succeed in deciphering this writing, we shall know the language of the Cretans, and shall better understand their civilization.

86. Society and Government. — It is clear that society was divided into the many toilers and the few nobles, and that the king was absolute master. There is strong evidence of peace throughout the island, of the union of all under one chief king. He built no walls of defence, for he placed his confidence in the navy. Egypt could not send over sea an army strong enough to conquer him.

Rather he preferred to buy the favor of Pharaoh with rich gifts while he himself extended his sway over many Aegean islands.

III. The Migrations of the Hellenes

87. Beginnings (about 2500 B.C.); **Formation of the Race.** — In our study of the Aegean region we have had to do thus far with people who were not Greeks or even Indo-Europeans. We noticed above[1] that about 3000 B.C. the Indo-European tribes, in the homeland of the race, began to move apart and to develop into separate peoples. Some in their wandering halted long in the valley of the Danube, where archaeologists have discovered remains of their civilization. From there, about 2500, various tribes began to move southward into Greece. There had been trade between the valley of the Danube and the Aegean area; hence the new-comers found a mode of life not much different from their own. As elsewhere, the immigrants of European speech mingled with the natives, and the language of the invaders prevailed, though modified somewhat by the intrusion of many aliens. The blending of the two peoples produced the Hellenic race.

88. The Turmoil and Strife of Settlement. — It would be useless to attempt a detailed account of the migration, as the Greeks themselves had no record of it, and could not remember that their ancestors had ever come from a foreign land. Doubtless they entered gradually by tribes, perhaps in "waves," pushed on from behind by Il-lyr'i-ans and Thracians, who also were Indo-European. There must have been continual fighting between the invaders and the natives, and among the immigrant tribes as well, for the possession of the best lands. For centuries, therefore, Greece was full of uproar and violence. The confusion reached its height in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries, when Greece and the Aegean region were all astir. "The islands were restless," deciares the Egyptian record of the time. The cause must have been the southward pressure of the Illyrian and other peoples.

A part of this movement was the shifting of masses of Greeks from the northwest of the peninsula — from Epeirus, Aetolia,

[1] § 61.

and vicinity[1] — into east and south Peloponnese. These people came afterward to be known as the Dorians, and their movement into Peloponnese is termed the Dorian migration. It was the last great migration within the peninsula, and the only one remembered by the Greeks of later time. It seems to have taken place in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries B.C.

IV. The Mycenaean Civilization

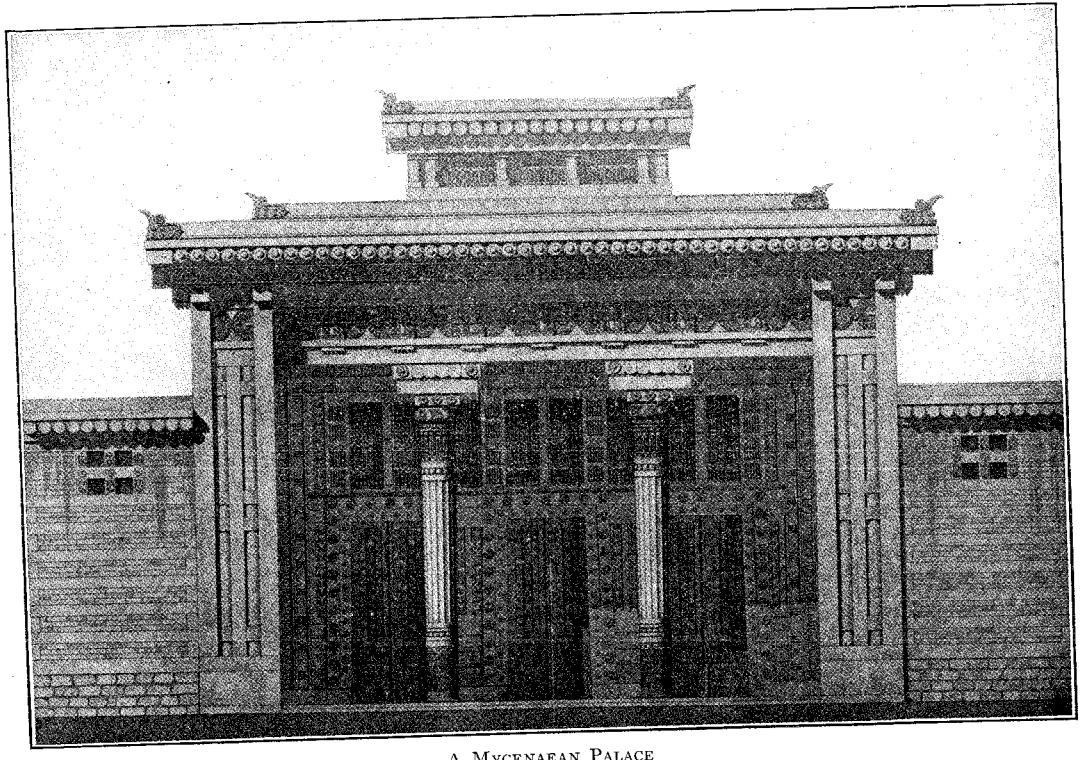
About 1500–1000 B.C.

89. Beginnings; Tiryns. — While the Greeks were taking possession of their historical home, the Cretans were making great progress in the art of living. Through commerce their products, with some knowledge of their industries, were coming to all parts of the Aegean area and to countries far beyond. But for a long time the Greeks, distracted by the turmoil of migration and conquest, took little interest in these improvements. Toward the middle of the second millennium (2000–1000) B.C., however, as life became for a season more secure, those of the east and south coasts of the peninsula fell rapidly under Cretan influence. This was at a time when the Cretans had lost their inventive power, and their civilization had become stagnant, just as did the Egyptian in the same period.[2]

Under this foreign influence the Greek chieftains along the east coast founded little kingdoms, generally in the alluvial plains at the mouths of rivers. Each kingdom centred in a strongly fortified city. One of these settlements was Tiryns, on a low flat hill a little more than a mile from the Argolic Gulf, the oldest city, so far as we know, on the continent of Europe. Its walls were of huge, rudely dressed stones, built, the myths would make us believe, by a race of giants called Cy-clo'pes. For this reason stone work of this rough kind is described as Cy-clo-pe'an. The highest part of the citadel, enclosed by these defences, was occupied by a great palace. Like that at Cnossus, it contained a multitude of apart-

[1] The fact that the dialect of the Dorians is nearly the same as that spoken in northwestern Greece proves them to have come from that quarter.

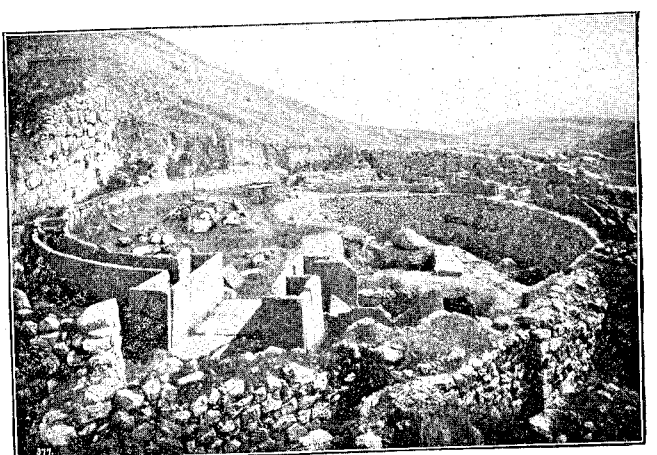
[2] § 17.



A Mycenaean Palace

(Restoration; from Perrot and Chipiez, VI)

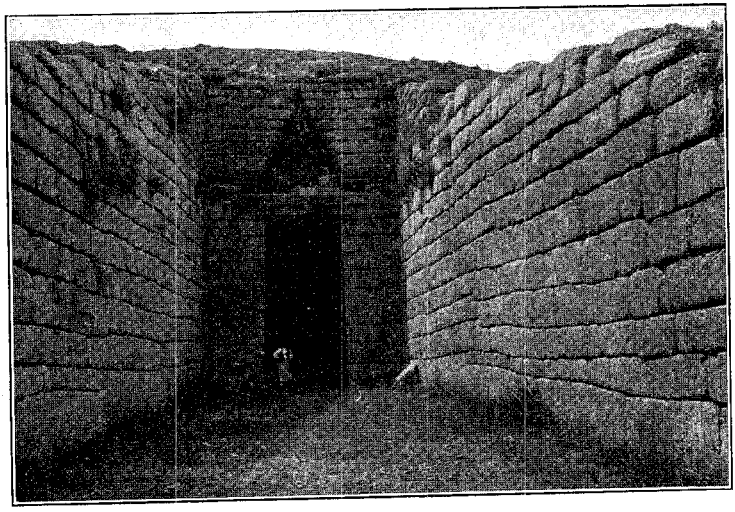
ments, including separate courts and halls for men and women; a bath-room with conduit and drains; sleeping-rooms, corridors, and porticoes. The palace was smaller and simpler than that of Cnossus, but very great for a king who ruled over only a few square miles of territory. The walls and palace tell a vivid tale of the wealth and luxury of the king, and of his unlimited authority over the lives and labor of his subjects.



ROYAL CEMETERY OF MYCENAE
On the citadel
(From a photograph)

90. Mycenae. — Mycenae was built on a steep hill at the extreme north of the plain of Argolis. Around it ran a wall of much finer workmanship than that of Tiryns. When the city outgrew this space, it extended over a low adjoining ridge. The older and better-fortified part is distinguished as the citadel; the later addition is termed the lower city. Mycenae was younger than Tiryns, but because of the favorable situation its king in time became ruler of all Argolis. Here Schliemann unearthed not only a palace, but private houses, the homes of lords and servants. More remarkable were the royal tombs grouped in and about a circular enclosure on the hill. Here were buried the earlier kings with their

families. The later rulers made for themselves in the lower city immense dome-shaped tombs. One of them, the so-called Tomb of A'treus, is about fifty feet in height and the same in diameter. A tomb of the kind was built underground in the hillside, and was approached by a long, horizontal passage. All those at Mycenae were found empty; doubtless they had been pillaged. From these remains, especially from the contents of the tombs in the

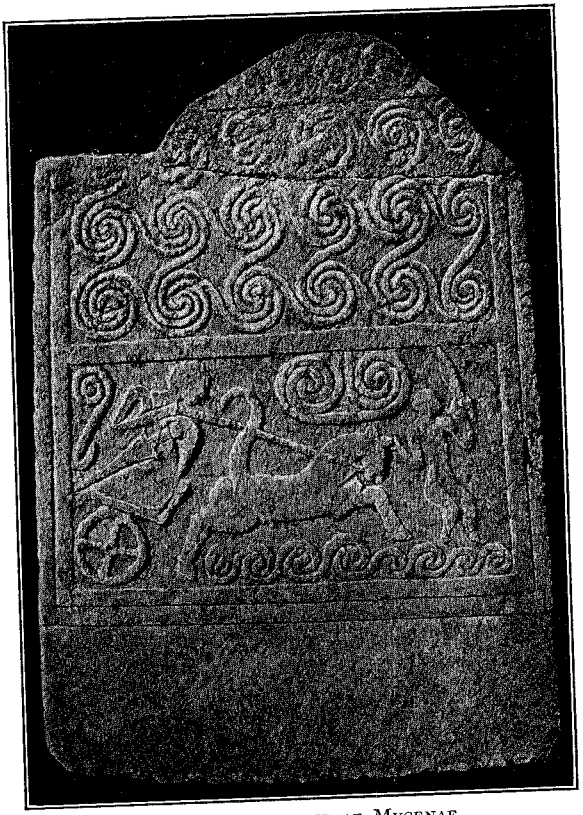


ENTRANCE TO THE TOMB OF ATREUS
Lower city, Mycenae
(From a photograph)

citadel, we can make out how the people of Mycenae lived, and even what they wore and ate.

The court lady dressed in a bodice and full flounced skirt. The cloth was fine linen or soft wool of sea-purple stain. "The diadem of gold was on her brow, golden fillets and pins of exquisite technique shining out of her dark hair; golden bands about her throat and golden necklaces falling upon her bosom; golden bracelets upon her arms, gold rings chased with inimitable art upon her

fingers, and finally her very robes agleam with gold." [1] The men wore a simple cloth around the waist, either hanging loose or drawn together in such a way as to form short trousers. On the shoulders



GRAVESTONE FOUND AT MYCENAE
Warrior in chariot; his squire walking ahead.
(From Schuchhardt, *Schliemann's Excavations*)

they pinned a mantle. Like the women, they loaded themselves with jewelry. They enjoyed perfumes, and took delight in gazing admiringly at themselves in their bronze mirrors.

[1] Tsountas and Manatt, *The Mycenaean Age*, 189 f.

In war the king or noble equipped himself with a helmet, with a huge shield which reached from neck to ankles, and with woollen or leathern greaves. His weapons of defence were sword and spear. Unable to carry his heavy equipment far, he rode to battle in a chariot drawn by a team of horses, but dismounted for combat. The common men dressed lightly, wore no defensive armor, and fought chiefly with the bow and sling. They counted for little in war and politics.

The Mycenaeans believed in a future life. They must have imagined that the soul, living in the tomb, used and enjoyed all the wealth of utensils and ornaments buried with the body.[1] They worshipped not only the dead, but other gods represented by little idols.

91. Relations with Crete; the Decline. — Mycenae was the richest and most brilliant and powerful of the cities in Greece during this period. Hence the civilization of the age is called Mycenaean. But there were many other seats of the same culture in Greece, as in Laconia near Sparta, and at Athens. Across the Aegean Sea, the "sixth city" at Troy was contemporary, and life there was similar. In brief, the same culture now prevailed over the Aegean area. Everywhere is seen the influence of Crete. The engraved gems, the fine gold work, the inlaid daggers, and much of the other movable goods found at Mycenae, were undoubtedly imported from the island. Cretan architects built the palaces, and Cretan artists frescoed the interior walls with scenes like those they had painted in their own country. Many immigrants must have come from Crete to seek their fortunes among these new and enterprising people. The difference between the two cultures was not striking. It was chiefly one of periods. The earlier civilization was inventive and aggressive; the later was for a time stationary, then decadent. In Crete the temperament was more artistic; in Tiryns and Mycenae more political. The cities of Greece were walled, but not those of Crete. The palace at Tiryns or Mycenae was simpler and more regular in form than that of Cnossus, and included features afterward inherited by the Greek temple. Life must have been strenuous in Greece. There were wars for supremacy among the kings, and doubtless fiercer struggles to maintain

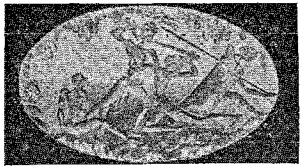
[1] § 100.

I

BEZEL OF A GOLD RING

Showing women, a fruit tree, sun and moon. Found at Mycenae.

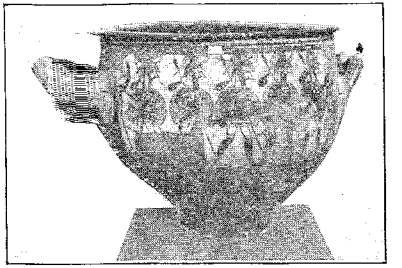
II



BEZEL OF A GOLD RING

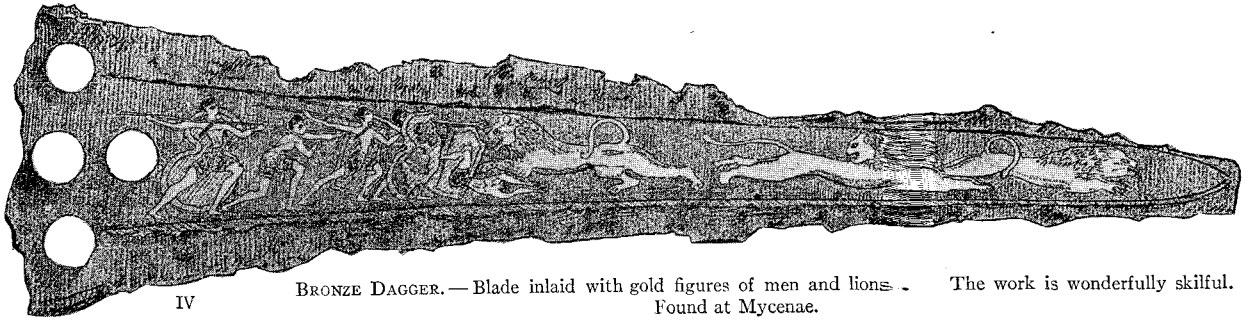
Showing a combat of warriors. Found at Mycenae.

III



THE "WARRIOR VASE"

Late Mycenaean or Early Epic. Contrast dress and arms with those of II and IV.



IV

BRONZE DAGGER. — Blade inlaid with gold figures of men and lions. The work is wonderfully skilful. Found at Mycenae.

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