ANTIQUE GEMS AND RINGS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649059027

Antique gems and rings by C. W. King

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

C. W. KING

ANTIQUE GEMS AND RINGS

Trieste

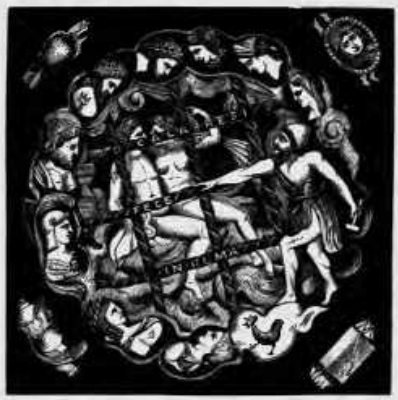
ANTIQUE GEMS AND RINGS.

ANTIQUE GEMS AND RINGS.

BY

C. W. KING, M.A.,

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.



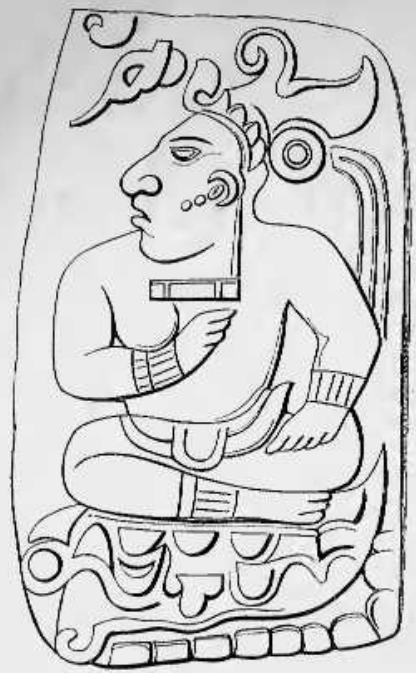
Calabrezi's Ransom (*p.* 428), *enlarged by one-half.*

"In tenui labor: at tenuis non gloria, si quem
Numina læva sinunt auditque vocatus Apollo."—VIRGIL.

VOL. II.—ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:
BELL AND DALDY, YORK STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

1872.



APPENDIX.

SAVAGE LAPIDARY ART.

The history of the first invention of the glyptic art receives considerable light from our learning the processes followed by tribes still in a state of nature for reducing hard stones into various articles of ornament or utility. Man's instinct usually leads him, under the same conditions, to resort to the same means for effecting a certain given purpose, and to producing the same forms; nevertheless, one cannot help being surprised at finding the primæval Assyrian and the Indian of the Amazon equally adopting the *cylinder* as the badge of distinction, and fashioning it, in the same way, out of the most intractable substance within their reach. But the whole of the subject is so full of interest, as well as of special information, that I have thought I am doing a service to my readers by bringing together whatever recent travellers have made known respecting it, as observed by them either in the remains of savage art, or in its actual practice at the present day.

Savage Lapidaries on the Maupes River, Brazil.—"I now saw several of the

men with their most peculiar and valued ornament, a cylindrical, opaque white stone, looking like marble, but which is merely quartz imperfectly crystallized. These stones are from four to eight inches long, and about an inch in diameter. They are ground round, and flat at the ends, a work of great labour, and are each pierced with a hole at one end, through which a string is inserted to support it round the neck. It appears almost incredible that they should make this hole in so hard a substance without any iron instrument for the purpose. What they are said to use is the pointed flexible leaf-shoot of the large wild plantain, triturating with fine sand and a little water; and I have no doubt it is, as it is said to be, a labour of years. Yet it must take a much longer time to pierce that which the Tushatia (chief) wears as the emblem of his authority, for it is generally of the largest size, and is worn transversely across his breast; for which purpose the hole is bored lengthways, from one end to the other, an operation which, I was informed, sometimes occupied two lives. The stones themselves are procured from a great distance up the river, probably from near its source at the base of the Andes: they are therefore highly valued, and it is seldom that the owners can be induced to part with them; the chiefs scarcely ever." (*Wallace's Amazon*, p. 278.)

For comparison of similar primitive processes, it may be added that the New Zealanders bore jade by means of a splinter of quartz fixed on the end of a rod, which is turned between the hands after the manner of a fire-stick, *i. e.*, the instrument used for producing fire by friction in a block of softer wood.

Mexican Jade Carvings.—"Squier gives a drawing of what he justly calls a very beautiful miniature representation of the same subject [the beneficent demigod Cuculcan], obtained from the ruins of Ocosingo, forty miles to the south of Palenque, in 1856. It is engraved full size of the original [oblong, $3\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ inches], which is of the variety of beautiful green stone called by the Spaniards *Madre di esmeralda*, and which was highly esteemed by the ancient Indians under the name of *Chalchiuite*. It is very hard, and when polished resembles the finest kind of green enamel. Some experts pronounce the material green quartz, but Sir R. Murchison recognises in it nephrite, or jade. The figure is sharply cut in high relief, and the whole is exquisitely polished. A hole is drilled through the stone between the points *a*, *a*, evidently for the purpose of suspension, and we are no doubt right in supposing that it was worn supported on the breast of some sacerdotal dignitary, perhaps the high-priest of Cuculcan, whose image it bears. In connection with this relic were found a number of others, of the same material, and scarcely inferior in interest. Amongst them may be

mentioned a *cylinder*, two inches in diameter, and resembling those found in Assyrian ruins, with hieroglyphics engraved on its outer surface. They are represented in the accompanying cut of equal size [viz., Head in profile, facing four pellets; Fist clenched, placed on another, the palm of which is marked with four pellets; Lama lying down, or some similar object]. As already said, these green stones, or Chalchiuites, were held in the highest estimation by the Mexicans and Central Americans. Bernal Diaz represents Montezuma as saying, in handing them over: 'To these I will add a few Chalchiuites of such enormous value, that I could not consent to give them to any one except to such a powerful emperor as yours. Each of these stones is worth two loads of gold.' In the first-mentioned carving or *cameo*, the figure of Cuculcan, seated cross-legged upon an elaborately-worked cushion, presents so striking a resemblance to the usual type of Buddha, that it is difficult to ascribe the coincidence to the native instinct of Man in corresponding stages of culture. The only difference is that the Mexican god shows his countenance in profile in the act of speaking, and with the well-known Aztec features." *(Morelet's Central America*, p. 97.)

Aztec Lapidary Skill.—"A very common ornament in the Omotepec (Nicaragua) graves is a string of beads, sometimes of chalcedony, and sometimes of lava. The piercing of the latter is wonderful. Many of the beads are an inch in length, ringed all over, and pierced with a hole as fine as ordinary thread. The whole bead is no thicker than twine, and most brittle. Had we not seen such wonders before, we never could have deemed such fine work possible without tools of metal. The chalcedony beads are very much larger; they are handsomely rounded and polished, and the hole is carefully bored. Ten to fifteen formed a necklace or bracelet, from which we may conclude, either that they were only worn by children, or else that feathers or other perishable ornaments were interspersed." *(Boyle's Ride Across a Continent*, ii. 98.)

Aztec Sculpture, executed without metal tools.—Boyle found upon Mount Mombacho, near Grenada, many monumental *portrait* statues, life-size, executed with great fidelity to nature, and carved out of *basalt*, a material which, even in the ancient world, was only attempted by the Egyptians. He figures specimens which perfectly bear out his description and praise in his *Ride Across a Continent*, ii. p. 43.

"Amongst the Assinaboin Indians a fine marble is used, much too hard to admit of minute carving, but susceptible of a high polish. This is cut into pipes of graceful form, and made so extremely thin as to be nearly transparent, so that when ignited the glowing tobacco shines through, and presents a singular appearance when in use at night, or in a dark lodge.

Another favourite material is a coarse species of jasper, also too hard to admit of elaborate ornamentation. This also is cut into various simple but graceful designs, executed chiefly by the slow and laborious process of rubbing it down with other stones. The choice of the material for fashioning the favourite pipe is by no means guided by the facilities which the position of the tribe affords. A suitable stone for such a purpose will be picked up and carried hundreds of miles. Mr. Kane informs me that in coming down the Athabaska river, when drawing near its source in the Rocky Mountains, he observed his Assinaboin guides select the favourite bluish jasper from among the water-worn stones in the bed of the river, to carry home for the purpose of pipe manufacture, although they were then fully five hundred miles from their lodges." (*Wilson's Pre-historic Man*, ii. 14.)

Mexican Turquoise.—The source from which the ancient Mexicans derived their turquoise, so long entirely lost in the darkness of Spanish misrule, has at length been brought to light; and all the circumstances of the discovery tend to declare the energy, extent, and commercial advancement of the pre-existing empire. Prof. W. P. Blake, of San Francisco, had noticed beads of green turquoise worn by the Navajo Indians, who inhabit the northern and western parts of the province of New Mexico. To these they attach such value, that the traders will take them in pledge for any quantity of goods the owners may demand, with the certainty that they will be ultimately redeemed. Prof. Blake prevailed upon these Indians to show the place where they obtained the stone, which proved to be in the Los Cerillos mountains, twenty miles south-east of Santa Fé. The mine was an immense open quarry, "large enough to hold the entire buildings of the British Museum," to use the learned explorer's own words, at an interview I had the pleasure of enjoying with him (Sept. 27, 1867). The sides of the excavation, and the heaps of ancient rubbish are now overgrown with gigantic pines, the growth of the three centuries that have elapsed since the ruin of its old industrious workers. The rock is a decomposed porphyry, resembling sandstone in appearance, with the turquoise running through it in veins, or lining the sides of crevices with a thin coating. Its colour is pure *green*, except when it is decomposed by weathering. The poor Indians of these times, lacking skill and means to quarry the rock to follow up the veins still productive of the finest material, grub about in the rubbish heaps, and are well content with the refuse of the original prosecutors of these enormous and long-continued operations. The fragments so found they polish into irregular forms, perforate, and wear for necklaces. Prof. Blake is of opinion that *this* was the so highly valued "Chalchihuite," or, as the

Indians pronounce it, "Chalcivite." A full account of his visit to the place is given in the *American Journal* for 1858.

Chinese Glyptic Art has produced nothing so noteworthy alike for "matter, form, and style," as the work (said, as usual in all such cases, to come from the sacking of the Summer Palace) very recently acquired by Mr. Octavius Morgan, and which at once arrested my attention amongst the infinite variety of rarities adorning his collection. In the first place, the material is by far the largest specimen of turquoise ever brought to Europe, being eight inches long by six high, and as many in its greatest thickness. Its colour is sap-green, the surface divided into innumerable minute and regular tesseræ by hair-lines of black oxide, a peculiarity also observable in the turquoises from the Sinaitic mine. The kidney-like shape of the mass, covered with mamillary protuberances, has been happily taken advantage of by the artist for the production of a work best adapted to the national taste, with the least possible waste of the so precious subject matter. The general outline suggested the idea of a rounded mountain, the protuberances lent themselves for minor hills, forests, and villages, rising in tiers one above another, with due gradation of distance, and every portion enlivened with numerous figures engaged in various occupations. The subject is treated in exactly the same manner as in the ivory carvings in which similar landscapes in high relief are so frequently to be seen; and from the comparative softness of the gem, it is probable the carving was effected by the same method as in the other substance.