

TREASURES OF LAKE NEMI

Bronzes from the Sunken Galleys Now Nearly Two Thousand Years Old to Be Brought to America to Enrich the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The acquisition by the Metropolitan Museum of Art of the so-called "Treasure of Lake Nemi" will bring to New York city a collection of archaeological monuments of great artistic value that cannot be duplicated, unless it be by further finds in the same place. It consists of ornaments and fragments of Roman vessels that are surely 1,800 years old and very possibly two or more centuries older still.

The relics were procured from the bottom of the lake nine years ago by Signor Eliseo Borghi, an Italian archaeologist, who was working on his own account with no assistance from the government. His discoveries made a great sensation and some account of them appeared in the newspapers at the time. The immediate effect of publication was to make the Italian government step in and interfere with all further investigation.

Nemi is a picturesque little town in the Alban hills, twenty miles out of Rome, familiar to all travelers in Italy. It has been painted time and again by artists, and is known particularly through Turner's charming engraving. The lake of Nemi is the most beautiful spot that is seen in the Alban trip from Rome. It is the crater of an extinct volcano sloping down abruptly, so that the water becomes very deep a few yards from the



WOLF BEAM HEAD.

shore. Close to the lake are the vestiges of an old temple of Diana.

From time immemorial the tradition has existed among the peasants of the district that somewhere in the lake a Roman galley was sunk. The legend ascribed it to Tiberius, whose name is attached to many classical antiquities by the fancy of the people, and the mythical galley was called the nave di Tiberio, a name that may suit it as well as any other. Classical scholars who followed up the myth came upon a story of the Emperor Caligula's building an immense vessel on the little lake, wherein he held his orgies. It was a structure of extraordinary magnificence; some held that it was built of stone in the lake in the form of a ship, but modern archaeologists agreed that, whatever truth there might be in the story, the ship or the building had disappeared long ago and that it was folly to talk of recovering any part of it. This in spite of well authenticated records of beams and other debris drawn from Lake Nemi by fishermen and others.

Signor Borghi, who was engaged in excavating the remains of the temple of Diana, in the district called the Campo del Giardino, near the shores of the lake, was so much impressed by the persistence of the tradition that he hunted up the records and, after reading what had been done, decided to search the lake for the fabled galley. He gave credit to his predecessors of trying to tell the truth, and this is what he found.

In the middle of the fifteenth century Cardinal Prospero Colonna, who

then owned the land around Lake Nemi, was so much impressed by the tradition that he employed Leon Battista Alberti, the great architect and engineer, to raise the two galleys, which, it was said, lay at the bottom of the lake. Alberti made use of Genoese sailors skilled in diving; they were able to report on the size of the ships and to attach to them grappling hooks, one of which was subse-



MEDUSA HEAD FROM THE STERN.

quently found by Signor Borghi's diver. Then with stout ropes and a system of cranes erected on empty casks they tried to raise the galleys, but only part of the prow of one ship was torn out. "It was made of larch boards, covered with yellow or crimson composition in which were set leaden plates fastened with nails not of iron but of bronze." They found besides leaden pipes two cubits long and marked with inscriptions.

A century later a military architect, Francesco de Marchi of Bologna, explored the lake himself, making use of a sort of diving bell, the construction of which he does not explain, having promised the inventor to keep it secret. He hauled up part of the side: "Enough wood to load two very good mules, which wood was of various kinds, there was larch and pine and cypress." Also pegs of oak, veined so that they looked like ebony. Besides, he found iron nails worn by rust, a great quantity of brass nails, lead plates with the covering material, beams of metal, lead pipe three fingers in thickness and wide enough for the fist to enter, and a staircase, down which he fell. And he took out a piece of red enamel from a flooring. This probably was the first boat Signor Borghi found.

Then nothing more was done for



LION BEAM HEAD.

nearly three centuries, when in 1827 Cavaliere Anesio Fusconi tackled the galley with a diving bell. His attempt came to an untimely end after he had spent \$5,000 on it, owing to thieves carrying off all his apparatus during the winter months. Among the things Fusconi brought up were a bronze capital, forty terra cotta tablets, iron and bronze nails, pieces of enamel and marble from mosaics, a fragment of grating inscribed Tib. Cæs., beams, boards and woods of all kinds. His

divers also saw at the bottom statues, columns and metal beams, which they could not get out. Some of these things were distributed among the vatican museums, but nearly every trace of them has disappeared.

Signor Borghi, while busied with his excavation of the temple of Diana, kept hearing the peasants tell of the sunken ship of Tiberius; he heard the fishermen's stories of their nets catching in the ships, and one day he saw a long beam the fisherman had dragged from the lake in the palace of Prince Orsini at Nemi. He made up his mind to try the venture and made a contract with the Orsini family, which owns Lake Nemi. Then he engaged an experienced diver, bought boats and machinery and had built the necessary constructions, derricks and cranes on the lakeside. He selected a spot 75 fathoms from the shore, and 3 fathoms south of the building known as the "fishermen's hut" for his attempt, and on Oct. 3, 1895, began to draw up the objects which form his collection.

The first bronze brought to the surface was the top of a mooring post, a splendid work of art, a great band in the cavity of which was still the end of the beam to which it had been attached. More than a third of the surface bears in relief a beautiful lion's head, holding in its teeth a ring held out horizontally. The workmanship points clearly to the first century of the empire.



LION HEAD OF MOORING-POST.

In the days following many other important objects were drawn up. Chief among them were four bronze heads of animals with square bases, being the ornamental ends of beams; one of these represents a wolf's head, larger than life, with a ring hanging from the jaws; another the head of a hyena; two others, lions' heads, all with mooring rings attached to them.

Another extremely beautiful bronze is a head of Medusa, which was probably attached to the stern, and to which time has given a magnificent patina.

As the fisherman reported that there was another ship in the lake close to the point called the "Rock of Germanicus," about seventy-five fathoms from the shore and 1,300 feet to the south of the first ship, Signor Borghi determined to examine the place. Soon the diver reported that there was a ship there, at a depth of sixty-two feet, and brought up two beams fastened together by iron rails and bands, held apart at a distance of nine feet. Then a lot of wood of various sorts, and beams held together with iron or copper nails, were raised to the surface.

Besides these things the second ship yielded bits of marble and other parts of a mosaic pavement, part of a little bronze column and some copper plates like those from the first ship. Further a plaque with a female figure on it in archaic style, a bar of bronze very well preserved and three and three-quarter feet long, and, most important of all, a beamhead of bronze, similar to but somewhat larger than those found on the first ship. Part of the beam to which it was fastened, curiously waterworn,

was found with it. The bronze beam-head has on one face the figure of an outspread hand, which is also archaic in style.

As soon as Signor Borghi's discoveries became known the Italian government stepped in. It prevented the removal of the objects found for a long time, during which they were subjected to exposure to the weather and other perils. Much of the wood recovered—Signor Borghi says it amounted to 1,200 feet—decayed or was plundered by the neighboring peasants, who used it for firewood.

Exploration of the ships is now at a standstill. The Italian government sent a marine engineer to investigate and he recommended the draining of the lake to below the level where the ships are stranded. This will require much money and will involve a great deal of litigation with the riparian owners, and as the Italian government



HYENA BEAM HEAD.

is very poor the ships in Lake Nemi are likely to remain undisturbed for a long time.

It is interesting to note the conclusion to which Signor Borghi has come with regard to the character of these ships in the course of his researches. According to him there is no question of pleasure yachts of Tiberius or of Caligula; in fact, the art of the second ship points back to the time of the republic. He believes that the vessels were connected with the temple of Diana.

Diana's temple at Nemi was long a place of pilgrimage. It was the temple in the grove that gave the names to both the villages near the lake. Nemi is from Nemus, the lake is Nemorensis, while Genzano, near by, is from Cynthia, one of Diana's names. There is proof of the great magnificence of the temple on shore, and he holds that for some sacred reason these vessels were built and decorated splendidly as part of the sacrificial worship of the goddess. The theory is more plausible than that which attributes the building of the ships to imperial caprice, and would account



HAND ON BEAM HEAD OF SECOND SHIP.

for the remembrance of the ships in the popular tradition.—New York Sun.

Distinction for Choate.

Ambassador Choate is regarded as the wittiest and most brilliant conversationalist among the diplomats in London.

Blame-all and praise-all are two blockheads.