

VI.—*Remarks on a Coloured Drawing of some Ancient Beads, executed by BENJAMIN NIGHTINGALE, Esq., from Specimens in his possession. By JOHN YONGE AKERMAN, Esq., Secretary.*

Read June 6, 1850.

By the kindness of Mr. Nightingale I am enabled to lay before the Society a drawing of various Ancient Beads in his collection.

I know of no objects of antiquity which, while they present so distinct a character, are at the same time so difficult to assign to a precise period, as these beads. Some may be ascribed with tolerable certainty to particular countries; but others are so widely distributed as to render the place of their fabrication a difficult point to settle.

We have abundant evidence that the fabrication of glass is an art of remote antiquity. Without calling in question the authenticity of the specimens of Egyptian beads said to be as old as the period of the Exodus, we may safely infer that the λίθινα κοτά mentioned by Herodotus (ii. 69), as appended to the ears of the sacred crocodile in Egypt, were objects formed in a similar manner to the vitrified pastes of which so many of these beads are composed. Beads of this description were doubtless, in the first instance, composed of simple masses; but the art of combining stalks of glass of various colours was evidently soon discovered, and adapted to the formation of party-coloured beads, of which some very beautiful specimens are given in the drawing now exhibited.

Although beads of various kinds are discovered so frequently in Anglo-Saxon barrows, I am inclined to assign even the latest of them to a period anterior to the spread of Christianity. However frequently found in the graves of christianized Saxons, we cannot infer that they date from the century of the interment. Many pagan superstitions still remained, and the talismanic character of beads was still recognised.

To the antiquary it will be needless to remark that beads are discovered repeatedly in England, in the interments of the three distinct periods—the Celtic, the Roman, and the Saxon. The elegant drum-shaped beads of gold discovered in the tumulus at Upton Lovell, and engraved by Sir R. C. Hoare, are well known, and are remarkable among all the objects that have been discovered in the early tumuli.

Among Roman remains a great number and variety of beads have from time to time been discovered; and of all the periods beads of amber, which Pliny informs us were much valued and worn by women, form a part of the personal ornaments of the deceased.

I have now to append Mr. Nightingale's descriptions of the beads in his collection. The accompanying Plate offers a considerable variety, and may furnish data to the antiquary of some value in future inquiry:—

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ Clare Cottage, Priory Road, March, 1850.

“ I send you, agreeably to your request, sketches of thirty-five specimens from my collection of Antique Beads, which I will proceed to describe according to their numbers.

“ Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 are of vitrified porcelain, very highly glazed, and of brilliant colours. They were found in a tumulus near Northwold's Mill in Norfolk, together with about eighty others, chiefly of amber and dark blue glass.

“ No. 5 is similar to the preceding, and was found in Butt Lane, Colchester, in 1847.

“ No. 6 was found at the Roman Camp, Castlefield, near Manchester. Transparent green glass.

“ No. 7 was found with Roman coins at Aldborough, near Boroughbridge, in Yorkshire, in 1843. The body is of dark green glass, coated with unglazed enamel, which is delicately veined or marbled in colours.

“ No. 8 is of coarse clay, unglazed. It was found under the walls of York, with a large hoard of stycas, in 1841.

“ No. 9. This elegant little bead, which is probably Anglo-Saxon, was discovered in the Thames near London Bridge, in June 1847, and came immediately into my possession. It is formed of variegated glass, arranged in concentric layers; the facets are cut across these, and produce waved or zigzag lines. A similar bead, about double the size, is delineated in Lee's “*Antiquities of Caerleon*,” p. 16, No. 21.

“ No. 10 is a fragment of a bead similar to the last in fabric and ornament, and when perfect must have been as large as a hen's egg. It serves to show how these beads were formed, the broken part revealing the disposal of the concentric layers. The light green glass bordering the aperture is as clear and bright as beryl. Its locality is unknown; but perfect beads, equal in dimensions to what this has originally been, are frequently found in the countries bordering the Rhine, and the

local museums of the Rhenish towns, especially Manheim and Baden, are rich in such specimens.

“ Nos. 11, 12 were found on the site of the Roman station at Farley Heath, near Albury, in 1847. Both are of transparent glass; one green, with a white opaque stripe running through it; the other, bright blue.

“ Nos. 13, 14, 15 were found in London, on the site of the Post Office, when the foundations for the present building were laid. One is of clear yellow glass, the other two of coloured clay, with a shining glaze or enamel.

“ These three beads, as well as No. 8, are of the class called traditionally *Druidical*—Druid’s beads or rings. They are found throughout England, in all parts of the Continent, and even in remote places in the East. They are occasionally composed of glass, but more generally of coarse light-coloured clay, sometimes covered with a vitreous glaze, and always fluted. They are frequently found in British barrows, and there is a strong probability that they were manufactured here, and sold by the Druids as amulets or charms. Perhaps the glass specimens were imported by those who traded with the Belgæ and Gauls, and formed the model for the manufacture of the commoner native sort. Those who have opened the most ancient barrows have often found but a single bead accompanying a skeleton, and the inference is, that it was deemed an amulet rather than an ornament. The readers of Pliny need not to be referred to his description of the *ovum anguinum*, but it is certain that a notion agreeing with his account of the origin of the serpent-bead, or ‘glain stone,’ as it is called, is still prevalent in Wales. Lee gives a curious anecdote illustrative of this tradition. He adds that these beads or rings are called in Cornwall ‘glain neider,’ which literally means ‘serpents of glass.’

“ No. 16 is of semi-opaque glass, of a milky appearance, and is of an unusual shape. It was found at Chapel Hill, Mershall, near Caistor.

“ No. 17 is of coarse red clay, and was found at Caistor, near Norwich.

“ No. 18 is a large ball or bead of glass, rather more than five inches in circumference, and unperforated. It is formed of a very dark brown glass, which, except when held to the light, appears black. It is ornamented with white enamel arranged in a series of semicircles radiating from the centre, which is slightly depressed. A somewhat similar bead, belonging to Mr. Orlando Jewitt, of Headington, Oxford, is engraved in the *Archæological Journal* of December, 1846, No. 12; but the enamel on that is disposed in irregular splashes, as if laid on at random. There is another depicted in Beesley’s *History of Banbury*, which was found at Adderbury; this is also decorated with spots of enamel, but in a less

degree, and still more irregularly disposed. I do not know where my bead was found. It was obtained (together with No. 10) at the sale of the collection of the late Mr. Anstice, of Bridgewater, where it was labelled 'Phœnician glass.'

"No. 19 is of coarse clay, but glazed; it was found with a human skeleton in a field at Barrow, near Bury St. Edmund's.

"Nos. 20, 21 were found at Kertch, in Southern Russia (the ancient Panticapæum, the capital city of Mithridates, where he is said to have died), in a tomb opened under the personal inspection of Mrs. Cattley, the wife of the English consul at that place, by whom they were, with a large collection of similar objects, brought to this country in 1848. The sepulchres which abound around Kertch have proved extremely rich in antiquities; in one, where the remains of a king and queen were deposited, no less than the almost incredible amount of 168 lbs. weight of solid gold ornaments were discovered. They are preserved in the Emperor's museum.

"No. 22 is from Egypt. This beautiful specimen is of green transparent glass, enamelled all over with minute stripes of red and white.

"Nos. 23, 24 were brought from the East by Major Macdonald. They are of a cylindrical form, and are used in Nubia and some parts of Abyssinia as money; the equivalent of the larger one is four cows! Several specimens in my collection appear to have been purposely cut in half, as a medium for smaller transactions in trade or barter. None but the antique beads are esteemed, and the native eye is so practised as at once to detect the modern counterfeits with which unprincipled traders have attempted to deceive them.

"No. 25 is Egyptian, and was formerly in Mr. Salt's collection; it is of a unique shape, of yellow porcelain, with a blue spiral line which appears to be carried quite through the substance of the bead.

"No. 26 is also Egyptian; it is of red porcelain, with variegated stripes.

"No. 27 is one of a series of twenty-two beads, of different sizes, but all similar in colour and pattern. They were formerly in the collection of the late Dean of St. Patrick, where they were labelled 'Found in a tomb in the Sabine country.'

"Nos. 28 to 35. The locality of these beads is unknown; they are chiefly from a Continental collection. Nos. 29 and 35 are of rich purple glass, the former having a band of green encircling it; the latter shewing grooved circles filled in with a yellow paste. The other examples are remarkable either for shape or ornament.

"I leave to your more experienced and practical antiquarianism the task of discussing the origin, uses, and manufacture of these curious and interesting relics,

which would seem to have been held in high esteem by our rude forefathers, British as well as Anglo-Saxon ;

“ Remaining, my dear Sir,

“ Faithfully yours,

“ B. NIGHTINGALE.

“ To John Yonge Akerman, Esq.
Sec. S. A.”

I have merely to observe that the unperforated bead, No. 18, is unquestionably genuine, and that it resembles a fragment found in Westmerland,^a by labourers engaged in exploring some tombs of the middle ages. If really deposited with the body then found, it had doubtless been considered by the deceased as an amulet.

I am well aware that much might be written on a subject so interesting, and that, whether viewed as personal ornaments or the evidences of ancient superstition, they are well deserving the attention of the curious ; but my present object is simply to place before the reader a few well-authenticated facts as a guide to further investigation.

JOHN YONGE AKERMAN.

^a Journal of Arch. Inst. vol. iv. p. 60.



Antique Beads in the Collection of B. Nightingale 1850.

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