

VI.

NOTICE OF FLINTS, FROM CAVES IN THE WADY MEGHARA, IN ARABIA. BY JOHN TURNBULL, W.S., OF ABBEY ST BATHANS, ESQ.

When travelling, in March 1862, in the Sinaitic peninsula, I visited a gentleman (Major M'Donald), who had been resident there for some time, engaged in mining turquoises. From him I got the flints which I now send, that they may be presented to the Society of Antiquaries, if of sufficient interest.

The few I brought home were selected from a considerable number in the possession of Major M'Donald, and which had been obtained by him from time to time from the Arabs in his employment, who found them in the caverns or ancient mines which exist in the district. These caverns are in a sandstone formation, and bear evidence, in the chisel

mark still existing, of their partial, or, it may be, entire artificial origin. They are much the same as the quarries or excavations so common in Egypt, and are sometimes of great size. One which I examined in the Wady Meghara contained vast chambers, and extended in length from a quarter to half a mile, with several entrances. I am not aware that the age or purpose of these excavations has been satisfactorily investigated, but Major M'Donald is of opinion that they have been turquoise mines. Excepting flints, the only manufactured articles I heard of having been discovered in them were a wooden model of an elephant and a broken finger ring. The elephant was eight or nine inches high, and though somewhat rudely, was yet well executed. The ring was of bronze, with turquoises set in it—a larger one in the centre, and six smaller ones round the larger—but only three of these latter are left.

The mines in the Wady Meghara are well known to travellers. They have evidently been worked at a period much more recent than that of the flint weapons; for in that valley, and close by the caverns, are found not only Sinaitic inscriptions, but Egyptian tablets, containing hieroglyphics and sculptures, with the cartouche, among others, of Suphis—works which, from their execution, are evidence of a considerable degree of civilisation. Near the openings of the caverns, and scattered over the smooth rocks, are little basins, always two together—one circular, and the other oval. The circular one is generally eight or nine inches in diameter, and the same in depth. The oval one is about the same in width, but 18 or 20 inches long, and not more than 3 or 4 deep. May these not have been used for polishing the turquoises, the circular basin containing the water, and the other having been formed gradually by friction in grinding the stones?

Across this Wady (Meghara), and up the hill on each side, until it rises almost into a precipice, run two stone walls. One of these is close to the opening of the glen, and the other some 200 or 300 yards up it; and between these walls, and, consequently, inclosed by them, are the Egyptian tablets and openings of caverns. The top of the projecting hill on the east of the valley has been cut into a terrace, leaving a conical peak in the centre, and on this terrace are the foundations of about 100 houses or other buildings. The walls run up to this fort, if such it be; and one may be allowed to conjecture that at some remote period

an Egyptian colony was settled here for the purpose of working the mines, and protected themselves by these ramparts; or it may be that it was a penal colony, and that the walls were intended as much to confine the convicts as to exclude the Bedouins.

The flints, however, must be of a date long anterior to this period. The largest of them is 4 inches long by $1\frac{1}{2}$ broad, and the smallest is 2 inches long by $1\frac{1}{4}$ broad. They are evidently shaped artificially, tapering to a point, and being triangular in the cross section, the one side or face, however, being much broader than the other two, and perfectly smooth. Indeed, in general appearance they are not to be distinguished from flint weapons found in this country or Ireland.