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FEATURE SECTION
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IN THE TEMPLE OF MOLOCH THE "EATER" OF LITTLE CHILDREN

Ruins of the Altars of the Phoenicians' Cruel God Found by the Italians in Conquered Tripoli.

Mask Worn by a Priest of Moloch.

NOW that the Italians have occupied Tripoli, we may expect to see many interesting remains of the remarkable civilization of ancient Carthage brought to light.

The city of Carthage itself lay in what is now French Northern Africa, and its site is occupied by the modern city of Tunis. But the Carthaginian Empire at one time included nearly the whole of Africa lying on the Mediterranean and extended eastward through the territory now acquired by Italy to the borders of Egypt.

An extraordinary feature of life in ancient Carthage was the worship of Moloch, the hideous divinity to whom little children were sacrificed. The god was represented by a seated figure of frightful aspect with a bull's head. In its interior was a furnace and in its breast bronze doors.

On ceremonial days the furnace was lighted and the doors opened. After long prayers the priest took one child after another and cast it though the bronze doors into the furnace, while the people prostrated themselves in awe before the dreadful god, who could only be appeased by human sacrifice.

There is evidence that the worship of Moloch prevailed to a frightful extent in Carthage and other Carthaginian cities. The country was nearly stripped of children through this form of sacrifice, and hence it was necessary to capture slaves from all parts of the world to make up the laboring population. Owing to peculiar circumstances very little can be recovered from Carthage, but in the many Carthaginian cities situated in Tripoli there are undoubtedly vast remains of the worship of Moloch and the Carthaginian civilization.

Italian archaeologists have already gone to Tripoli and have started work on the site of Philaeni, which was one of the most important of the later Carthaginian cities. Although they have examined only a very small area, they have discovered the foundations of a temple, with the remains of a furnace, which was evidently used in the worship of Moloch. Twenty feet away from the furnace are chambers containing large quantities of charred bones, relics of the dreadful cult.

The Carthaginians belonged to the Phoenician race, who occupied Tyre and Sidon, on the coast north of Palestine. The ancient Israelites frequently sinned by sacrificing to Moloch. Their prophets and leaders constantly warn them against this sin in the Bible. Solomon erected an altar to Moloch on the Mount of Olives, and under Ahaz and Manasseh children fed the fire of the idol at Tophet, in the Valley of Hinnom.

The Phoenicians were the greatest traders in the ancient world before the Romans rose to supreme power. A Phoenician colony founded Carthage and eventually spread along the northern coast of Africa from Gibraltar to Egypt. Settlements were made on the coast of nearly every European country, and there were several even as far away as Britain.

The Romans, growing jealous of Carthage, deliberately planned to destroy it. They succeeded in their third war against the Carthaginians, which came to an end in 146 B. C. The Romans then burnt Carthage and passed the ploughshare over the ruins.

Later a Roman city was built in its place. The worship of Moloch, doubtless brought in from other Carthaginian settlements, reached an alarming development in the new city, and it was suppressed by the Emperor Tiberius about the year 20 A.D.

After the fall of the Roman Empire Carthage fell into a state of ruin. During the Middle Ages the Italian architects used the city, which is a very short distance from Italy, as a stone quarry. They carried away remains of Carthaginian and Roman times indiscriminately. Hence it happens that very little is left of what was the leading city of the world before Rome won the first place. A settlement of mixed Oriental population now occupies the site.

The remains of Carthage that still exists lie in the suburbs, or far outside the city. On the lagoon of Tunis, several miles from the ancient city, are traces of a vast cemetery, where the ancient Carthaginians buried their dead. They did not permit gravestones to be erected within sight of their dwellings. Why a people who were accustomed to sacrifice little children should have objected so strongly to the sight of ordinary graves is a peculiarity not yet explained.

In the cemeteries of Carthage are unnumbered urns and little coffins of stone, containing calcined and broken bones, the remains of the human victims, which the Carthaginians were in the habit of offering to the god Moloch.

On certain days the hideous god received into its brazen, burning breast from two to three hundred children of the noblest families of Carthage, the mothers being forced to look at these odious sacrifices without shedding a tear.

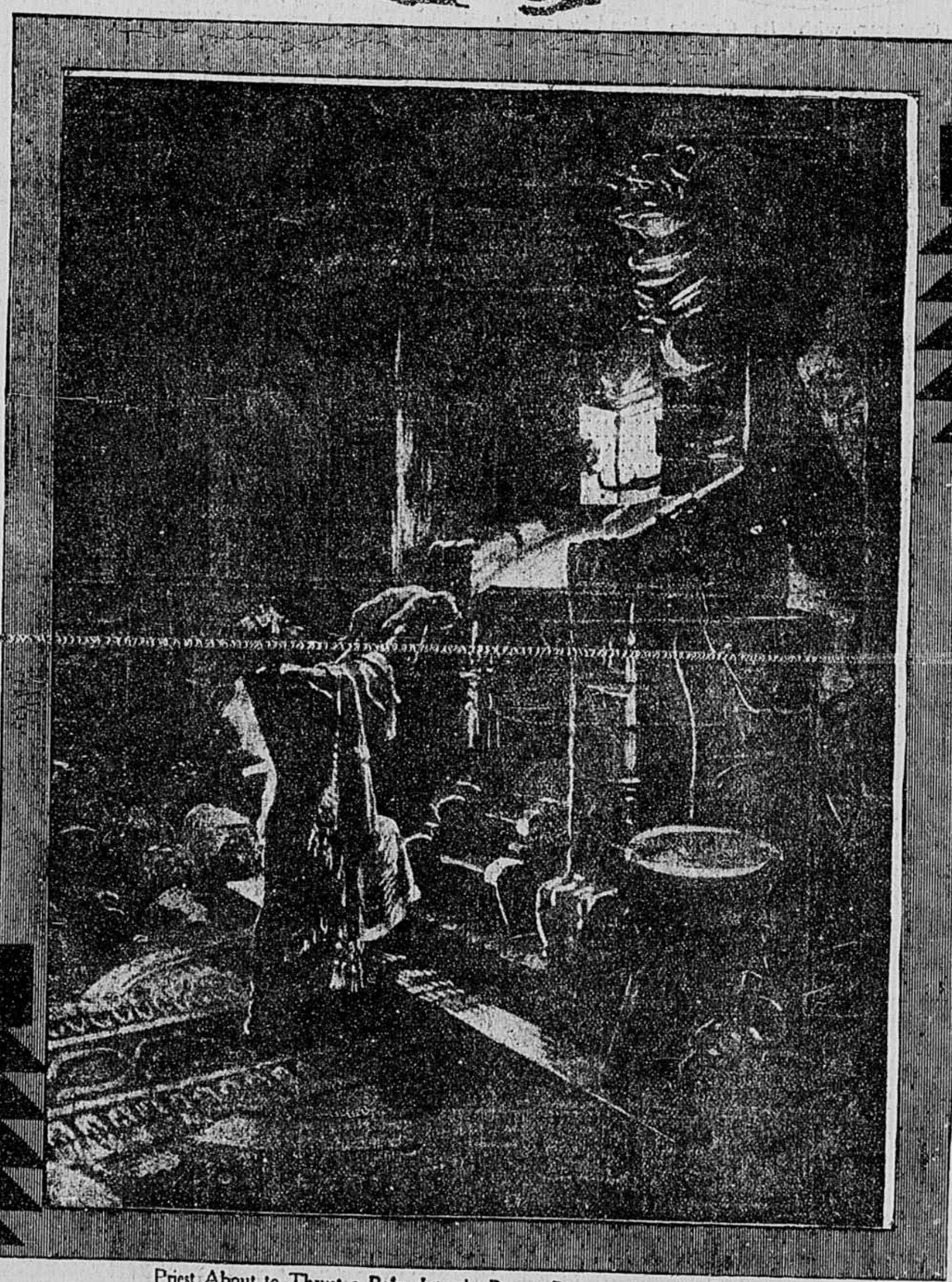
A curious fact is that the sea in the vicinity of Tunis regularly casts up little pieces of gold and jewelry. This evidently indicates that the richest part of ancient Carthage now lies beneath the sea.

"Every Winter," writes Father Delattre, a noted investigator of Carthaginian civilization, "when in the rough weather the waves break with violence, stirring and washing up the sand on certain parts of the coast, a sifting takes place which brings to the surface minute particles of gold.

"I have succeeded in gathering up as much as nineteen or twenty grammes—a sufficient quantity to confirm the reality of the fact which has been stated. The gold is of a very fine yellow. Curious to relate, this gold is not met with in the form of dust; it is, in fact, composed of the minute debris of trinkets.

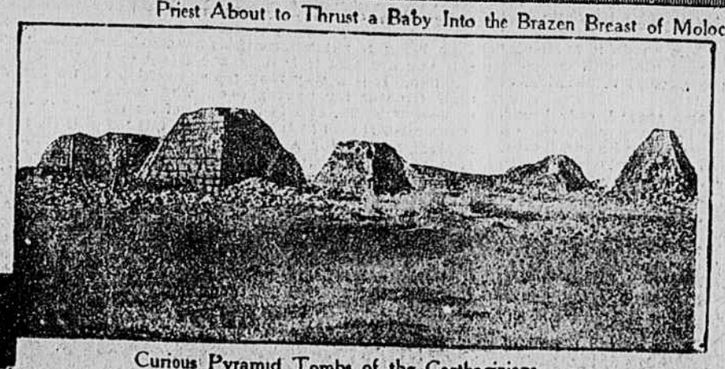
"The quantity of gold which I have gathered represents nearly three hundred fragments. The scraps which preserve a characteristic form are globules, bits of filigree, twisted fringe, small rosettes, sockets, decorated links, wrought wires, inlaid or openwork pieces, one of these being fashioned in the form of a rectangular cartouche.

"In all of this there is not the shadow of a grain of natural gold dust. That is not to say that the sand does not actually contain any; but the gold which we have gathered is worked gold."



Priest About to Thrust a Baby Into the Brazen Breast of Moloch. Painting by Andre Castaigne.

Excavations by the Italians in Ancient Carthaginian Territory.



Curious Pyramid Tombs of the Carthaginians.