

REMAINS OF TOMBS IN PALESTINE.

BY CAPTAIN C. W. WILSON, R.E.

ANCIENT tombs are thickly scattered over the whole of Palestine, especially near those places where there are traces of the site of a town or village; measurements were made of several, and as they vary considerably in arrangement and construction, a general description of them under three heads of "Rock-hewn Tombs," "Masonry Tombs," and "Sarcophagi," with notes on the most remarkable, may be of use to future investigators.

In the following remarks the term "loculus" is always applied to the actual resting-place of the body; a "sunk loculus" is an excavation made in the surface of the rock much after the manner of a modern grave, whilst a "deep loculus" is an excavation driven into the face of the rock like a small tunnel or pigeon-hole.

Rock-hewn Tombs.—These appear to be the earliest in date, and are the tombs most commonly met with; the softer strata of limestone, especially the white chalk in some districts, are well adapted for sepulchral excavations, and it is only in a few places, such as Tel Hum and Kerazeh, where the formation is hard basalt, that this description of tomb is not found, the labour and expense of making them having probably led the inhabitants to adopt a different mode of burial.

The simplest form of tomb is that in which a grave-shaped loculus has been sunk in the rock, and a reveal cut round its mouth to receive a covering slab, which in some instances is flush with the surface of the rock, and in others raised above it and ornamented in the same way as the lid of a sarcophagus. Examples of this kind were found at Kedes, Khurbet Khureibeh above Khan Minyeh, Yarun, Iksal, near Nablus, and near the Tombs of the Kings at Jerusalem, at which latter place the covering slabs are placed almost immediately above the body, the remainder of the loculus being apparently filled up with earth or used for a second interment. (See Fig. 1.)

At Meiron there is a slightly altered form of the same kind of tomb, an arched recess being cut in the face of the rock and the loculus "sunk" beneath it; several of these are for children of all sizes, from that of an infant upwards, and both those for adults and young have a small raised bench at one end to support the head. At this place as well as a few others, a slight economy of labour is shown in making the arched recess in the rock deep enough to allow of two loculi being "sunk" side by side, with a thin partition between them, but covered by one slab let into a reveal. (See Fig. 2.)

Another simple kind of tomb found in many places is that in which a single "deep" loculus is cut in the face of the rock, and its mouth closed by a rough stone slab. (See Fig. 3.)

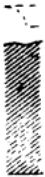
The most common description of tomb is that in which a number of "deep" loculi are grouped together in one or more chambers of the same excavation, and they may, for clearness, be divided into three classes.

Before commencing an account of them it may be as well to mention that no approximation to their relative age can be made from the shape of the loculi or chambers; some have circular heads, some square, and in the tombs at Seilun, which may be supposed to be as old as any, circular and square headed loculi are found in the same chamber, and so also of the chambers themselves where there are more than one in the same tomb.

The first class of these excavations met with in all parts of the country is that in which a natural cavern in one of the softer strata of limestone has been made use of; "deep" loculi are cut in its sides, with their beds on a level with the ground, and their mouths closed by rough stone slabs, resting against the face of the rock, or fitting into the openings without a reveal; in these cases no arrangement is made for closing the entrances of the caverns.

In the second class, also found everywhere, a square or oblong chamber is cut in the rock, and "deep" loculi are ranged along its sides, their mouths closed by neatly-dressed stone slabs fitting closely into reveals made to receive them; the entrance to the chamber is by a low square opening fitted with a slab in the same manner, or with a stone door turning on a socket hinge, and secured by bolts on the inside. In this kind of tomb there is usually a bench running in front of the loculi, and elevated from 1ft. 6in. to 3ft. above the floor of the excavation. At Kedes there is a variety of this form in which arched recesses are excavated in the sides, each large enough to contain two "sunk" loculi. Some tombs were found on Mount Ebal which had no loculi, but simply stone benches running round the sides, on which the bodies may have been laid; in the floor of these, however, there is often the mouth of a shaft which possibly leads to lower chambers, but they were full of water and could not be explored. In the same place there are also a few tombs in which benches have been left along the sides of the excavation, and loculi "sunk" in them.

The third class is that in which one entrance leads into a number of sepulchral chambers, each containing several loculi. These tombs generally have a sort of porch or vestibule hewn in the rock, in many cases, as at Jerusalem, Tibneh, and Abud, having the front of the roof supported by pillars of natural rock, which are surmounted by a frieze invariably of a debased Doric character; the spaces between the triglyphs are ornamented with floral devices, wreaths, or bunches of grapes. (See Photographs 108, 109, 141, 143, 149, 151, of the series taken for the Palestine Exploration Society.) From the porch a low door leads into an ante-chamber, with or without tombs, from which access is obtained to the tomb chambers, all of which have raised benches running in front of the loculi; the entrances to many of these chambers are ingeniously concealed, sometimes being at the end of a loculus, as at Tibneh and Jerusalem, at others in the bed of a loculus or the floor of a chamber, as at the Tombs of the Kings, and those of



the Judges at Jerusalem. Some of the chambers, instead of loculi, have arched recesses cut in their sides, on the bottom of which the body was laid either with or without a sarcophagus. At Um Keis the entrances to the tombs are closed by stone doors turning on socket hinges, but the usual method is a stone slab fitted in the manner described above. At Abud there are remains of painting, and on the sides of the porches traces of plaster. It seems to have been the object to make the chambers as nearly as possible square or rectangular, but very few of them were found to be quite true, and the sizes of the loculi and distances between them are also variable, though not to any great extent; the excavations have been made with much care and skill, a few inches being often all that is left between the ends of the loculi in different chambers.

The most remarkable of the large tombs are at Tibneh and Jerusalem. In the so-called tomb of Joshua (Photograph 108), at the former place, after passing through a chamber with fourteen loculi, a smaller one is reached which has only one loculus at its extreme end, an arrangement not noticed elsewhere; the face and sides of the porch are nearly covered with niches for lamps, and round the door are traces of plaster; some excavations were made, but none of the fragments of coarse mosaic mentioned by Monsieur de Saulcy were seen. Several tombs were opened at Tibneh, and numerous remains, including one female skeleton, found, but they appeared to be later burials, and the tombs had been previously rifled; in one there was a chamber with a simple bench running round it, on which the bodies seem to have been laid, as there was a thick deposit of bones. The Tombs of the Kings near Jerusalem is the best finished and most extensive of the catacombs (see Plate XXV. to notes on Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem); the entrance is by a low door, closed by a circular stone running in a passage which was formerly covered by a slab, but is now open; in the interior there is a large ante-chamber without loculi, from which openings, at one time closed by stone doors on socket hinges, lead off to the tomb chambers. Many of the loculi have small rectangular excavations attached to them, which are supposed to have been for treasure, and they have also channels cut lengthwise in their beds, the use of which is not very clear; in several of the chambers there are arched recesses for sarcophagi or bodies, and there are also rooms at a lower level, the entrances to which have been carefully concealed. At the Tombs of the Judges the loculi are arranged in two tiers one above the other, the lower row running in on a level with the floor, the upper from the back of an arched recess, and there is a lower chamber which has never been finished, where the mode of excavation is clearly seen. At the Tombs of the Prophets the passage is peculiarly arranged in a sort of semicircle, and the loculi are half sunk below the level of the floor, with fittings for a slab, as if they were intended for two bodies one above the other. There are many large tombs in the valley of Hinnom, each of which has some feature peculiar to itself, but the general arrangement is the

same in all; the most remarkable is one which appears to be early Christian: the roof is domed, and the loculi are sunk beneath recesses and in benches left along the sides. A large tomb has lately been discovered by Lieutenant Warren in the Kedron Valley, below Bir Eyub, and is figured in Plan No. 24 of the P. E. Fund. It is a good example of the larger kind of catacomb, but has no peculiar features such as those in the tombs noticed above. There are two tombs of great interest which hardly come under either of the above headings, that of Joseph and Nicodemus in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and that of St. John at Samaria; in the former, which is greatly mutilated, the beds of the loculi are not horizontal in the usual manner, but have a considerable slope down to the head, and there is a small chamber containing a loculus in the floor of the tomb; in the latter, the loculi, which are in two tiers of three each, are built entirely of masonry, and the walls of the chamber are so covered with plaster, that it is difficult to say what is rock. There are, however, some arched recesses similar to those often found in tombs, which may be part of the original excavation, if the place ever were a tomb, which there are some reasons for doubting.

The number of Rock-hewn Tombs seems hardly sufficient for a large population, but it was possibly the custom to use the same loculus for several burials, a second interment taking place when the body of the first had decomposed, which it would do very rapidly in the climate of Palestine, and the removal of the bones to one common receptacle may have been what is called "the gathering to the fathers;" it may also be suggested that whilst many of the highly-finished and ornamented tombs were for noble or princely families, some of the larger ones may have been public tombs for the poor or other classes of society, and perhaps provided by the government.

Masonry Tombs.—The Masonry Tombs are few in number, and confined to the northern portion of the country. At Kedes there is a building (Photograph 38, P. E. F.) 34ft. 4in. square, with a doorway on the southern side, which leads into a chamber on each side of which are three loculi, except on the south, where there are only two, one on each side of the entrance; in the corners are piers of solid masonry, and the spaces between them were covered with semicircular arches, portions of which on the north and east remain; the centre appears to have been domed. The masonry is of plain chiselled stones set without mortar in courses from 1ft. 10in. to 2ft. 3in. in height, and the mouldings are of a simple character and well cut; on the exterior near the door is a niche 5ft. 11in. high, and round the base of the whole building runs a plinth. The loculi have been used for interments at a comparatively recent period. (See Fig. 4.) At Tel Hum two masonry tombs were found; one is built below the level of the ground, of well-dressed limestone blocks brought from a distance and set without mortar; the loculi are in the sides of a broad passage which runs round three sides of a square, and is covered by a segmental arch, plastered to keep out

the damp; the ends are closed by a thick wall, through a hole in which an entrance was obtained, there being no regular doorway; on the surface of the ground above the tomb is a level platform of basalt, which seems to have been the base of a pyramid or some other monument. The loculi of the other tomb are of the same shape as "sunk loculi," and are ranged along two sides of a rectangular building standing above ground, the walls of which are of coursed basaltic rubble cemented inside and out, and at one time apparently whitewashed. (See Fig. 5.) It is possible that in places like Tel Hum, where the rock is so hard as to make excavation difficult, this form of tomb was commonly used, and it may be suggested whether the tombs in which the demoniac lived may not have been of this description; the only rock-hewn tombs seen near the Sea of Galilee were a few south of Tiberias, and some in the cliff on the eastern side of the lake, which were almost too far from the water to meet the requirements of the Bible narrative, where the meeting with the demoniac seems to have immediately followed the landing of our Saviour (Mark v. 2); the disappearance of a tomb of this sort is not at all surprising. At Ain Elibiáni there are the remains of a building over some rock-hewn tombs; the outside is decorated with pilasters, and the covering arch is segmental, but it is in such a ruined state little can be made out of it. At Malul, near Nazareth (see Fig. 6), the tomb is a chamber covered by a semicircular waggon vault, in the sides of which are four large loculi for sarcophagi; the present entrance is through one of these, the original door, which is at the eastern end of the building, being closed with masonry; the exterior is ornamented with half engaged columns, and on the northern side, which is best preserved, some of the pedestals can be seen resting on a sub-base, with a simple moulding; the masonry is of well-dressed stones set in a dark-coloured mortar of good quality; two Ionic capitals of coarse workmanship were found on the ground close by. The tomb is now used as a church by the native Christians. The tomb at Teyasir (Photograph 97) is square, and has four pilasters on each side; there are the remains of a moulded plinth, and the door is standing, but all above has been destroyed; in the corners are solid piers of masonry similar to those at Kedes, but there are no traces of loculi.

Sarcophagi.—Of the sarcophagi, those at Kedes are the most elaborately ornamented; not far from the masonry tomb described above, there is a very remarkable group, formerly elevated on a masonry platform, but now, with the exception of one, overturned. (See Photograph 40.) Some of these (see Figure No. 7) are made to contain two bodies laid in opposite directions, and at the bottoms of the loculi are small raised pillows to take the heads; the covers are pent shaped, and covered with a leaf-like ornament. (See Photograph 42.) The material out of which the sarcophagi are hewn is hard white limestone, almost marble, and the workmanship is excellent; the usual design on the sides is a garland held up in two or more loops by nude figures, with some

device over each bend, and a bunch of grapes hanging from the bottom. The ornament has been disfigured and worn away, so that it is difficult in many cases to see the design, but on one which was uncovered (see Photograph 47) the carving was sharp and good, though the faces and busts of the figures had been purposely mutilated; they consisted of a winged female figure with flowing drapery at each corner, and two figures on the sides holding up a garland, over which are a vase, flowers, &c., and from which hang bunches of grapes. On the end of the lid of one of these sarcophagi is a shield and sword (see Photograph 42), and on one seen in another part of the country are a shield and three javelins. A sarcophagus with three loculi, and a flight of steps leading up to it, was found by Lieutenant Anderson, R.E., on Tel Khurcibeh, near Kedes. At Um Keis there are a number of sarcophagi in good preservation, which appear to have been ranged in two rows, one on each side of a road leading out of the city, and it has been the fashion to make them of black basalt, which does not take nearly such a fine finish as the limestone, of which there is abundance around. They are all for single bodies, and the prevailing ornaments are garlands held up by nude figures, faces, bulls' heads, &c., with discs, flowers, busts of men, &c., over the loops; the absence of the scroll of vine leaves with grape pendants is very marked, and none of them can compare with those at Kedes for graceful design and delicate execution. At Kefr Kana, Nazareth, Sephuriyeh, and the villages round them, the sarcophagi invariably have a plain ornament. At Lydda some apparently Christian sarcophagi were found in a catacomb built of masonry, and on one was an inscription in Greek; all the lids had round tops, which, perhaps, shows a later date, as those at Kedes, Um Keis, and elsewhere, are always pent-shaped.

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KEFR KENNA.

BY THE REV. DR. ZELLER.

Situation :—Kefr-Kenna lies five miles N.E. of Nazareth on the direct road to the Sea of Galilee. It is bordered towards the west and north by the plain of Battauf. Its situation is particularly suitable, pretty and healthy, for the village lies on a hill gradually sloping down towards the west, so that the houses, built in terraces up the slope, receive the cool west wind which has through the plain of Battauf a free and strong current over the village. On the south the village is separated by a valley from the higher mountains (called Jebel Esseeh) separating it from Mount Tabor and the plain of Iesreel. At the south of the village is a copious fountain of excellent water. The present village contains about 200 houses, half of them belonging to Greek Christians, and the other half to Moslems. It covers only the