

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

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REPORT ON THE SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATION OF CERAMIC MATERIAL EXCAVATED AT
AKSUM (SUBMITTED BY DR. H. N. CHITTICK, DIRECTOR OF THE BRITISH INSTITUTE
IN EAST AFRICA, via Dr. D. B. Harden)

1. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Chittick particularly asked about some 'curious glazed ware..... found in a context, perhaps as late as the ninth century or so'. He uses the terms "frit", "glass frit" and "frit faience"; one may assume he means "Egyptian faience" which is a powdered quartz body covered with an alkaline glaze. In the book, "Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries" (Fourth Ed. 1962) Lucas and Harris refer on p. 164 to a "glassy faience" (Variant E. in their faience typology), but the glassy faience is very hard whereas this ceramic material is very poorly sintered and can be scraped with the finger nail. Dr. Chittick also comments, "So far as I know, no one has recorded 'frit faience' as late as this"; (i.e. 9th century), but Lucas and Harris refer to its survival until the 14th or 15th century A.D. in Egypt and, according to H. E. Wolff (Archaeology Vol. 21 No. 2 (1968) p.98) it is still made today in Iran. The present examination was undertaken to obtain information about the nature of this ceramic material.

2. NATURE OF THE MATERIAL

(a) Body Material of Sherd: Ref. No. Ax.St. ~~XX~~ ⑨ 1973

A sample of the body material was analysed for silicon by colorimetric analysis and for aluminium, sodium and potassium by atomic absorption spectrophotometry. The results obtained were as follows: SiO_2 93± 2%, Na_2O 0.4%, K_2O 0.96% and Al_2O_3 0.6%. This composition agrees with those found for the body material of Egyptian faience by Lucas and Harris (op. cit. p. 474)

(b) Glazed Sherd: Ref. No. Ax. St. XX ⑨ 1973

A sample of the glaze from a green glazed sherd was examined by qualitative spectrographic analysis and shown to contain lead.

3. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the body material clearly indicates this "curious glazed ware" is, in fact, ordinary Egyptian faience, i.e. a sintered quartz body.

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