

Birth.—Salt water is poured on a child when born, and it is then swaddled.

NOTE.—The rubbing with salt is a very old and widely observed custom.

Marriage.—The men at the age of sixteen, the women of fourteen. A few have more than one wife. The eldest son inherits two parts, the other sons one part; the daughters each a half part of property.

Burial.—All the law is read up to Deut. xxxii before leaving the house and the rest at the tomb. The family mourn seven days, during which the priests read the law in the room of the deceased. Both men and women follow the corpse to the grave. During the year after death the family visit the tomb once every month.

Genealogy.—They claim to possess the genealogy of the High Priests from Aaron to the present day.

Nothing new has yet been elicited concerning Samaritan literature beyond what is already well known to scholars.

Music.—They appear not to have any instrumental music.

There are many other answers which I have not yet been able to compare with the questions.

C. R. CONDER.

BOAT-SHAPED GRAVES OF SYRIA.

IN passing through the Anti-Lebanon District of Syria I noticed that at some of the villages the graves possessed the form of a boat or skiff. The fact appeared remarkable, in a district far away from the sea, away from navigable rivers, and among villagers whose daily occupation is not connected with boats at all. I asked myself what could be the intent of the boat, and after comparison with the graves at other villages I asked whether the prow and stern of a boat may not be represented in the head and foot stones of ordinary graves?

At Cairo I had noticed the tombs of the Mohammedans with two stelæ or upright stones towards the head and foot, though far from being uniformly *at* the head and foot. These are sometimes flat stones, but very commonly rounded, in either case tapering towards the bottom, while a turban or cap or other head-dress is carved on the top of the head-stone, to indicate the rank or class of the deceased. Such a grave is figured in Mr. Lane's "Modern Egyptians," p. 524. On the meaner tombs the upright stones are smaller, often roughly formed and almost shapeless; and are so far from looking like head and foot stones that inquiry was prompted as to their meaning. I was told that they represented the good and bad angels of the deceased. Probably the reference was to the two angels, *Munkar* and *Nekeer*, who are supposed to visit the dead person on the night following his burial, and examine him concerning his soundness in the faith.

Some weeks after being in Cairo I was with a party making the journey from Damascus to Baalbec. We rested for lunch at the fountain of Fijeh, where the main water of the Barada comes boiling out from a cave and forms at once a considerable torrent. The cave is surmounted and surrounded by Cyclopean masonry, which appears to be the remains of a temple, of unknown date and significance, but anterior to Roman or Greek. The interest of these remains may have diverted attention from other things in the neighbourhood, and I cannot find that Murray or Baedeker, or such a traveller as Dr. Tristram, have a word to say about the curious graves in the village. Throughout this stony district the graves are raised mounds, looking as though the body were placed, not *in* the ground but upon the surface, to save the trouble of excavation. But the graves at El Fijeh have the form of broad flat-bottomed boats. About a day's journey beyond this place, at the hamlet of 'Ain Hawar, I found the graves in the little cemetery still more remarkable in shape, for they are like long Egyptian boats carrying an ark of the dead, and ornamented with the sacred tree. Two-and-a-half hours further on, in the burial ground of the village of Yafueh, the graves are of simpler form, being built in three tiers, in the fashion of a step pyramid; and here my note, made on the spot, records my impression that while the upper tier *may* probably be representative of the ark, the head and foot-stones are almost certainly the conventional reproduction of the head and stern of the boat.

What first led these people in the Anti-Lebanon mountains to build their graves on the model of a boat? Captain Conder, in his "Syrian Stone Lore," reminds us that Sanchoniathon speaks of arks or ships borne in procession. He mentions also that the Phœnicians of Gebal used annually to observe a feast of floating papyrus arks on the river Adonis. A carnelian scarab found at Amrit, in Phœnicia, exhibits a ship with the sun above it, and letters which Perrot reads as Kheb, but which Conder would read Kher and regard as the Semitic spelling of Horus. Probably we must go to Egypt for the fullest light on this subject.

The ancient Egyptians carried a sacred boat in their funeral processions, and the ceremonies always included a voyage across a lake or across the Nile. Every large city, such as Thebes or Memphis, had its sacred lake, and there were lakes also for the Nomes or Departments. When the funeral procession arrived at the sacred lake, the coffin was placed on a *baris* or consecrated boat of the dead, such as is figured in Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson's "Ancient Egyptians." This was not because the lake lay in their way and must be crossed; for the funeral party appear to have returned by land, the distance round the side of the lake not being great. Nor was it a mere survival of ancient usage from the time when it had been necessary to cross the Nile to reach some burial ground on the other side. The carrying of a consecrated boat in the funeral procession was a practice which existed side by side with the actual crossing of the water when they came to it. The boat was symbolical; and the lake itself was symbolic, representing the water to be crossed by

the soul in the Underworld, in order to reach the abode of bliss. The boat of the sun descended into its nocturnal course at a cleft in the mountain near Abydos, and the soul of man would have to go the same way. There was a Lake Acherusia in the Lower World, midway between east and west we may suppose, and both the sun and the soul would have to cross it. This lake was localised near Memphis, in Egypt, and at several places in Greece.

The Greeks, we know, borrowed their religious system from Egypt ; and this portion of it was not left out. In the boat which was brought up to the lake side in the funeral ceremony in Egypt the boatman's name was Charon ; and both Charon and his boat were adopted by the Greeks for the conveyance of the shades of the dead across the River Styx in Hades.

On the side of a tomb at Pompeii is a curious bas-relief of a ship, the prow of which is of singular shape, and surmounted by a bust of Minerva. It has been maintained that it symbolises the arrival of the tossed ship of life in a quiet haven ; and in support of this opinion Breton adduces several instances of the allegorical introduction of a ship in funeral monuments.¹ In the *Ceramicon* at Athens—a cemetery which has been buried for centuries, like Herculaneum and Pompeii, and only recently dug out—I noticed a tomb on which Charon and his boat are sculptured, while survivors are taking leave of their departing friend. And in the cathedral at Athens, one of the most beautiful of the recent monuments has a boat carved upon it as its chief feature. Captain Conder also tells us that in February, 1882, he saw symbolic ships carried through the streets of Constantinople to be floated in the Bosphorus.

Considering all these facts, we can hardly doubt that the boat-shaped graves of Syria are symbolical of the soul's voyage in the Underworld, and are reproduced by traditional custom in perpetuation of a practice which appears to have originated with the ancient Egyptians. The like may be said for the old Scandinavian custom of burying the dead in boats ; it was doubtless connected with their belief in Odin's golden ship, which conveyed the souls of slain heroes to Valhalla.

A word finally about the head stones and foot stones of modern graves. In the consecrated boat of the Egyptians there stood behind the hearse the images of Isis and Nephthys, emblems of the Beginning and the End, who were thought to be always present at the head and feet of the dead who had led a virtuous life, and who were deemed worthy of admission into the regions of the blessed. These might afford a plausible origin for the two upright stones on a Mohammedan tomb ; but for those in Syria and elsewhere I am inclined to think that the prow and poop of a sacred boat of the dead are not unlikely to have formed the first models.

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¹ Dyer's Pompeii.