

THE LYKAIAN ALTAR OF ZEUS

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IN THE COURSE OF HIS DESCRIPTION of the monuments of Arkadia, Pausanias gives the following account of a very interesting cult site of Zeus on Mt. Lykaion. "On the topmost peak of the mountain" writes the periegetes "there is an altar of Lycaean Zeus in the shape of a mound of earth, and most of the Peloponnese is visible from it. In front of the altar, on the east, stand two pillars, on which there used formerly to be gilded eagles."¹ This very altar of Zeus Lykaios was located by Dr. Kourouniotes on one of the three crests of Mt. Lykaion, which now bears the name of Haghios Elias. His excavations, conducted in 1903, revealed that the altar occupied the apex of that summit, that it was circular in shape, like a threshing floor, and that it measured 97 feet 6 inches in diameter. It had no architectural character and originally it could have been a mound of earth.² A little below the altar, and about 23 feet apart, were found the bases of two columns, while broken pieces of drums were discovered in the surrounding territory. These bases and fragments were identified as belonging to the columns which were seen by Pausanias and on top of which the two eagles were perched.³

Among the votive offerings discovered in the district of the altar are bronze statuettes representing Zeus brandishing the thunderbolt and supporting an eagle on his outstretched left hand. One of these is placed in the seventh century and forms the oldest find discovered in the precinct. Other votive offerings prove that the altar was in continuous use from the seventh century to the times of Pausanias. The local traditions however, seem to indicate that the altar was in use long before the time when the oldest statuette was offered, i.e., long before the seventh century. Its founder is a shadowy figure lost in the mythical age of Greece, Lykaon the son of Pelasgos. This Pelasgos was reputed to have been the first man who ruled over the

¹ Pausanias 8, 38, 7. Translation of J. G. Frazer.

² *Ephemeris* 1904, 153-214. See also A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, vol. 1, (Cambridge, 1914), 81-88. F. H. Marshall *Class. Rev.* 9 (1905) 280 f.

³ *Ephemeris* 1904, 173, fig. 7. See also L. Ross, *Reisen*, 92.

Arkadians, while Lykaon was credited with the building of Lykoursa, which, according to the local tradition, was the oldest of all "cities on earth" and "the first city that ever the sun beheld." The Arkadian story of the child Zeus was located in the territory. According to that story, Zeus was reared on Mount Lykaion and the Arkadians pointed out the site of Cretea on Lykaios as the original Crete, where the Cretan legend was developed.⁴ Above all it seems certain that here we have one of the few sanctuaries where human sacrifice was practiced in historic times. The reluctance of Pausanias to describe the rites held at the altar—"on this altar they offer secret sacrifices to Lycaean Zeus, but I did not care to pry into details of the sacrifice"—seems to indicate that the practice continued even to the time of the periegetes. This practice would certainly prove that a very old cult, venerated in the days when human sacrifices were not uncommon, i.e., in very remote prehistoric days, survived on this mountain precinct of Zeus.⁵ And perhaps this could suggest that in the altar of Zeus Lykaios we may have the successor of a prehistoric shrine.

The examination of the units composing this unique altar will lead us to the same conclusion. These units are, the mound of earth, two columns and two eagles perched on top of these columns. Frazer, recalling the existence and use of columns for astronomical purposes in Peru, has suggested that perhaps "these columns have been set up for the purpose of determining the solstices and equinoxes by means of the length and direction of the shadows."⁶ Recalling the sky

⁴ Pausanias 8, 1, 2; 8, 2, 1; 8, 38, 1. Kallimachos *Hymn to Zeus* 4 ff. Strabo 348.

⁵ For a discussion of this interesting cult cf. Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 70-81. Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 8, 81-82; St. Augustine *De civ. Dei* 18, 17. Pausanias 6, 8, 2. It is interesting to note that according to Euanthes the were-wolf was chosen from the members of a clan descended from Anthos. Cook has mentioned the fact that Stoll and Töpffer have pointed out that the names *Anthos*, *Anthas*, *Anthes*, and *Antheus* were given to "mythical figures of a common type—the handsome youth who comes early to a cruel death just because he personifies the short-lived vegetation of the year. . . . Arguing from analogy, I conclude that in Arkadia, the descendants of Anthos were a priestly clan charged with the upkeep of vegetation in connection with the cult of Zeus Lykaios." This may be so; but I want to draw attention to the name itself, Anthos. This is one of the pre-Indo-European words which may go back at least to the Early Helladic Period when such names were in universal use. (cf. C. W. Blegen, *AJA* 32 (1928) 146-154.) It may be possible to assume that Anthos, the father of the clan, lived in that age. And if that is so it will indicate that the beginnings of the rites held around the altar go even beyond the Early Bronze Age, since only the final form of these rites is connected with Anthos and his clan. The myth of Lykaon perhaps represents the "first stages of the custom" (Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 80.) Whether Zeus was venerated at the Lykaian altar as a light god or as a wolf god is a subject which is not pertinent to our present study. (See Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 63-68.)

⁶ In his commentary on Pausanias 8, 38, 7 (vol. 4, p. 385).

pillars of South Italy and the Pythagorean doctrine of the Milky Way and the "pillar of light" stretching along the axis of the Universe, Cook seems to imply that such columns were supposed to connect heaven and earth and that our two columns were in all probability conceived as sky-props.⁷ Nilsson in his exhaustive study of the survival of Minoan-Mycenaean elements in Greek religion mentions the Lykaian sanctuary only in connection with the Arkadian legends dealing with the birth of Zeus.⁸ We believe that all the elements of our altar will find their logical interpretation, if we relate them to prehistoric religious uses and to prehistoric ritualistic remains.

Ever since the publication of Sir Arthur Evans's study on the "Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult,"⁹ scholars have argued about the role played by pillars and columns in the religion of the Minoan world. Sir Arthur believed that the pillars were the aniconic images of a God and they were the objects of worship. This view has been ably refuted by Nilsson, who has reviewed the evidence lately, and his conclusion that "the pillars of the pillared rooms cannot be considered as embodiments of a deity or as cult objects, but that they may be sacred in the sense that they either belong to a sanctuary or that they were endued with sacred power to strengthen their structural function," seems to be correct.¹⁰ To these pillars with structural function should be added the numerous representations of columns on minor works of art—on gems, impressions and the like—even on the famous relief over the Lions' Gate at Mycenae, when the structural character of the column is indicated by the symbolic entablature placed over its capital. However, as Evans and Nilsson have pointed out, there are some representations of free standing columns, the sacred character of which cannot be denied.¹¹ Most important of these are the representations on two glass plaques found by Tsountas in tombs of the lower Town of Mycenae.¹² According to Sir Arthur Evans, on these plaques are represented libation scenes; on the first (Pl. VII, 2, p. 217), animal headed "genii" are "pouring libations from two ewers over a square-cut upright altar block" or over "a sacred pillar"; and on the second (Pl. VII, 1) similar "genii"

⁷ Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 44-46, 423. cp. Plato *Rep.* 616 B.C.

⁸ *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion*, (Lund, 1927), 463 n. 2. ⁹ *JHS* 21 (1901), 99-204. ¹⁰ Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 212-213.

¹¹ See the design carved on the gold ring discovered by Tsountas in 1895 in a tomb in the lower city of Mycenae (Furtwängler, *Ant. Gemmen*, Pl. VI. 3. Evans, "Tree and Pillar Cult" 177, fig. 53); the design on the gold ring from Tiryns (Evans, *Palace of Minos*, vol. 4, 460-461, fig. 385. Karo, *Arch. Anz.* 1916, 143-148, fig. 5); on a seal cylinder from Mycenae (Evans, "Tree and Pillar Cult" 140, fig. 24) etc. ¹² Πρακτικά, 1896, 29-31.

are "pouring libations over what appears to be a tripod cauldron set over a baetylic column." This interpretation has been also accepted by Nilsson.¹³ The representation on the second plaque (Pl. VII, 1), is of importance to our quest especially since we believe that the tripod recognized by Evans is a column of the Mycenaean-Minoan variety. The cauldron-like capital on the plaque finds its parallel in the capitals of the columns represented in the seal cylinder from Mycenae illustrated by Evans in his study of the tree and pillar cult (Pl. VII, 4).¹⁴ It could also be compared to the capital of the column placed before the seated Goddess on the gold ring from Tiryns (Pl. VII, 8),¹⁵ to the complex capital represented on a golden ring from Mycenae now in the collection of Sir Arthur Evans (Pl. VII, 6), to the capital of a column represented on a clay seal-impression found by Wace at Mycenae, and to the bowl-shaped base on which rests a foliated column on a second gold signet ring from Mycenae (Pl. VII, 7).¹⁶ This foliated column, of the fleurs-de-lys type, flanked by sphinxes, will also provide a parallel for our so-called vertical legs of the "tripod." The shaft of that column is separated by vertical lines into two side divisions and a wider central division. The lines on this foliated column are taken to indicate flutings. On an ivory plaque from the chamber tombs of Mycenae excavated by Tsountas, we have the representation of a column with a bulging capital above which rise a pair of horizontal volutes.¹⁷ The edges of the column are emphasized by raised lines, similar to those on our plaque, leaving between them a broad surface to be decorated by linear patterns. This linear treatment of the shaft of a column, perhaps due to the desire of the artist to emphasize his vertical lines, is repeated in the rendering of tree trunks by the Mycenaean minor artists¹⁸ and, we believe, even in the stylized column-like patterns so common in the Late Helladic III vases.¹⁹ The comparison of the so-called tripod of our plaque with

¹³ Evans, "Tree and Pillar Cult," 117, figs. 13-14; *Palace of Minos*, vol. 4, 454-455, figs. 379 and 380. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 219. ¹⁴ 141, fig. 24.

¹⁵ See Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, vol. 4, 460, fig. 385.

¹⁶ Evans, "Tree and Pillar Cult" 155, fig. 33 and 159, fig. 39. Wace, *B.S.A.* 24 (1919-21) 205, fig. 1.

¹⁷ Kabbadias, P., *Προϊστορική Ἀρχαιολογία* (Athens 1909), 285, fig. 349.

¹⁸ Cp. the sacred tree on the gold signet ring from the Mycenaean Akropolis treasure (Evans, "Tree and Pillar Cult" 108, fig. 4). On the gold signet ring from Mycenae in the Collection of Evans (182, fig. 56), etc.

¹⁹ These decorative units developed according to Blegen from the older "octopus pattern" and according to Persson from the "loligo pattern." See cf. C. W. Blegen, *Zygouries* (Cambridge, 1928), 146-147 and fig. 137; *Prosymna* (Cambridge, 1937), vol. 1, 451 and Pl. VIII. Otto Frödin and Axel W. Persson, *Asine* (Stockholm, 1938), 402, fig. 264.

the few representations of columns existing in minor works of art from the Late Helladic III Period will leave no doubt as to its nature. It is a column; and this free-standing column is the center of a cult; it is therefore a sacred column.²⁰ If we take the rectangular blocks represented on the first plaque to be pillars, then we have in that object a companion piece to the plaque with the sacred column.

We may here add the column represented on the gold ring from Tiryns mentioned above (Pl. VII, 8).²¹ The ritualistic character of the scene represented on that ring has been universally recognized, hence the presence of a column in the composition is very important. Nilsson has suggested that "the inverted conical object" can hardly be taken for anything but a *thymiaterion*.²² The placing of such a vase, however, on top of a column seems impossible. That our column should be conceived as of regular size, and not as a colonette, is indicated, we believe, by the plant motives which are placed between the "genii." These plant motives have been explained by Nilsson as boughs "standing erect." But if we compare them with the trees represented on the gold signet ring from Mycenae bearing a "cult scene with sacred tree and portal,"²³ with those on the crystal lentoid from the Idaean cave,²⁴ with the "nursling palms" represented on the gem from Vapheio,²⁵ and even with the "Tree Trinity of Min" illustrated by Evans,²⁶ we shall have to conclude that cypress-like trees are represented on the Tiryns ring. That they are full sized trees conventionally rendered in the scale seen, is indicated by the examples cited and

²⁰ As to its size see *infra*. Perhaps it might prove interesting to note the arrangement of the units in the compositions on these two glass plaques. In the first we have six units arranged in the following manner: "Genius," pillar, "genius" (with its back to "genius" number 2) pillar, "genius." In the second plaque we have again six units with a somewhat different arrangement, "genius," column, "genius," column, "genius" with back turned to second column and facing the last "genius." Between the last two "genii" we have no column, although there could be enough room between them to accommodate such a column and although the "genii" are equipped with libation jugs. The omission of such a column may be significant. Could it perhaps indicate that only two such columns could be erected in a given precinct like the one represented on our plaques?

²¹ It was discovered with other objects in a bronze cauldron by Arvanitopoulos in 1915 (*Arch. Deltion* 2 (1916), *Parartema*, 13, pl. I. *Arch. Anz.* 1916, 143 and fig. 5). Professor Arvanitopoulos repeatedly has described to me the conditions under which the hoarded treasure was discovered and I believe he is right in maintaining the genuineness of the objects and in rejecting the doubts expressed as to their authenticity (cf. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 300).

²² *Op. cit.*, 301.

²³ "Tree and Pillar Cult," 183, fig. 57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 142, fig. 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 101, fig. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 143, fig. 26.

by others illustrated by Sir Arthur.²⁷ The object on top of that column can be nothing else but a bird; and column and bird mark the cult objects at the side of which the goddess descended to receive the gifts of the adoring "genii."

Practically all the examples mentioned were found in the Peloponnesos and date from the Late Helladic Period. The conclusion suggested by our discussion thus far is evident. The existence of free-standing sacred columns in the Peloponnesos and in the Late Helladic Period can be considered as certain. In these sacred columns of the Late Helladic Period the columns of the Lykaian altar find their exact parallel and apparently their antecedents.

The columns seen by Pausanias and uncovered by the excavators seem to have been erected in the fifth or the fourth century B.C. They are of the Doric order, but they stood on stepped bases in the shape of truncated pyramids. It is instructive to note that these unusual bases²⁸ find exact parallels in Mycenaean and Minoan practices. Stepped bases, in the shape of truncated pyramids, were used in Crete and in late Minoan times for the support of double axes.²⁹ They were also used, perhaps for the same purpose, in the Peloponnesos and in Late Helladic times as is proved by an actual stepped base which was discovered by Boethius at Mycenae.³⁰ When we recall that the cult of Mt. Lykaion is proved to have been practiced long before the erection of the columns uncovered by the excavators, we can naturally conclude that these columns were erected to replace older existing columns, perhaps of wood,³¹ which needed replacing and duplicated the details of the older examples. Their bases seem to indicate that the original columns, which were replaced and which flanked the mound, were perhaps erected in Late Helladic times.

²⁷ See for example the size of the tree in comparison to that of a Mycenaean man on the gold ring from Mycenae in the "Tree and Pillar Cult," 182, fig. 55. Also the tree and the votary represented on the gold signet ring in Evans's collection ("Tree and Pillar Cult," fig. 56.) Incidentally that tree is taken by Evans to be "three trees" because "the trunk too seems to be triply divided"; but we have seen that this linear treatment of tree-trunks was usual in Late Helladic III times and does not indicate many trees, but one.

²⁸ Of course they were usual as statue-bases in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.

²⁹ It will be too long to enumerate all the known examples. (Perhaps the most familiar examples are those represented on the sarcophagus of Haghia Triada). For such cf. Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, vol. 1, 427. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 183-184.

³⁰ A. J. B. Wace, *Chamber Tombs at Mycenae* (Oxford, 1937), 201, pl. LVIII.

³¹ The oak was considered sacred to Zeus at Mt. Lykaion and in tradition it played an important part in the development of the ritual. Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 76-81.

On the columns of the Lykaian altar two gilded eagles were perched. These eagles again find their parallel in the Minoan and the Mycenaean birds which are to be found perched on top of shrines—completely represented³² or symbolized by means of a column with entablature³³—, on the sacred double axes,³⁴ on female forms which are taken to represent goddesses,³⁵ on sacred boughs.³⁶ Some of these birds are doves; the species of others is hard to determine.³⁷ But it is clear that birds of various species were accepted as the tokens of the visible presence of the gods, as signs of divine epiphany. We find the bird in association with the sacred column at least on one and perhaps on a second object dating from Late Helladic times. On a clay seal impression discovered in 1920 at Mycenae a typical prehistoric column is depicted bearing on its capital two pairs of horns of consecration. These certainly indicate the sacred character of the column. Above the horns a bird is represented. Two more birds are flying over two kneeling animals which are flanking the column.³⁸ On the gold ring from Tiryns, discovered by Arvanitopoulos and discussed above (Fig. 1, 8), we may see a bird over the sacred column standing in front of the seated goddess. There can be little doubt that the eagles of the Lykaian altar originally stood for the same purpose which was served by the birds of the prehistoric shrines and columns; they were the signs of the divine epiphany, and they were the direct descendants of a prehistoric practice. That the Indo-European Greeks of historic times had no aversion towards the transformation of their

³² Like the shrines represented on gold leaf from the third and fourth shaft graves of Mycenae (H. Schliemann, *Mykenae*, 306, fig. 423. G. Karo, *Die Schachtgräber von Mykenai*, (München, 1930) Plates xviii, 242-244; xxvii, 26.

³³ See for example the group of three columns on a common base described by Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, vol. 1, 222 as "supporting in each case, above their square 'capital' the round ends of a pair of beams on which a dove is perched." ³⁴ On the sarcophagus of Haghia Triada.

³⁵ See the example from the third shaft grave of Mycenae, Schliemann, *Mykenae*, 200, figs. 267 and 268. Karo, *op. cit.*, pl. xxvii, 27-28.

³⁶ Evans, *Palace of Minos*, vol. 1, 632, fig. 470.

³⁷ How hopeless a task it is to determine their species has been indicated by Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 291-292. The birds on the sarcophagus of Haghia Triada have been recognized as eagles by Karo, as wood-peckers by Evans, as ravens by Von Duhn, as cuckoos by Petersen, as pigeons by Lagrange, and as magpies by Hall. For the birds as symbols of the epiphany of a god in prehistoric times, see Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 285-294.

³⁸ *BSA* 24 (1919-21) 205, fig. 1. Between the two pairs of horns is to be seen a "row of round dots" and these were taken to "indicate a row of beam-ends, as in the case of the column of the Lion Gate." I doubt that the dots indicate beam-ends, because they are placed between the two pairs of horns and not under them, as would have been the case if they were intended to indicate such beam-ends. The dots seem to serve for the differentiation of the two pairs of horns.

gods into birds, is evident from the many passages of ancient authors in which such transformations are mentioned. In the stories of the Odyssey, for example, time and again Athena assumed the form of a bird—swallow, sea eagle, vulture, etc.³⁹ In various occasions, and for his romantic adventures, Zeus himself took the form of an eagle.⁴⁰ In the eagles placed on top of the Lykaian columns the Arkadians of the times of Pausanias and perhaps those of the seventh century saw the attribute of their supreme god. In prehistoric and perhaps in proto-historic times these same eagles marked the epiphany of the god. Such an evolution in the development of primitive religious ideas is in agreement with the "law of religious development" so brilliantly established by Usener.⁴¹ The eagles which originally were the "Augenblicksgötter" gradually became the attributes of a "persönlicher Gott."

The position of the eagles, facing the sun, has already been explained by Elderkin,⁴² and Cook has enumerated the various possible interpretations which may account for the erection of two columns with two eagles in the sanctuary.⁴³ In spite of Cook's remarks, I still believe that reasons of balance and symmetry, which underly the heraldic schemes so dear to the Minoan and Mycenaean artists,⁴⁴ were responsible for the erection of the two columns. Whatever the explanation of the use of two units instead of one may be, the fact still remains that our two columns find close parallels in prehistoric practices where two such supports are placed on either side of a central cult object. An outstanding example of the practice is pictured on the sarcophagus of Haghia Triada; there two supports for the sacred double axes are placed on either side of the ritualistic jar in which the libation is poured.⁴⁵ On the *larnax* from Palaikastro we

³⁹ *Odyssey*, 3, 371 ff.; 1, 320; 12, 239. *Iliad*, 7, 58 cf. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 421.

⁴⁰ Cf. Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 187, note 8. ⁴¹ *Götternamen* (Bonn, 1896).

⁴² "Bronze Statuettes of Zeus Keraunios," *AJA* 44 (1940), 230.

⁴³ "The fact that they were two, not one, is hardly to be explained as a device of heraldry or the result of a desire for symmetry, or an attempt to represent both sides of a single bird, or a juxtaposition of memory pictures" Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 188-189 and foot-notes, 1-4.

⁴⁴ See Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 216, 308, 329-333.

⁴⁵ On the other side of the sarcophagus only one stand is pictured in front of a shrine, but that representation of the shrine is not entirely complete. Perhaps we should note that the sacred double axes depicted on the sarcophagus possess blades that are duplicated. Such axes with duplicated blades are known from the Late Minoan III shrine of Knossos (Evans, *Palace of Minos*, vol. 2, p. 339 and fig. 191). From the fourth shaft grave of Mycenae (Karo, *op. cit.*, pl. XLIV, 353-354). They are depicted on the large gold signet ring from the Mycenaean Akropolis treasure ("Tree and Pillar Cult," 108, fig. 4.) and on a number of clay sealings. (Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 652.)

have an even closer parallel; the sacred double axe, certainly the center of a cult, is flanked by two free-standing sacred columns.⁴⁶ On the glass plaques of Mycenae, discussed above, again we have two columns and two pillars as the centers of a cult. And perhaps the axes with duplicated blades and the two pairs of horns of consecration that are so often depicted in ritualistic scenes, even the two birds represented on the gold shrines from the third shaft grave of Mycenae, could be considered as the result of this religious practice of representing two of a kind.⁴⁷

The Lykaian altar was in the form of a mound. Can we find prehistoric parallels for this unit also? Altars built with a definite architectural character were common in the Minoan and the Mycenaean world.⁴⁸ But besides these, there were others in the form of a mound. An outstanding example of such a mound-altar is represented on a glass plaque, dating from the Late Helladic Period and discovered by Tsountas at Mycenae (Pl. VII, 3).⁴⁹ Two "genii" with beaked jugs are represented standing on either side of a pile of stone, on either side of a cairn, that can be nothing else but a mound-altar. The ritualistic character of the scene is universally accepted. Such a mound-altar we can also see on the seals from the Central Palace Sanctuary of Knossos, representing the Minoan "Mother Goddess" accompanied by her "lion supporters" and standing on top of a pile of stones which could stand for "her holy mountain Juktas," but which could also be interpreted as a mere cairn.⁵⁰ On a sealing from Knossos we have a cairn made up of rocks flanked by two lions and placed on top of an architrave supported by two columns.⁵¹

On another Late Helladic ring from the Vapheio Tomb we have, I believe, an additional example of such a mound-altar (Pl. VII, 5). The central elements of the religious scene depicted on that gold signet ring are a male and a female figure on a rocky height. They are

⁴⁶ *BSA* 8 (1901-1902), 297 ff., pl. 18.

⁴⁷ Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 537 and again 537 suggests that "the duplication of the double axe . . . suggests that joint cult of a god and a goddess." Two pairs of horns are depicted on the sarcophagi of Haghia Triada and of Palaikastro, on the *larnax* from Episkopi (Deltion 6 (1921), Parartema, 158 and fig. 5), on the gold shrines with doves from the third and fourth shaft graves of Mycenae (Karo, *op. cit.*, plates xviii 242-244 and xxvii, 26), on the gold signet ring from Mycenae now in Berlin ("Tree and Pillar Cult" 190 and fig. 64), on the sealing from Mycenae with the sacred column (*BSA* 24 (1919-21), 205, fig. 1), etc.

⁴⁸ Cf. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 98-102.

⁴⁹ Evans, "Tree and Pillar Cult," 117 and fig. 12.

⁵⁰ Evans, *Palace of Minos*, vol. 2, 808-809, fig. 528.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 608, fig. 597 A, i. See also, vol. 2, 524, fig. 327.

placed beneath the overhanging branches of a tree at the foot of which appears an element which has been variously interpreted. Tsountas, who discovered the ring and was the first to describe the scene,⁵² compares it with a long vase. Evans, objecting to Tsountas's comparison, is inclined to believe "that the object below (the tree), though certainly tub-like is a somewhat thick column."⁵³ Nilsson calls it "an undefinable construction."⁵⁴ A comparison of this element with such elements on other minor works of art depicting columns, vases, boulders, and the like, proves that it is different from all such representations.⁵⁵ It seems to us that it does represent a mound of earth, a mound altar. To the right of the figures a Mycenaean shield and perhaps a cuirass are represented,⁵⁶ while above a double axe and two more objects, one of which seems to be a *chrysalis* and the other a bough, are represented floating in the air. According to Sir Arthur Evans the scene depicts a "divine communion" during which a "female figure, probably a votary, partakes of the fruit of a sacred tree, which inspires her with ecstatic frenzy";⁵⁷ a scene in which "a male figure . . . is seen in an energetic attitude either plucking the fruit for the goddess from her own tree or pulling down the branch for her to gather it from."⁵⁸ But perhaps a simpler and a less involved interpretation may be nearer to the truth. We believe that the scene depicts a ritualistic dance performed by two dancers, by a man and a woman, before a mound-altar, by the side of which is to be seen a tree, perhaps standing for the sacred grove. The more energetic attitude of the man and the more measured stance of the woman and

⁵² *Ephemeris*, 1890, 170, pl. 10, 39.

⁵³ "Tree and Pillar Cult," 177 and foot-note 1. *Palace of Minos*, vol. 3, 142. foot-note 1.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, 237.

⁵⁵ For columns see the "religious scene on the gold signet ring from Mycenae" illustrated by Evans, "Tree and Pillar Cult," 177, fig. 53. For a certain example of a pithos cf. Evans, *Palace of Minos*, vol. 2, 842 and fig. 558. Persson in his most recent study on *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times* (Berkeley, 1942), 35, has maintained that the element in question is a pithos and that the scene is a burial scene; but I believe that his interpretation is not correct. Since his book appeared long after our study had been completed, we shall have to prove our belief at some future time. For boulders see the design on the "ring of Minos," *Palace of Minos*, vol. 4, 950 and fig. 917 or even the design on the same ring from Vapheio.

⁵⁶ Nilsson, *op. cit.*, 236. Evans recognized in it first "a small female figure . . . prostrate on a large Mycenaean shield" ("Tree and Pillar Cult," 179); then a "sacred knot" (*Palace of Minos*, vol. 1, 432); then again (*Palace of Minos*, vol. 3, 140-142) "a small female figure prostrate as if in an entranced attitude." Tsountas described it as "an object like an insect" (*Ephemeris* 1890, 170); Max Meyer as a helmet with a high crest (*Fahrbuch*, 1892, 189).

⁵⁷ *Palace of Minos*, vol. 1, 432.

⁵⁸ "Tree and Pillar Cult," 177.

even their gestures recall very strongly modern Greek dancers.⁵⁹ The man has laid aside his armor to be freer in his dancing movements. The scene is staged on a height, indicated by the stony ground on which the man is stepping, where the mound is located. The shrine is in many respects similar to our Lykaian altar and the design on the ring depicts a scene which must have occurred often in front of that altar in primitive days. Before we end our discussion of the mound-altar we may add our belief that Cook is right when he maintains that out of such mounds, and perhaps out of the Lykaian mound, the Delphic omphalos was developed.⁶⁰ Certainly the mound on the Vapheio ring resembles such an omphalos.

It is rather interesting to see how all the units which went to make the unusual Lykaian altar find their close parallels in Mycenaean and Minoan practices. This correspondence seems to strengthen the conclusion which we want to suggest, viz., that the Lykaian altar developed out of a primitive shrine existing on that peak in prehistoric times. The Indo-European Greek masters of Arkadia identified their supreme god with the Divinity worshipped on that mountain top by their predecessors and placed the altar of that divinity with its units in the service of their Zeus.⁶¹ In the Lykaian altar, therefore, we have a primitive, perhaps even a pre-Mycenaean, shrine which survived into the Historic Period. In that altar, come down from very old days, Zeus, the heir to the primitive god revered on the Lykaian mountain top from times immemorial, was worshipped with rites which were rather strange for the Greeks.⁶²

In closing we may turn our attention to the Lykaian eagles. Zeus hurling the thunderbolt and upholding an eagle on his outstretched left hand, is represented in the statuettes discovered in the debris of his altar. This type of Zeus became very popular in the Archaic and the Transitional Periods. In our study of the "Artemision Zeus"⁶³ we

⁵⁹ When they dance in pairs. I do not think that the man is "plucking the fruit" or "pulling down the branches." The position of the tree is determined by the ground to be decorated and by the laws of the primitive perspective (?) followed by the Cretan artists.

⁶⁰ Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 187. The two eagles of Delphoi mentioned by Pindar (*Pythian*, 4, 6 ff.) and represented in art objects (cp. Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, figs. 124-126) along with the omphalos, were directly derived perhaps from the Lykaian twin eagles. Of course C. Boetticher in his monograph "Der Omphalos des Zeus zu Delphi" in *Winckelmannsfest- Progr.* 19 (Berlin, 1859) 1-17, reached the conclusion that the omphalos belonged to Zeus originally.

⁶¹ See Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 45-50 and 187. Sir Arthur Evans, "Tree and Pillar Cult," 127 and 173.

⁶² Such as the human sacrifice reputed to have been held at the altar.

⁶³ To be published in the *American Journal of Archaeology*. For an abstract cf. *AJA* 45 (1941), 90-91.

pointed out that this type of Zeus with the eagle was probably developed in the south, while in the north a type of Zeus hurling the thunderbolt, but without the eagle, was prevalent. Now we want to add that it is possible to maintain that the type of Zeus with the eagle developed in the district of the Lykaian altar. When we bear in mind, (1) that the Lykaian eagles are perhaps the descendents of prehistoric-Mycenaean ancestors; (2) that the tradition of the eagle in association with a god was deeply rooted in that district, going back to prehistoric times; (3) that the eagles perhaps originally marked the epiphany of the god;⁶⁴ (4) that because of their strength, size and majestic appearance they could be easily associated with the supreme God of the Greeks; and (5) that in accordance with the "law of religious development" propounded by Usener the prehistoric "Augenblicksgötter" gradually became the attributes of a "persönlicher Gott"; when we have all these in mind, we can safely conclude that in the district of the Lykaian altar was developed the type of Zeus with the eagle. From there it spread to the rest of Greece and especially to the Peloponnesos and Olympia where it became so popular.

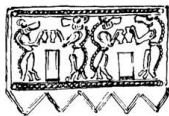
⁶⁴ Cf. Cook, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, 45-50 and 187. Elderkin in his study of the "Bronze statuette of Zeus Keraunios" (*AJA* 44 (1940) 225-233) remarked: "if the earliest temples of Zeus had in their eastern gables the figure of an eagle, then *ἀετός*, the word for gable, is readily explained" (230, foot-note 11). In support of this, he refers to Reinach who thinks that "an eagle fastened in a gable to protect the temple against lightning was responsible for the Greek word for gable." In this connection we may recall Pindar's passage in his Olympian Ode 13, 21-22"

"ἡ θεῶν ναοῖσιν οἰωνῶν βασιλέα διδυμον|ἐπίθηκε,"

which seems to echo an old tradition and seems to indicate that such eagles were fastened in the gables of temples and consequently they could have contributed the name. (See especially the scholium on the passage, and compare with Bekker *Anect.* 348, 3: "ἀετοῦ μιμῆται σχῆμα ἀποτετακός τὰ πτερά.") Further, that the eagles originally stood for the epiphany of the god, a belief which seems to have been prevalent in the Peloponnesos in Mycenaean times.



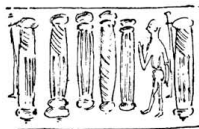
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PLATE VII—FIGURES ON TWO GLASS PLAQUES FROM TOMBS OF THE LOWER TOWN OF MYCENAE

CLASSICAL STUDIES

IN HONOR OF
WILLIAM ABBOTT OLDFATHER

*Presented by a committee of his
former students and colleagues*



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