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RARE BEADS FOUND IN CENTRAL MONTANA

From

Oscar O. Mueller

In a sheltered nook or cavern near the top of an Eagle sandstone castle-like promontory overlooking the Judith River bottom, some three miles above its mouth, about eight years ago, was found the remains of Indians and which appeared to be a family consisting of a big buck, a small squaw, and a child. Only the skeleton remains of the buck and squaw were found, but the child was well preserved or mummified. They no doubt died in a common disaster - small-pox. This dreaded disease made its appearance among the Indians first in 1837 and about half of the Indians died from the epidemic. The bottomlands at the mouth of the Judith was a popular gathering place for the Indians. Most of the bodies from the disaster were buried in the cottonwood trees on the bottom, but some up in the clefts of rocks and on high inaccessible places. The custom was to wrap the body in a blanket and then a buffalo robe which was lashed together with heavy rawhide thongs. Most of these bodies had weathered the storms for many years before falling down on the ground.

It is difficult now to time the date of this disaster, but the evidence presented primarily is in the form of beads found upon the bodies and in this last case on the body of the mummified child. On both arms of the child are three strings of beads, one primarily of cheap trade beads, another string of probably Bohemian or Venetian make and the third, of most value historically, or what the writer believes are Chinese made beads imported by the Russian trader about 100 years ago or more. They are of porcelain base with porcelain inlay of beautiful colors and designs and are hand made. This is evident from

the fact that beads are similar in design but a close inspection shows them to vary somewhat.

The first collection known of these beads were collected by a cook working at Claggett, the trading post at the P N Ranch buildings. She presented them to a Miss Ella Arnold of Oak Park, Chicago, who showed them to the different museums and art institutes in Chicago. The writer has in his possession an original clipping from the Chicago Tribune of June 9, 1895, and also the original letter of Mrs. Ella Arnold Renisch, written from Butte, Montana, February 8, 1927, to Mrs. Frank Wright of Lewiston. For a brief description of one of the experts who was shown these beads and the evidence of where they were found I now quote from the Chicago Tribune article, to-wit:

"Some four years ago, while Miss Ella Arnold of Oak Park was visiting in Northern Montana, a lady resident of that State presented her with this unique collection, telling her that she had herself found them beneath a tree which had been used as a burial place for Indians at some remote period. The lady had discovered one or two of them on the surface of the ground by accident, and had been led to investigate further beneath the surface, where she had unearthed nearly 100 of these beads. They had fallen to the ground, evidently from the body of the Indian who had received this tree burial, and had been covered in the course of time by nature. The place where they were found is far from the railroad and not generally visited by tourists.

"Prof. James H. Breasted, Egyptologist in the University of Chicago, upon examining the collection of beads, said:

'They were probably not made by the Indians, but by the people who lived there before the Indians, who are known to have imitated the Eastern arts closely in many particulars. It is not to be suspected, it is impossible to suspect, that the American Indian is in any way connected with the Egyptians. This string contains at least four distinct types of Egyptian beads. The globular blue beads belong to the twelfth dynasty. Beadology has not been studied extensively and is difficult to understand, as there is nothing to give the dates when they were made, and they are not found as a rule preserved separately, that is, according to their age. They are not as a rule found in strands but in a scattered condition, as these were. Some of these are evidently paste glass which belonged to an ancient time; some are

glass, indicating a higher and later art. Some of the shapes are peculiarly Egyptian, and one is of Arabic origin.'" "

This is only a part of the article and sufficient to give the reader an idea, the other experts being somewhat similar. Reading closely you will notice that they do not say they are of Egyptian make, but only design.

The next string of beads were found by Mr. A. J. Stough, now deceased, of Stanford, Montana. From the original letter of Mr. Stough to Mrs. Wright, dated January 21, 1927, and a statement by Mrs. Wright, written under the letter in the writer's possession, it appears that he found about 100 of these beads while on a trip to Claggett at the mouth of the Judith and probably about 1880. He presented about 25 of these beads to Mrs. Frank E. Wright of Lewiston, Montana. Mrs. Wright did a considerable original investigation of the beads and sent them for expert advice to the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, D. C. For the purpose of presenting the facts I quote entirely this letter, to-wit:

"August 15, 1927

"Mrs. F. E. Wright
210 W. Washington Street
Lewiston, Montana

"Dear Mrs. Wright:

"Referring to your correspondence with Dr. Aleš Hrdlička and Dr. Walter Hough, I beg to announce the return to you by registered mail of a package containing the string of Chinese beads which you forwarded for examination. In this connection Doctor Hough makes the following report:

'The beads are of Chinese manufacture and are still made in China. Because of the traces of wear, the specimens forwarded appear to be of different dates of manufacture. I would not date any of them further back than 1790. Such beads were used in trade by the Russians and Chinese in Alaska. It is highly probable that the Indian got them from a Chinese gold seeker or trader. They are marvels of patient and beautiful work in glass and do

not need the added interest of thousands of years of age to be appreciated.'

Very truly yours,

(Signed) A. WETMORE
A. Wetmore,
Assistant Secretary"

Mrs. Frank Wright often conferred with me on the beads. Just a short time before her death she brought the beads with the Chicago Tribune article and all letters and correspondence to me as a gift. She felt that I was the one who took special interest in them and should have them.

Among the correspondence was a letter received from Ella Arnold Renisch, formerly Ella Arnold, written from Butte where she resided at 1229 W. Gold Street, and dated February 8, 1927. From correspondence and other evidence there is not any question but that the beads she received from the woman cook were from Claggett, Montana. That was no doubt in the 70's and beads were found on the ground partially covered with debris and dirt, so they predate that date at least twenty or thirty years. For further information I quote from the letter as follows, to-wit:

"Your letter of February 1, took me back to my old home and the excitement I felt at discovering my 'Indian' beads were really Egyptian. The Art Institute, Prof. James Breasted of the University of Chicago, the famous Egyptologist, and another from Armour Institute, whose name I cannot now recall, all seemed quite interested at the time.

"I still have a letter, dated June 4, 1895, from the late G. Brown Good, then Assistant-Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and I believe later Curator of the same, in which he thanks me 'for bringing this interesting matter to our attention but regret to say that it is not practical for the Smithsonian Institution to make any investigations in the matter with a view to determining the exact character of the beads in question.'

"I have never seen any beads just like them except those I found in an Egyptian Case in the Chicago Art Institute. I took them up to the Flathead Reservation when I visited at the Agency years ago, but old Charlot, nor any of the other Indians I showed

them to had ever seen similar ones. This in spite of the fact that Chas. Gunther, the Chgo. Candy man, (whom you may remember if you ever lived in Chicago, was a great collector of art and curios) told me that the Indians in Oregon had any quantity of such beads. I have never thought or found it true.

"You are the very first to come forward with information that you had some similar beads. I think if we could talk it over we might some time arrange to go on an exploring trip, for I suppose they must have come from about the same place. The woman who gave me the beads was a cook, working for an acquaintance who left Montana years ago. I was so impressed by the unusual beads that she gave me all she had - 90 I think, and when I wanted to divide with her, she said 'No, I can get more.' She found them herself. I think she died years ago."

The writer is convinced that they are of Chinese make for the reason that among them were found some Chinese jade beads. From many inquiries and search the only similar beads were found in a collection recently exhibited by Mr. Ben Pease of Lodge Grass, Montana. He claimed to be a grandson of the original Pease who located on the Yellowstone. He had a few that were identical and no doubt Chinese made. The writer is of the opinion that there has been no such beads introduced in the last hundred years and that all of them have disappeared by having been placed on bodies.

The writer will appreciate any information or opinions from interested parties.

Respectfully submitted,

OSCAR O. MUELLER