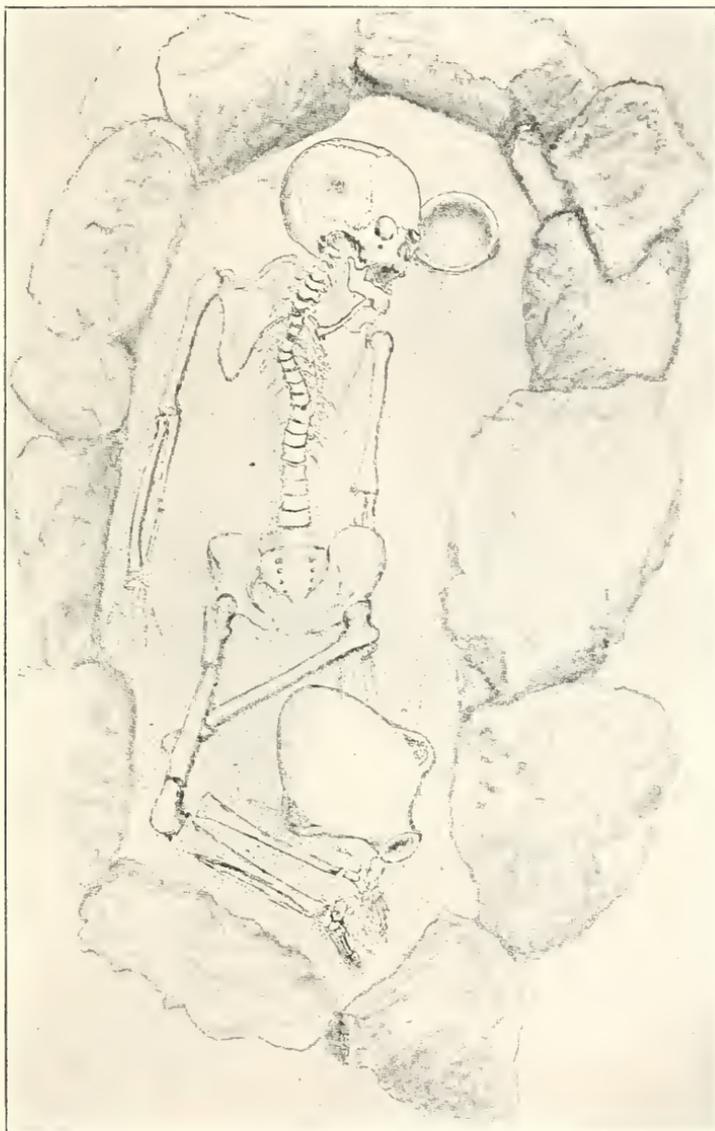


## FOUNDATIONS LAID IN HUMAN SACRIFICE.

BY THE EDITOR.

PERHAPS the most persistent among religious superstitions from the beginning of mankind down into so-called civilized ages, has been the custom of offering human sacrifices and burying them in the foundation stones of important buildings, especially in the fortifications of cities. It is difficult to explain the underlying idea with certainty since in all cases of superstitious practices which date back to a remote antiquity we have no historical information as to the original theory of the custom. We only know that it continued and that in later days different ideas prevailed. It is probable that the victim was a sacrifice offered to the deity, but we have also reason to assume that it was intended to serve as a guardian spirit who would protect the city from all harm.

In all these barbarous customs we must consider that the idea of killing a man, an infant, a woman, was not so terrible to the savage, for to him man's soul is immortal. He had not the slightest doubt that every being that died or was slain survived, and could at will put on another transfigured body, closely resembling his own. We might call it the dream-body, which was the figure in which he appeared to the survivors in dreams. This was supposed to move about as freely as we ourselves, and visit places at the most remote distances with unheard-of swiftness, and was not bound by the usual laws of gravity, or the rules of time and space. A person, whether infant or adult, that was sacrificed for some religious purpose was not supposed to be slain. He continued to live, and lived a kind of superior life, the life of a demi-god. He was transfigured into a spiritual presence that received divine honors, and so his condition was really envied. We may as well assume that originally the honor of being sacrificed was courted by many people, and the ghastly idea of the honor of such a death was absolutely present. But with the change of man's religious notions the prac-



HUMAN SACRIFICES UNDER THE FOUNDATION STONES OF GEZER.  
(Reproduced from the quarterly statements of the Palestine Exploration  
Fund, 1904, page 17.)

tice became more and more horrible and outrageous. People continued it because they considered it necessary. Their ancestors had done it to give stability to a building, and so the ceremony had to be done whatever might be the cost, and the further man grew away from his primitive barbarous ideas the more the victim shrank from it until finally he was forced to this unnatural death against his will.

Traces of burial alive have been found among all the nations of the earth without any exception, which indicates that the custom is as old as the art of architecture, and so under the most ancient buildings which date back to pre-Christian ages, we find some human skeleton embedded under the foundation stones. It seems that in the progress of civilization these horrible sacrifices were more and more discouraged because people may have felt instinctively that the custom was not right, and so the sacrifices which had been performed in ancient times were deemed to be sufficient even when fortifications were to be rebuilt. An exception was made, however, in case the city had been cursed in the name of the national deity. It was regarded as blasphemy to live in such a cursed city, for the man who dared to stay there disregarded the curse of his God. For instance, one of Job's friends, Eliphaz (Job xv. 28), counts it as one indication of a very reprobate man that he would live in such desolate cities. The curse pronounced on a conquered town which should remain destroyed forever, is recorded in Deut. xiii. 16, where we read: "It shall be an heap forever; it shall not be built again."

When Jericho was destroyed at the special command of God, all its inhabitants were slain, "both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and ass," with the sole exception of Rahab, who had betrayed the city into the hands of the enemies of her countrymen. And Joshua adjured the people, saying:

"Cursed be the man before the Lord that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it."

Jericho, however, was sure to be rebuilt sooner or later, for, being the key to Palestine, and commanding the entrance into the country from the desert routes, it was too important both for commercial and strategic purposes to be left in ruins; and the man who undertook the work was still superstitious and savage enough to heed Joshua's curse. We read in the first Book of Kings, with reference to the reign of Ahab (Chap. xvi. 34):

"In his days, Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid the foundation stones thereof in Abiram, his firstborn, and set up the gates

thereof in his youngest son, Segub, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Joshua, the son of Nun."

It appears that the curse of Joshua on the city of Jericho had reference only to the fortifications of Jericho and not to the town itself, which is an oasis and an important station for caravans. (2 Sam. x. 5). The rebuilding of the city took place under Ahab, who governed from 876 to 853 B. C.

Some archeologists believe that the idea of burying alive is due to the notion that the forces of nature, be they gods, demons, or giants, and later in their stead, the Devil, were supposed to possess the privilege of collecting rent from mankind. The spirit of the soil was supposed to be the landlord, to whom payment was to be made by an offering of human life. Grimm says (*Mythology*, p. 109):

"Frequently it was regarded as necessary to entomb within the foundation of a building living creatures and even men, an act which was regarded as a sacrifice to the soil which had to endure the weight of the structure. By this cruel custom people hoped to attain permanence and stability for great buildings."

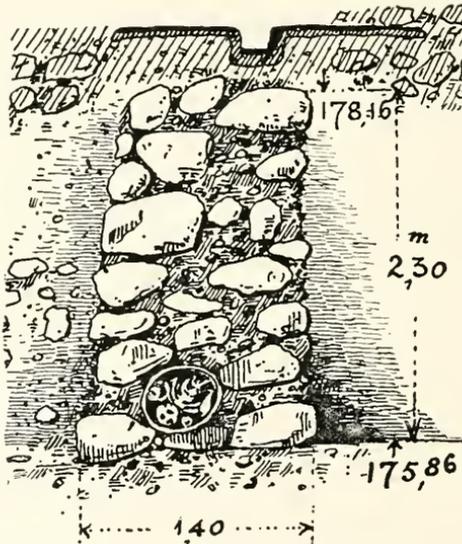
There are innumerable stories which preserve records of this barbaric custom, and there can be no doubt that many of them are historical and that the practice continued until comparatively recent time. We read in Thiele (*Dänische Volkssagen*, I, 3) that the walls of Copenhagen always sank down again and again, although they were constantly rebuilt, until the people took an innocent little girl, placed her on a chair before a table, gave her toys and sweets, and while she merrily played, twelve masons covered the vault and finished the wall, which since that time remained stable.

Scutari is said to have been built in a similar way. A ghost appeared while the fortress was in the process of building, and demanded that the wife of one of the three kings who should bring the food to the masons on the next day should be entombed in the foundation. Being a young mother, she was permitted to nurse her baby, and a hole was left for that purpose which was closed as soon as the child was weaned.

We read in F. Nork's *Sitten und Gebräuche* (*Das Kloster*, Vol. XII) that when in 1813 the ice broke the dam of the river Elbe and the engineers had great trouble in repairing it, an old man addressed the dike-inspector, saying: "You will never repair the dike unless you bury in it an innocent little child," and Grimm adduced even a more modern instance (*Sagen*, p. 1095) which dates from the year 1843. "When the new bridge in Halle was built," Grimm

tells us, "the people talked of a child which should be buried in its foundations."

So long did these superstitions continue after the cruel rite had been abandoned; and they were held, not only in spite of the higher morality which Christianity taught, but even in the name of Christianity. In Tommaseo's *Canti Popolari* an instance is quoted of the voice of an archangel from heaven bidding the builders of a wall entomb the wife of the architect in its foundation. The practice is here regarded as Christian and it is apparent that there are instances in which Christian authorities were sufficiently ignorant to sanction it, for even the erection of churches was supposed to re-

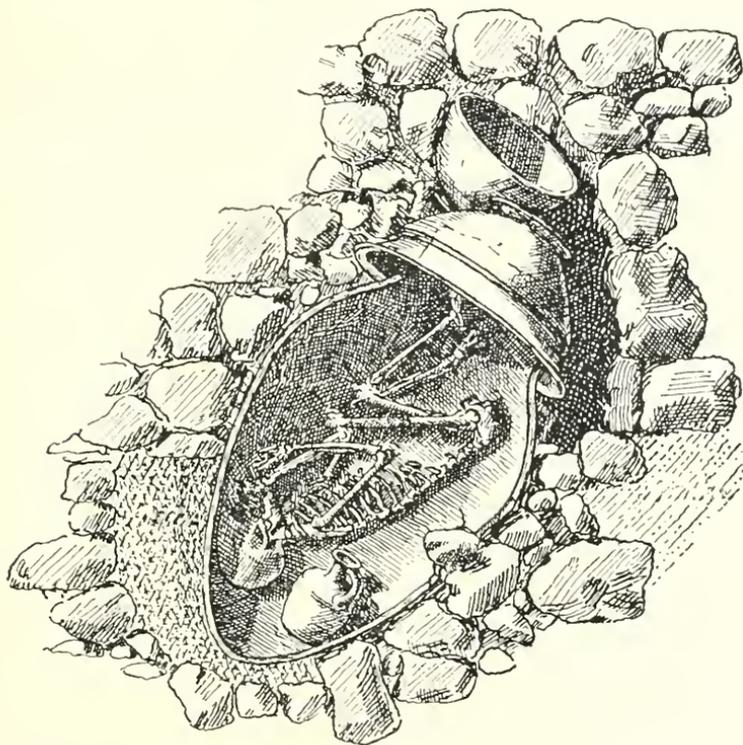


A TYPICAL TOMB IN THE INFANT CEMETERY OF MEGIDDO, PRESUMABLY AN OFFERING OF A FIRSTBORN.

quire the same cruel sacrifice; and there were cases in which, according to the special sanctity of the place, it was deemed necessary to bury a priest, because children and women were not regarded as sufficient. In Günther's *Sagenbuch des deutschen Volkes* (Vol. I, pp. 33 ff.) we read that the Strassburg cathedral required the sacrifice of two human lives, and that two brothers lie buried in its foundations.

The excavations in Palestine have brought to light such sacrifices in the foundation stones of ancient walls, and we here reproduce a drawing after Schumaker in his description of Tell el-Mutesellim. It is the site of the Biblical Megiddo where the fatal battle

with King Nechoh was fought in 609 B. C. in which King Josiah fell. In the foundations of a wall lying 2.30 meters under ground was found above the lowest layer of stones a jar 1.90 meters long and .40 in diameter, which was partly crushed by the second layer of stones. It contains the skeleton of a child and three clay vessels, presumably offerings made to the spirit of the victim, as it was customary even in the Middle Ages whenever persons were buried



HUMAN SACRIFICES BURIED IN THE FOUNDATION STONES OF A WALL OF THE ANCIENT MEGIDDO IN PALESTINE.

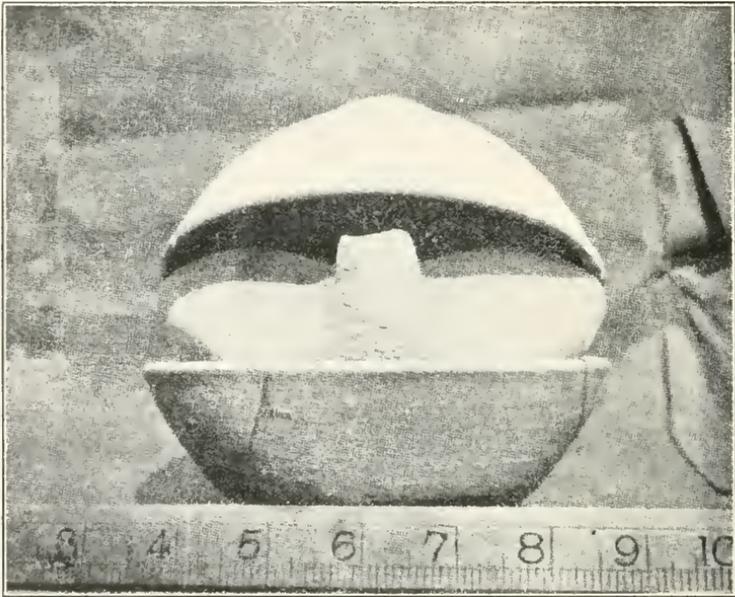
(After Schumaker's *Tell el-Mutesellim*, Vol. I, p. 25.)

alive, to give them rations of water and bread which were placed in their tomb. The top of the wall was covered by a carefully made layer containing a canal to draw off the water lest the foundation stones be washed away. In the same place at Megiddo a whole cemetery of infants has been discovered, and it is not impossible that we have here the horrible instance of the offering of the first-born, which is alluded to in Exod. xxii. 29: "Thou shalt not delay

to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give me."

The request of the firstborn as belonging to God is presupposed in Ex. xi. 4 ff., where Yahveh takes the firstborn of the Egyptians, and also in the story of Abraham's sacrifice, where the offering of Isaac, his firstborn, is not completed, but a ram is substituted (Gen. xxii).

In the progress of civilization, the horrible practice of human sacrifices was more and more abandoned, and substitutes were made.



DISH AND LAMP COVERED BY A LID FOUND IN GEZER UNDER THE FOUNDATION STONE OF A HOUSE AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR HUMAN SACRIFICES.

(Reproduced from the quarterly statements of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1903, page 205.)

first with animals and later with symbols. The excavators of the city of Gezer in Palestine have found human figures made of silver which are obviously a substitute for real human beings. They were embedded in the foundation stones in the same place where in more ancient times human skeletons were buried under the walls, in corner stones and under the gates. Not infrequently we find dishes and lamps which are placed in a curious way inside one another,

or side by side. We reproduce here one of these lamps encased in a dish.

Mr. Charles Hallock in his interesting book *Peerless Alaska*, speaks of the sacrifices which have been made even in our days among the Indians in these, our northern possessions. He says:

"Slaves are often killed at 'house-warmings,' one being placed under each of the corner uprights when the frame was raised, the ceremony being sometimes attended with the greatest cruelty. With a house of irregular foundation lines the sacrifice of life was great."

Even in Europe the custom of burying victims in the foundations of important buildings continued long after Christianity had been introduced. Not a few of the most important buildings, especially castles and fortifications, frequently prove to have remnants of unhappy victims under their corner stones. For instance the tradition is pretty well established that the foundations of the Kremlin, the imperial dwelling at Moscow, were laid in human sacrifices. Our frontispiece represents the barbarous act of starting the building of this great castle, and we see how the laborers have taken hold of a beautiful woman who is dragged to her tomb against her will. In the background stands the priest who is to bless the victim and to give her the comfort of the sacraments.

Gustave Freytag in his novel *The Lost Manuscript* mentions the old custom of burying offerings in the foundation stones of new structures (page 162). The hero of the novel, Professor Werner, searches for a lost copy of Tacitus and hopes to find it in the foundation walls, where they were marked by a slab of peculiar form and color. On the removal of this slab he discovers the bones of a dog, which goes far to prove that the building was very old, for it was an evidence that the man who built it still deemed it necessary to have a living being entombed there as a substitute for the ancient human sacrifice of primitive times.