

III.

ON SOME AMULETS. BY PROFESSOR DUNS, D.D., F.S.A. SCOT.

The specimens now on the table differ so much among themselves, that, perhaps, I should ask to be excused for ranking them under a common title.

The terms Amulet, Charm, and Talisman are now very generally used as equivalent and interchangeable. As originally applied to certain phases of superstition, or of popular belief, they had severally a definite meaning, and were limited to different classes of objects. Amulet was the name given to something arbitrarily credited with the possession of medicinal virtues, and worn about the person as a cure for, or a safeguard against, disease, originating either in known or unknown causes. Pliny used the word in this sense.¹

The Charm, again, had no specific medicinal qualities ascribed to it, and had no such place in medical practice as the amulet had. Abnormal forms of minerals or plants, rare objects never seen, or seldom seen

¹ "Infantibus adalligari amuleti ratione prodest." Thus, too, as to the medicinal virtues of amber, "*succinum*," the famous CHEYSELECTRUM of the ancients:—"Hoc collo adalligatum, mederi febribus et morbis: triticum cum melle et rosaceo, aurium vitii: et si cum melle Attico conteratur oculorum quoque obscuratibus."—*Historia Naturalis*, lib. xxxvii. c. 12. By some inexplicable process of association imaginary virtues were ascribed to certain objects. Moss scraped from a decaying skull was worn as a cure for, or preventative against some kinds of hæmorrhage, and lozenges (*Troches*) of toads' flesh were, as amulets, held to be efficacious against the plague and infectious diseases generally. A ring stone of amethyst beguiled the wearer from temptations to drunkenness; one of green jasper warded off the discomforts of indigestion.

before, were credulously endowed with unintelligible virtues, and were regarded as the savage regards his fetich, or were worn about the person. Even mere phrases, nothing in themselves, became potent by the frequency of their repetition.¹

The astrologers were mainly responsible for the term Talisman. In their hands it was employed to the form of signs suggested by alleged astronomical phenomena.² Later, it was applied to objects set in rings, or worn about the person, in order to secure good fortune, ward off disease, remove difficulties, or to win love and favour even against the will of the person loved. I preface my notes with these very commonplace remarks solely because the specimens, as they passed through different hands, are characterized by all the three terms indiscriminately.

I. In June 1885 His Excellency R. H. Gunning, M.D., LL.D., informed me that he had received a communication from Captain Lemare of the Amazons Steamship Company, intimating that he had forwarded a Peruvian-shrunk head and a specimen of the famous *Muirakitan*, a jade amulet held in highest esteem by the Indians in the Valley of the Amazon.³ I suggested to His Excellency that both specimens would be valued by the Society. The idol head was forwarded, and is now in the Museum.⁴ In reply to my letter as to the amulet, he informed me that a jade axe had also been sent to him from the same locality, but that "he had given it to Professor Giglioli of the Natural History Museum at Florence. So that in the Amazon Valley, where no jade rock is to be found, there are both amulets and axes of that mineral." He asks, "Did a tribe of Oriental origin, say from Japan

¹ "Alcyone he names amidst his prayers,
Names as a charm against the waves and wind,
Most in his mouth and ever in his mind."

² Of talismans he—

"knew the power,
And careful watched the planetary hour."

The "*abracadabra*"—the letters A, B, R, A, C, A, D, A, B, R, A—in the form of an isocetes-triangle, when worn on the wrist, was a favourite amulet.

³ "Indian 'muir or mbyra,' a stick, and 'kytan,' a knot; from the similarity which the mineral presents to some knots of wood, or even to its resins."—*Rodrigués*.

⁴ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, March 8, 1886. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, Session 1885-86.

or China, bring these across the Andes and drop them there, or were they prepared in the Amazons Valley?" Later, Dr Gunning writes, "The amulet is a plain one, but some with designs have also been found. We have also an amulet from India with a kidney in silver on one side. I will give one to the Society when I return." "The amulet is rare, there being only one such from the Amazons in the Museum at Berlin, and one in that of Munich, according to a Brazilian writer, who says there is no jade or nephrite formation in the Valley of the Amazons, and regards it as of Oriental origin." "It is strange that the same should be superstitiously used in places so distant as India, New Zealand, and Brazil." "Mrs Gunning wishes to retain them still, but they will go to Edinburgh by and bye." In August 1889 His Excellency writes, "Mrs Gunning has been arranging things since her illness began, and she and I were speaking of the two amulets entrusted to you. We thought the best way was to give you her one, and the Antiquarian Museum my one. Hers is the one with a kidney formed on it, mine is the one picked up in the Valley of the Amazons. I would like to have my specimen in the National Museum, and after this I would like to serve you; but Mrs Gunning is not so national as I, and prefers to give hers to you. However, in this way we can all be pleased."

His Excellency has shown such a patriotic, wise, and hearty interest in the Museum and in the work of the Society, that I have pleasure in putting the foregoing statements on record. The amulet bearing the figure of a kidney was believed to have been worn many years in India by a British officer. It gives me pleasure to present it to the Society.

Interest of another kind belongs to the Brazilian specimen, which sets it in wider relations than those associated with it as simply an amulet. It is one of many forms which come under the notice of the antiquary suggestive of important questions in the wide field of general ethnology. What is its true character as a mineral? Has it been met with *in situ* in America, or in the islands of the Pacific, or in Egypt, or Switzerland, or in Northern, Central, or Southern Europe, in all of which it occurs as axe and amulet. If it occurs in the rock mass in Asia, are we sure of the locality? These questions justify the claim which mineralogy has

recently made to a place in archæology,¹ and thus the so-called jade problem, which has had so much importance attached to it by some students of archaic ethnology. The literature of the subject is extensive and of some importance, not so much, perhaps, from its amulet or even its mineralogical point of view, as from discussions touching the migrations and social condition of the great leading families of prehistoric and early historic man.

I deferred the presentation of the Muirakitan (fig. 1) till I could, as Dr Gunning desired, associate it with an historical note. This led me, from the point of view of historical criticism, to look into the voluminous literature which has gathered round it as a mineral, as an

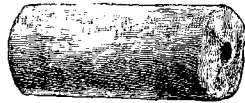


Fig. 1. Muirakitan or Amulet of Jade from Brazil (actual size).

alleged help in an interesting department of prehistoric ethnology, and as an amulet. A good deal of uncertainty and some confusion characterize the mineralogical question. The terms jade, nephrite, jadeit, chloromelanite, Amazon-stone, New Zealand axe-stone, and *the greenstone*, are used by some as if they were equivalent. It would prevent confusion if the terms jadeit, Amazon-stone, and chloromelanite were avoided when reference is made to this mineral, and jade, nephrite, or New Zealand axe-stone only were used. Much, if not most, of what is known as Oriental nephrite is either jadeit or chloromelanite. The difference between the latter and nephrite may at once be seen from the specimens on the table (specimens shown). Nephrite proper is the Portuguese *pedra de la hijada*, or loins stone, the term which gives us jade, and which is suggestive of the idea associated with the amulet. Though chloromelanite is more frequently met with than nephrite, it is not common; and though it occurs as a constituent in some mineral

¹ "Nephrit und Jadeit, nach ihren mineralogischen Eigenschaften, sowie nach ihrer Urgeschichtlichen und ethnographischen Bedeutung. Einführung der Mineralogie in das Studium Archæologie."—*Von Heinrich Fischer.*

aggregates or rocks, I am not aware of its presence anywhere as a distinct mass or separate vein or layer. This fact adds to the value of implements formed of this material. In chemical composition and specific gravity these minerals differ very little. Very slight proportional variety determines species. For example, the chief difference between jade and jadeit is that in the former the magnesia is nearly three times more than the alumina. In the latter it is the reverse. The nephrites proper belong to a group of minerals—the amphiboles or hornblendes—which range in hardness from the so-called mountain leather (*Asbestos*) to the highly crystalline form now under notice. In colour the nephrites vary very much, giving not only many shades of green, but different shades of grey also, as clouded, remotely greenish dark grey, and distinctly greenish grey often in the same lump. The Muirakitan is of the former shade, and occurred in the same locality as the small fine-green crystalline chisel now on the table. Throughout these notes on this amulet I have the nephrite celts of the Amazons Valley, and also that now shown from Barbados, ethnologically in view.

I have referred to the value attached to the occurrence of articles of true jade in widely separated regions where it is not met with *in situ*, as a help in, if not a key to, some of the most obscure questions in archaic ethnology. Great prominence is given to this in an able paper in vol. ii., 1884, of the *Revista Amazonica*, a Portuguese review published at Para.¹ The author, J. Barbosa Rodriquéz, is evidently a man of wide and accurate information, and an enthusiastic believer in the Central Asian origin of the prehistoric or ante-Columbus Indian tribes of South America. Fragments of nephrite are to him the footprints of great migrations from the Orient. Guided, he thinks, by prehistoric objects in nephrite, we can trace its geographical line, and point to the centre whence it spread over the world. The trail is the dust which the emigration raised. He strikes the trail at Bahma, China, follows it to Turkestan, by banks of the Tartus to the Aral Sea, across the Ixartos and Oxus, along the shores of the Caspian, and skirting the north of Asia Minor to Troy, from Greece to Italy, from Italy to Switzerland,

¹ I am indebted to His Excellency Dr Gunning for a copy of this paper, and to H. Edgell Hunt, Esq., C.E., F.S.A. Scot., for a translation of it.

where he finds it divided into three great branches. He takes the centre one, descends the Rhine, gets to Belgium, thence to England, and thence to Scandinavia. Returning to Switzerland he takes up another branch, and follows it through Austria and Germany. Returning once more to the Swiss centre, the line leads him to Cis-Alpine Gaul and to the Celtiberic peninsula, where the jade-bearers embark and cross the Atlantic, then through the Bahamas to Mexico, to South America, to the Valley of the Amazons, and, passing the Andes, to Chili. Returning to Mexico he can trace, he thinks, the trail across California to the Aleutias and Kurillas Islands, to Japan, to Burmah, and from Burmah to his original starting-point, Bahma. The impression left on one after a careful study of the materials is somewhat complex. We recognize the ability of the writer, and wonder at his credulity. He assumes that no archæologist will insist on seeing every link in his chain of evidence, and, without evidence, he holds it proved that true nephrite, grey or green, is not to be found anywhere *in situ* except at the centre whence he starts.

This last still continues a moot question. From the time that Keller¹ called attention to the occurrence of clear nephrite celts at Meilen, Robenhäusen, &c., this question has been discussed. Recently it has been referred to by Dr Munro in his able and most interesting Rhind Lectures. Dr Munro inclines to the belief that what Keller desiderated as evidence of its occurrence in Europe has been supplied by the presence of unworked lumps and waste pieces or chippings. As to unworked lumps, if such have been found, I suspect they were in fluvial gravels or in lake debris. And as to the chips, what more likely than that Bronze Age or early Iron Age possessors of nephrite celts should turn them into amulets or ornaments, when they had got much more effective weapons, thus leaving the chips as marks of their work?

II. I submitted the metal amulet already mentioned to Mr Alex. J. S. Brook, 87 George Street, who has kindly favoured me with the following notes:—

“*Amulet for Kidney Disease.*—The amulet is in the form of a cylinder,

¹ *The Lake Dwellings of Switzerland and other Parts of Europe*, by Dr Ferdinand Keller (translation 1866), pp. 16, 18, 56, &c.

measuring $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long, $\frac{7}{16}$ th inch in diameter, with a hole in the centre of about $\frac{1}{8}$ th inch in diameter. It is made of copper, and inlaid with silver, and both these metals have been afterwards treated with oxides to show a variety of tints.

“(1) In part 1 there is inlaid a flat piece of silver in the form of a kidney, the ground surrounding it being of a pale oxydized colour.

“(2) Part 2 is a checked pattern composed of thirty-six equal-sized squares of three different shades of colour. Only nine of these squares, *i.e.*, the silver ones, appear to be inlaid. The others are merely produced by a very thin electro deposit of silver, afterwards oxydized in nine squares to a dark black shade, and in the other eighteen to a grey tint.

“(3) Part 3 shows the natural colour of the copper body of the cylinder, and is inlaid with silver tracery. A little variety of tint is produced by oxydizing portions of the copper ground a darker hue. An examination of the workmanship of the amulet, and the methods by

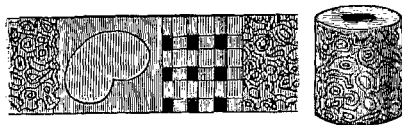


Fig. 2. Metal Amulet from India (actual size).

which the different tints are produced, would suggest that it has been made in imitation of a steel one inlaid or damascened with different metals.” Mr Brook thinks that “the technique is certainly not Indian, although the pattern and the combination of the colours is such as will be found in many pieces of Oriental damascening.” This raises some questions which seem to me to suggest further inquiries, both as to its technique and the locality of its make. This is especially the case if the diced squares are composed of an electro deposit of silver, because that would conflict with the belief that it was worn before electroplating was in use—say between 1840 to 1850, the decade within which so many improvements were made in electro deposition. Perhaps, however, the more recent its use the greater its interest. That it could be worn as a trusted safeguard against kidney disease by a man of

education, and of one of the higher ranks of life, shows how deep the roots of superstition may lie in human nature.

III. But whatever doubt we may have as to the Oriental origin of this amulet, we can have none as to the next to which the attention of the Society is now called. This forms the centre of a bracelet of purely Eastern workmanship. The stone is a gem of the silica alumina group—a wine-yellow topaz. It bears, in micrograph, an Arabic inscription, clean and deep, consisting of fifteen lines, containing nearly two hundred words. A former student of mine, an accomplished Arabic scholar, Mr Constantian, now of Constantinople, copied and translated the inscription for me. Half of the words consists of repetitions of the Arabic exclamation, the equivalent of our O, the other half of names expressive of attributes of God, as, "O holy, O gracious, O merciful, O pure, O creator, O high, O Lord of All," &c. This form of amulet is said to be rare, and its virtue firmly believed in by devout Arabs.

IV. In a paper on "Brazilian Weapons," March 1885, I described an arrow-head of pure diaphanous quartz; length, $2\frac{2}{8}$ th inches, spatulose and bevelled at the broad end, where it is $\frac{6}{8}$ th of an inch broad, on each edge a margin of sharp points. It is an exceedingly pretty form, and is now on the table. I thought at the time that it was very doubtful if it had ever been used as a weapon, and suggested that it might have been a *xerembita* or lip-ornament, such as some of the Amazons Valley Indians wear. Inquiry has led me to believe that, like the nephrite and chloromelanite celts, both of Brazil and the West Indies, it may have come down from long-past generations and been carefully preserved as an amulet.