

SCIENCE

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THE ETRUSCAN-PELASGIAN PROBLEM.¹

IN the wavering twilight of the dawn of history a mysterious people is dimly discerned, occupying the peninsula of Greece, — the Pelasgians; and another, seen somewhat more clearly, owning or controlling the central districts of Italy, — the Etruscans.

Erudition has been exhausted with arguments as to the relationship of these peoples to others better known. Volumes have been written to prove them Aryans, Turanians, Semites, Egyptians, Iberians, Celts, and what not?

To both is assigned a singular degree of culture, and this with such certainty that we cannot deny that the mighty walls of Tiryns and Fiesole, the delicate gold-work from the tombs of Chiusi, and the exquisite alabasters from the cemeteries of Volterra, remain to us as achievements in art and architecture before which any thing accomplished in the same direction by Greek or Roman holds the second place.

Nor were the Etruscans, at least, an illiterate people, or negligent of the holy duty of setting down in permanent records the great and good deeds of the departed. They were indeed "most careful chief in that." Of the something more than six thousand inscriptions in their tongue and alphabet which we already have in hand, five-sixths of them are epitaphs or mortuary comments.

Yet with all this store of material, with many inscriptions bilingual, — Etruscan and Latin, — and with numerous descriptions in classic writers, we do not know, beyond peradventure, the meaning of a single word in the Etruscan language. What a fine field, therefore, for learned speculations!

Several such are before us. Dr. Hesselmeier, already favorably known from an earlier archæological study, "*Die Ursprünge der Stadt Pergamos*" (1885), offers his solution of the problem by identifying the Etruscans and Pelasgians as members of the same linguistic family, which family he very positively decides belonged neither to the Indo-Germanic (Aryan), nor Semitic nor Turanian, branches of the human species. Further than this negative position, he will not advance, and denies the possibility of so doing, with our present knowledge. His identification of the Pelasgians with the Etruscans rests chiefly on the famous "inscription of Lemnos," — an inscribed slab found on that island, undoubtedly Etruscan in origin, and dating from the sixth century B.C. Furthermore, a number of proper names, especially in the Ionian dialect of Greek, point, he contends, to an admixture of the language in early days with another of Etruscan character.

The most original part of Hesselmeier's study is his tracing the migrations of the Pelasgo-Etruscans. The trend he finds was certainly from west to east, and from the seacoast toward the interior. Their colonies reached the shores of

Asia Minor at a very early day, and their stations there led some of the Greek historians to believe the original home of the "Tyrrhenians" (as they were also called) was somewhere to the east. As Karl Otfried Müller has abundantly shown in his classical work, "*Die Etrusker*," the Etruscans themselves repudiated any such origin, and by their most ancient traditions claimed to have reached Italian soil by sea, from the south.

Although the leading German authorities wholly disregard this venerable legend, and insist that the ancestors of the Etruscans came across the Alps from some land to the north, an American scholar has recently insisted not less vigorously that the old legend is true, and has boldly connected it with a previously unthought-of origin of the Etruscans. As the result of his travels in ancient Numidia, now the French colony of Algiers, and ancient Etruria, the modern Tuscany, Dr. D. G. Brinton has developed the theory that the Etruscans were originally a Numidian or Libyan colony, allied in language to the ancestors of the modern Kabyles or Berbers, — a race who, at the dawn of history, occupied the whole of North Africa, from the Nile valley to the Atlantic Ocean.

His arguments, if not especially weighty on any one point, make amends by their diversity. They include the physical character, in reference to which he makes both Etruscans and Berbers tall and blond, to the confusion of our ordinary notions of both these peoples; their traditions; their political institutions; their culture; and, finally, their language. To the last named he gives particular attention, availing himself of the little-known Numidian inscriptions in the "tiffinagh" alphabet, dating from about 200 B.C. Perhaps the most striking of his identifications is his interpretation of the Etruscan name of Servius Tullius, — "Mas-tarna." This appears to be clearly Numidian, and to mean "great conqueror."

Although Dr. C. Pauli of Leipzig, without doubt the most eminent "Etruscologist" now living, has entirely abandoned the Aryan or Indo-Germanic relationship of the Etruscan language, yet in the last year this effete hypothesis has again been advanced, with new arguments. Dr. Bugge, a learned Norwegian, has developed a suggestion offered thirty years ago by the late Dr. Robert Ellis of London, that the Etruscan was an Armenian dialect; and the odd combination of the president of the Royal Society of Literature, Sir Patrick Colquhoun, and the Turkish governor-general of the Libanus, Pasco Wassa Pacha, have appeared jointly in favor of identifying the Pelasgians with the Illyrians, the ancestors of the modern Albanians, who are also a member of the Aryan, or, as Penka prefers to call it, the "Aryac" family.

From the agreeable variety of these various learned solutions of the problem, all coming out within a twelve-month, it is quite evident that there is abundant chance yet for the learned to sharpen their wits on this much-vexed question.

¹ Dr. ELLIS HESSELMAYER, *Die Pelasgerfrage und ihre Lösbarkeit* (Tübingen, 1890); Dr. SAPHUS BUGGE, *Etruscan and Armenian Researches in Comparative Language* (Christiania, 1890); Dr. D. G. BRINTON, *Etruscan and Libyan Names. A Comparative Study* (Philadelphia, 1890); Sir PATRICK COLQUHOUN and H. E. WASSA PACHA, "The Pelasgi and their Modern Descendants," 1891 (*Asiatic Quarterly Review*).

DR. DOREMUS has recently found, according to *The Engineering and Mining Journal* of Feb. 7, that sodium fluoride and other fluorides can be used with advantage for softening hard waters.