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Whence Come These Stones? Philippine Tektites

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Book Reviews

WHENCE COME THESE STONES?

PHILIPPINE TEKTITES. A Contribution to the Study of the Tektite Problem in General, in the Light of both Past and Recent Discoveries. By H. Otley Beyer. (Volume One in Four Parts—paged separately) Parts I and II. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Publication, 1962. 160, 290 pp.

"Ask the man who owns one" was a commercial slogan intended to sell a well known product. In the two parts of the book under review we have the answer of the man who owns not merely one but half a million, a large proportion of all the tektites on record in the world. When Professor H. Otley Beyer, a senior scientist in tektite matters, presents his well documented views, the reader can be sure that he speaks from thorough knowledge and close acquaintance with his subject.

Tektites are a curious group of naturally occurring glassy objects consisting chiefly of silica together with smaller quantities of metallic oxides. These black stones usually weigh less than 200 grams. The name, tektites, was given to these bodies by Professor F. E. Suess in 1900 after the Greek word *tektos* meaning molten. This arises from their various shapes and appearances suggesting a molten origin. Since that time, and more especially since 1926 when they were first known scientifically in the Philippines, tektites have been carefully studied and compared for chemical composition, terrestrial location, physical dimensions and markings together with any other features which might give a further clue to their nature.

The problem of tektites is chiefly that of their origin. Where do they come from? Primitive people who found these distinctive stones thought they fell from the skies and so used them as charms. Later a large body of tektite scientists, after serious study, saw indications that they did fall from the skies, at least, that they came from outer

space, perhaps from the moon or from some other extra-terrestrial region. But other scientists see the evidence pointing away from an unacceptable lunar or cosmic origin, indicating the earth as their source.

The question is being very actively pursued in various scientific quarters. It is no longer a subject restricted to a few metallurgists or archaeologists. Physicists, chemists, astronomers, space scientists are bringing their techniques to bear on the problem. The copiousness of present day articles about tektites must be an unexpected reply to Professor Beyer's request in his first paper, written in 1928, for "a wider group of investigators than have hitherto attacked it" (p. 33).

The present work of Beyer is not intended as a single synthesis of all tektite information up to the latest theories. Rather it is a reissuing together of twenty papers written in the period between 1928 and 1962. The first paper introduces the reader to the state of tektite knowledge in 1928 and from then on he can grow with the thinking of Professor Beyer as new tektite areas are uncovered and studied. It is to be expected, too, that this type of work would be repetitious, one paper repeating ideas contained in a previous one.

For facility in seeing his volume through the press the author has chosen to issue it in four parts. Only Part I and Part II are now available. However from the *Contents* it is seen that Part III will furnish chiefly a thorough bibliography of the literature in this field. Part IV will gather together his pertinent papers written in the post-war period. The author has not restricted himself to the chronological order in the presentation of Parts I and II. Still, these two parts, with a preface and a few significant notes by way of comment, give the development of the status of Philippine tektites from the time they were first identified in 1926 up to 1945.

If there are any doubts about Beyer's access to the world's largest collection of tektites, Parts I and II, without having this for their purpose, remove the doubts entirely. The Philippines is easily the world's richest tektite region. Beyer has been at great pains to hunt them out, wherever possible, in their original location, *in situ*. In collecting the specimens he was ably assisted by many willing helpers. But it is clear that his own personal field trips gave impetus to this task. Particularly in areas like the Cubao and Santa Mesa regions, where modern structures have been erected on former agricultural fields, this preservation is of great worth.

Professor Beyer and those who have given him assistance are to be complimented on the accomplishment of Parts I and II of this volume. Interested scholars may not find everything here that is needed for solving the problem of tektite origin, but they will find easily the best and the most complete description of Philippine tektites.

In a total explanation of their origin, the characteristics of tektites so carefully described, classified and catalogued, cannot be ignored.

The reviewer of a book is expected to use his prerogative of pointing out defects or even disagreeing with the argument of the text. There can be no disagreement with those who have desired to place together a set of valuable scientific and historical papers. Particularly in cases where the originals may be lost to various scholars or may not be readily available to them, the reproduction will facilitate and stimulate future studies. A number of minor mistakes, more attributable to the proof-reader than to the author, have been noted. Minor blemishes do not weight heavily against the merit of the work; they require the reader to go carefully and to correct the evident errors as he goes.

The following sentence (page 125, Part II) taken in conjunction with the legend on page 82, Part I and with material on page 136, Part II, is difficult to understand:

This is the apparent fact that the whole tektite deposit of eastern Manila and western Rizal lies in what is essentially a single straight strip running in a roughly SE-NW direction—or to be more specifically accurate, in an ENE and WSW direction.

It would seem that there has been a slip in the proof-reading of directions in this passage.

The Preface to the volume begins with the question: "What are Tektites?" At the end of Parts I and II Beyer has us looking forward especially to Part IV where further information about the origin of tektites can be expected. No doubt he will give an analysis and critique of the positions of various groups such as that of the chemist, Dr. H. C. Urey, or that of the space physicist, Dr. John A. O'Keefe, or that of the geologist, Dr. Virgil E. Barnes, or that of some other group. But of peculiar interest will be the interpretation given by Professor Beyer himself as being influenced most by Philippine tektite specimens. Thus with all this scholarly energy being applied to the tektite problem the dictum of seventy years ago as cited recently by Dr. George Baker may be disproved: "where they came from no one knows."

JAMES J. HENNESSEY

BROWNE ON BLACK AND WHITE

RACE RELATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. By Robert S. Browne. Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1961. 62 pp.

Like other Public Affairs Press publications, this is not a book but a 62-page monograph or extended essay. The author is an Ameri-