Danish Bronze Age glass beads traced to Egypt

Analyses of glass beads found in Denmark give us new knowledge of Bronze Age trade routes.

Keywords: Archeology, Bronze Age, Egypt

By: Jeanette Varberg, Aarhus University, Flemming Kaul, National Museum of Denmark, Bernard Gratzu, Université d’Orléans

An international collaboration between Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus, the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen, and Institut de Recherche sur les Archéomatières (IRAMAT) at Orléans, France, has resulted in a sensational discovery about the trade routes between Denmark and the ancient civilisations in Egypt and Mesopotamia in the Bronze Age 3,400 years ago. The discovery also gives us new knowledge about the sun cult in the Nordic Bronze Age.

Archaeologists Jeanette Varberg from Moesgaard Museum and Flemming Kaul from the National Museum, and Bernard Gratzu, director of IRAMAT, analysed the composition of some blue glass beads found on buried Bronze Age women in Denmark. The analyses revealed that the glass originate from the same glass workshops in Egypt that supplied the glass that the Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamun took with him to his grave in 1323 BC.

The study was recently published in SKALK.

Globalisation in the Bronze Age

Twenty-three glass beads from Denmark were analysed using plasma-spectrometry. Without destroying the fragile beads, this technique makes it possible to compare the chemical composition of trace elements in the beads with reference material from Amarna in Egypt and Nippur in Mesopotamia, about 50 km south east of Baghdad in Iraq. The comparison showed that the chemical composition of the two sets of trace elements match.

The researchers' first object for comparison was a bead from a wealthy woman's grave at Ølby, about 40 km south of Copenhagen. The woman had been buried in a more extravagant fashion, lying in a hollowed-out oak trunk and wearing a beautiful belt disc, a smart string skirt with tinkling, shining small bronze tubes, and an overarm bracelet made of amber beads, and a single blue glass bead.

The glass bead turned out to be Egyptian. This is the first time that typical Egyptian cobalt glass has been discovered outside the Mediterranean area.

The archaeologists can now also substantiate that there is a connection between the amber beads and the glass beads.

It has been known for a long time that amber was exported in the Bronze Age from Nordic latitudes and southwards. Tutankhamun and other Egyptian pharaohs had large amber chains in boxes in their burial chambers.

Now the researchers are linking amber and glass together in an unexpected way.

Nordic and Egyptian sun cults traded goods

One property that both glass and amber have is that sunlight penetrates their surface.

It appears that glass and amber beads have been found together on sites from the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Germany to the Nordic latitudes.
The archaeologists believe this could be proof of a link between the Egyptian sun cult and the Nordic sun cult.

When a Danish woman in the Bronze Age took a piece of jewellery made of amber and blue glass with her to the grave, it constituted a prayer to the sun to ensure that she would be re-united with it and share her fate with the sun's on its eternal journey.

The old amber route to the countries in the Mediterranean thus now has a counterpart: the glass route to the North.

So far, the researchers have shown that there was a trade connection to Egypt and Mesopotamia in the years 1400-1100 BC. Finding out whether the route continued in the later Bronze Age is a future task for the Danish-French research team.

-------------

Read the original article in Danish on Videnskab.dk

Country Denmark  Translated by Michael de Laine

Related content

Archeologists burn pigs to investigate historical mystery
Archeologists burn pigs to investigate historical mystery
A murky glass mystery
Documents reveal 2,000-year-old Egyptian youth organization
Bronze Age people with a mine of their own
Field teeming with Bronze Age gold rings

Like 7,301 people like this.
Researchers will uncover “the other” hidden internet

Researchers will uncover “the other” hidden internet

La red semántica es muy compleja. En ella existen muchísimos idiomas ...

How about a Power Road?

How about a Power Road?

Camino hacia el futuro... El futuro es hoy.

New part of the immune system discovered

New part of the immune system discovered

Los hallazgos que se realizan, cuando se están buscando otros resultados, son ...

SAD starts in the eye

SAD starts in the eye

One way of recovering quickly from jet-lag (= re-setting circadian rhythm) is to allow ...

How about a Power Road?

How about a Power Road?

Camino hacia el futuro... El futuro es hoy.

New part of the immune system discovered

New part of the immune system discovered

Los hallazgos que se realizan, cuando se están buscando otros resultados, son ...

SAD starts in the eye

SAD starts in the eye

One way of recovering quickly from jet-lag (= re-setting circadian rhythm) is to allow ...

How about a Power Road?

How about a Power Road?

Camino hacia el futuro... El futuro es hoy.