



2. MODERN LOOM IN THE VILLAGE OF MAHARRAQA, LISHT.

LOOM WEIGHTS IN EGYPT.

MR. WINLOCK'S discovery of a model weaving shop in the XIth dynasty tomb of Mehenkwtre' at Thebes has caused a great revival of interest in the subject of ancient Egyptian looms.¹ Those in the model are horizontal ones, and so far bear out the evidence of tomb paintings that the looms of the Middle Kingdom were horizontal, and those of the Empire vertical. In a country like Egypt, however, in which all artistic expression was bounded and restricted by convention, it is dangerous to generalise from the evidence of tomb models and paintings alone, and it is by no means safe to assume that vertical looms were unknown in the Middle Kingdom, or, as Mr. Ling Roth inclines to do,² that in the Empire they replaced horizontal looms as a result of Asiatic influence. The simple form of loom represented in the model and in the tomb paintings could be used with equal facility in either position, and it would be more natural to suppose that under some circumstances a vertical adjustment would be found more practicable. That is as may be. In any case it is quite certain that the conventionalised tomb paintings are very far from giving us a complete picture of the knowledge of weaving that the artist must have had, for in none of them is there any suggestion of a weighted loom, and weighted looms the Egyptians certainly had.

Egyptologists have been strangely diffident about the loom weights that have been found in Egypt; almost apologetic, as though the weights were objects that had no right to be there, and were for that reason to be ignored or explained away.³ Why should we take up this attitude? We are all of us much too ready to assume that what we do not know cannot exist, and to affix a "foreign importation" label to anything that we do not much like the look of. As a matter of fact, warp weights are by no means uncommon in Egypt. I find them by the dozen in the ancient town of Lisht (Empire Period)—of mud, like the Kahun example, and also of stone—and there is no possible reason for doubt that they are Egyptian articles. Samples of both types are shown in Fig. I.



I. MUD AND STONE LOOM WEIGHTS, LISHT.

¹ See *Metropolitan Museum Bulletin*, December, 1920, Part II; and the articles in *ANCIENT EGYPT*, 1921, IV, by Ling Roth and Crowfoot.

² "Studies in Primitive Looms," *R.A.I. Journal*, XLVIII, p. 141.

³ As an example we may quote the mud warp weight from Kahun in the Manchester University Museum, which Dr. Hall decided "was probably found in the ruins of houses where Aegean pottery was found," and hence was "probably a temporary warp weight of these people, and not an Egyptian article." (Ling Roth, "Ancient Egyptian and Greek Looms," p. 17.)

The Egyptians must then have used weighted looms. The question is, what form did these looms take? The most natural supposition would be that they belonged to the so-called "Greek" type, an upright loom with a single beam, the place of the second beam being taken by a series of hanging weights. There is another way, however, in which weights can be used, and one more easily adapted to the ordinary Egyptian two-beam looms. This is in Fig. 2 (frontispiece), which represents a loom in use to-day in the village of Maharraqa, close to the southern Lisht pyramid. It is a pit treadle loom, in which the warp threads, instead of being attached to the warp beam, are carried under a roller, then diagonally upwards to another roller, over which they are bunched and kept taut by means of heavy stone weights. The same principle is adopted in Syrian looms, but with a difference, the bunched warp threads in this case being carried back and suspended over the head of the weaver (see diagram in Ling Roth's *Ancient Egyptian and Greek Looms*, p. 39).

Now this is a much more practical form of loom than the upright "Greek" variety, and, as we said before, one much more likely to be adapted to the existing Egyptian type. The system of suspension weights would apply equally well to a simple form of loom, such as the ancient one must have been, and I think it more than likely that the weights which turn up in our excavations were so used. Indeed, it is quite possible that the modern loom is but a development from a form that has persisted in the district since ancient times. Such survivals are common enough, as every digger knows, and the excavation of the ancient town site of Lisht has furnished us with a number of other very striking examples.

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