

FIG. 2.—LOCALITY UNKNOWN.
(British Museum.)

FIG. 1.—PATCHAM, SUSSEX.
(Brighton Museum.)

PLATE I.—ROMAN GLASS INKPOTS.

A ROMAN GLASS INKPOT

FOUND AT PATCHAM, SUSSEX.

BY A. F. GRIFFITH, M.A.

JUST twenty years ago, three or four earthenware crocks were discovered, one of which contained the glass vessel here figured (Plate I., Fig. 1). They were found by flint-diggers in the field lying immediately to the west of the main road from Brighton to Lewes, between that road and the mouth of the narrow steep valley (so well known to entomologists as a haunt of *Colias Hyale*, *Procris geryon* and *globulariae*, *Coleophora niveicostella*, and other rarities) called Moulsecoomb Pit, and just a mile beyond the Brighton Borough boundary. The crocks and this vessel were in my custody for some time after their discovery, but were subsequently lost sight of, and it is feared that the crocks may be irretrievably lost.

This vessel is made of the ordinary thick blue-green glass used by the Romans for many of their cinerary bottles and other objects. A very similar but rather larger vessel, in similar glass, is preserved among the Slade Collection at the British Museum (Slade No. 923), but without any history. It is shown to the left of the same Plate (Fig. 2).

The writers of antiquity took little interest in recording anything about articles of common use, nor do inkpots form an exception. Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* XXXV. 6, 25), about A.D. 60, explains various ways in which black ink, or paint, was made, and specially mentions Indian ink as brought from India, though he had not succeeded in discovering its method of manufacture; and in the following sections he gives similar information as to other colours. But I find no reference in his writings to inkpots. He calls writing ink *Atramentum*

librarium, and advises (*Nat Hist.* XXVII. 7, 28) that it should be mixed with tincture of wormwood to preserve the writing from mice!

Pollux, about A.D. 200, gives two lists (IV. 18 and X. 59) of writing requisites, each obviously very incomplete. In the first of these he mentions neither ink nor inkpots; and most of the words he records in the second passage refer to the waxed tablets on which words were written or "scratched" by a stylus or writing ("graving") tool, *γραφεῖον*, rather than writing materials as we should now understand the expression. But he finishes up by adding "ink, inkpot and pens," *μέλαν, μελανοδόχον, καλάμους*.

The history of writing probably begins with characters engraved on stones, and then seems to have developed along two distinct lines—one, of engraved; the other, of painted or written characters. Pursuing the former line, we come upon the clay tablets or cylinders on which, while soft, characters were marked with a graving tool, and then rendered almost imperishable when the whole tablet was burnt into pottery. This process no doubt led up to the waxed tablets of classical times. These consisted of thin sheets of wood or other substance, thinly coated with bees-wax, on which characters were marked with a stylus, one end of which was pointed for the purpose, the other end being frequently flattened to a smooth blade, with which any mistakes could be corrected by simply pressing the wax flat again, so that it was ready to take new and correct letters. These tablets were either single, or joined together in pairs (*δέλιον διπτυχόν*), or three or more together as *τριπτυχόν* (whence the mediæval painted triptychs have their name, like their Pompeian prototypes), or *πολυπτυχόν* (Pollux IV. 18).

These tablets have led up to the writing slates of our childhood, where, however, the letters are as little "graved" by the hard "stylus," or slate pencil, as is the case with inked writing, unless, of course, the pencil has been carelessly allowed to scratch the fair surface of the slate.

For almost all practical purposes, this first line had died out soon after the close of the classical period, having been supplanted by the second, or ink writing. The beginnings of this latter method seem to be at least coëval with the early engraved clay tablets. In Egypt, the earliest dated Papyrus, written with ink, that has survived is of the reign of Assa, VIth. dynasty (about 2200 B.C. according to most Egyptologists, though at least 1000 years older according to Professor Petrie's reckoning). After this, long literary papyri are not infrequent, the ink being usually black, but with red interpositions.

As early as the XVIIIth. dynasty (about 1540 B.C.) we find jars marked in ink with the record of their contents; from which period, broken potsherds marked with inked memoranda were in common use.

How early ink writing may have been in Mesopotamia it is hard to say. Scribes appear holding a roll of something, which may have been leather, or cotton, or bark, or some vegetable substance the name of which, *liu*, suggests nothing known. This appears to date from about 2000 B.C. Unlike the dry climate of Egypt, the dampness of Mesopotamia has effectually destroyed all such writing substances. Inked "notes" (or comments on the inscribed texts) in cuneiform characters on clay tablets are known as early as B.C. 650; but for cuneiform characters, "graving" on clay was more convenient than ink writing, while for the curved Aramaic characters the opposite is the case. Aramaic letters are used, scratched on the baked clay, to write notes or dockets on clay contracts inscribed in cuneiform as early as 850 B.C. Later, such notes are written in ink. Still later, we find in Babylonia that incantations in Hebrew or Aramaic were written with ink on the inside of bowls; the patient, drinking out of these, swallowed his prescription, ink and all.

Curiously enough, neither in Egypt nor in Mesopotamia do the scribes appear to have had pottery tablets burnt specially to use with ink; they seem to have been always satisfied with broken sherds. In both regions the

writing tool appears to have been a reed with the end macerated (in Mesopotamia, probably by chewing) into a kind of brush.¹ And no doubt in Mesopotamia, as in Egypt, the "ink" was a dry black substance, similar to Indian ink, which was rubbed up with water on a palette as required. The old stone palettes and ink-boxes are in every collection of Egyptian antiquities, and can be traced in the modern Arab scribe's outfit. Demosthenes (*de Cor.* 313, 12), about B.C. 350, speaks of a school-master having to grind up his ink (τὸ μέλαν τρίβειν). But by the end of the fifth century A.D., a black (if not a blue-black!) writing fluid was in use, as Damocharis (of Cos) writes:

καὶ γραφικοῖο δοχεῖα κελαινοτοτάτοιο ῥέεθρον.

In quite early days the reed brush began to give place to a true pen, which was usually made of reed, though on occasion of metal, an early example of which is preserved in the British Museum. Damocharis, about A.D. 500, in writing of a scribe's outfit, speaks of a gouge for reed pens:

γλύφανον καλάμου πλατέος γλωχίνα σιδήρον,

while Julianus Aegyptiacus, about A.D. 500 (like Philip of Thessalonica 400 years earlier) speaks of a penknife:

σμίλης τ' ὀξυτόμον κοπίδα.

The pens were split, like modern quills or steel pens, when duly hollowed; and pumice stone (*κίσσηριν, ἀρχμηρὸν πόντου τρηματόεντα λίθον*, as Philip of Thessalonica describes it) was used to sharpen the nib, when softened and blunt with much writing. Thus Paulus Silentarius, one of Justinian's secretaries, about A.D. 520 writes:

*καὶ λίθον ὀκρίοντα, δοναξ ὄθι δισσὸν ὀδόντα
θήγεται ἀμβλυθεῖς ἐκ δολιχογραφίης.*

Probably few of us have realised that lead pencils, round as at present (*τροχόεντα μόλιβδον* or *μόλιβον*) were made, at any rate at the beginning of the second century

¹ Chinese writing is effected with a brush. The early history of the means of writing in that country would be most interesting if obtainable.

A.D. (see Philip of Thessalonica), for ruling the columns of writing in the old rolls. Damocharis, already twice quoted above, calls a pencil :

πλήθοντα μελάσματι κυκλομόλιβδον

thus showing that in his time (about A.D. 500) the third word had ceased to convey the separate ideas involved in "a rounded lead," and merely designated a "pencil" which could be described as "full of blacking." In fact, unless one bears in mind that μέλασμα here means not ink but black lead, or graphite, one is tempted to translate the whole three words as "a fountain pen."

Just as the writer on a waxed tablet liked to have one end of his stylus flattened, to obliterate a mistake, so the writer in ink had his sponge. Thus Paulus Silentiarius :—

καὶ βυθίην Τρίτωνος ἀλιπλάγκτοιο χαμεύνην
σπόγγου, ἀκεστορίην πλαζομένης γράφιδος.

The anticlimax is delicious : "A sponge, once the ocean-couch of the sea-roving God, now corrects an erring stroke of a letter."

The sixth book of the *Anthologia Palatina* consists of *Epigrammata Anathematica*, short poetic effusions supposed to accompany votive offerings. Those numbered 62 to 68 inclusive relate to ἐγγραφίος τέχνης ὄργανα, which scribes, with their hands or eyes wearied or worn out with years of work, offer up either to the Muses or to Hermes. This is the quarry, whence much of the foregoing information as to late classical pens and other scribe's tools has been dug ; the earliest was composed in the time of the Emperor Trajan, about 120 A.D. All the rest range round about 500 A.D., and they give us a vivid picture of the old writer's equipment. These few pages² contain almost all the references to ink and inkpots which I have been able to discover in Greek literature. They contain the following terms for inkpots (which no other Greek author appears to mention except Pollux, who, as above quoted, uses the term μελανοδόχον)

² The early editions of Liddell and Scott refer also to *Anth. Pal.* X. 68. But I can find no mention of an inkpot throughout that long and wearisome book.

in addition to the *δοχεῖα* for black writing fluid quoted above from Damocharis (63) :

κίστην πολύωπα³ μελανδόκον ἐν ἐνὶ πάντα
 εὐγραφέος τέχνης ὄργανα ῥυομένην 65 (Paulus Silentarius)
 μέλανος σταθεροῖο δοχήϊον 66 (id.)
 ἄγγος τε μελανδόκον 68 (Julianus Aegyptiacus)

It will be remembered that Jeremiah, about B.C. 600, was as well acquainted with graven characters (xvii. 1) as with ink writing (xxxvi. 18), as indeed we should expect, recollecting his stay at Tahpenhes, in Egypt. So too Isaiah, a hundred years earlier (see xxx. 8). Nor shall we forget the three occasions when ink is mentioned in the New Testament (2 Cor. iii. 3; 2 John 12, in connection with *χάρτος*, paper, and 3 John 13, in connection with *κάλαμος*, pen). But nowhere in the Bible is an inkpot mentioned except in the passage of Ezekiel, mentioned later on.

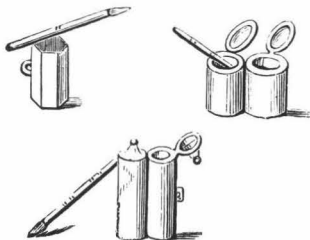


FIG. 3.—INKPOTS POURTRAYED IN POMPEIAN WALL PAINTINGS.

In the Pompeian wall-painting, inkpots are portrayed in several instances (probably in all cases between 63 and 79 A.D.). Three such paintings are reproduced in *Real Museo Borbonico* (published in 16 volumes in 1824 by Cav. Antonio Niccolini), see Vol. I., pl. XII., where Bernardo Quaranta gives a description of sundry articles used by the ancients for writing. The inkpots themselves are figured in Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* under the heading *Atramentum*, and by the courtesy of the editor of that work the block is reproduced here (Fig. 3). They would all appear to be

³ This word, literally "many-eyed," is usually here translated "with many openings;" more probably, however, it refers to the substance of which the pot was made, perhaps a marble or glass with ocellated patterns on it.

of metal. Two of them are double, each of the pots having a hinged lid, closing in the whole of the top of the cylinder. One of the pairs has a ring fixed vertically half-way down, of which more will be said below. The remaining inkpot is seen to be a single one, hexagonal in section, also with a ring fixed vertically half-way down one edge. The panel in which this single pot is depicted was found in the dining-room of the house of Julia Felix, and is reproduced in Gargiulo's *Raccolta*, 2nd series (issued in 1854). It appears as the top right-hand corner panel of Plate 58, where, unfortunately, the inkpot is so roughly drawn as to be almost indistinguishable, while in Niccolini's Plate it is as carefully and accurately drawn as in our Fig. 3.

In referring to the double inkpot, with the ring on the side, Quaranta suggests that black ink was put into the one, and red in the other pot; and that the ring "served to hold it hung on to the hip, as *Horace says*, or simply as a handle." Where does Horace refer to anything of the kind? I remember no such passage, nor have my more learned friends been able to help. Oddly enough, Smith's *Dictionary*, in noting the same ring, refers to Petronius *Sat.* 102, where however again we find nothing apposite, though we find a reference to the sticky nature of the ink of his time, thus confirming Pliny's prescription of gum and lamp-black, and reminding us of the pot of original ink, found at Herculaneum, which was still viscous and gummy after all these centuries. But these rings ought to throw light on the rings of our Moulsecomb inkpot, so it is disappointing to find neither of the above references correct, though probably the rings on the Pompeian pots were really for the purpose suggested by Quaranta, and these on the Moulsecomb pot also.

As we have seen, ink was in common use in Egypt and elsewhere in classical times; and inkpots to hold it must have been correspondingly common, in spite of the paucity of coëval references and pictures. Very few, however, seem to have survived to our own time. In addition to the Slade glass example mentioned above

(Fig. 2), the British Museum exhibits a blue glazed pottery specimen, with two holes in the top, one central and the other close to the side (see Plate II., Fig. 4). This was found by the Egypt Exploration Fund at Oxyrhynchus, near the Fayoum, in Egypt; the famous site whence so many valuable classical papyri have been obtained by that Fund.

The same Museum also exhibits six bronze cylindrical pots, all of circular section, one of which is shown in Plate II. (Fig. 6). This has one central round hole in the lid. Its history is not recorded. Another, very similar but of larger diameter, and therefore more squat-looking, is believed to have come from Corfu. A third, again very similar, but with the cylindrical body reeded round almost continuously from top to bottom, came from Melos. A pair, each with a hinged cover at top, but otherwise very similar in many respects to Fig. 5, were found at Torre Annunziata (near Pompeii). The sixth, also with a hinged lid and a beautiful Roman design chased round the top, has a much larger base and smaller cylinder than Fig. 5. No record remains of its discovery. These three last-mentioned differ from those portrayed in the Pompeian wall paintings, not only in their more ornate contour, but also by having their hinged lids of a size to cover the central holes in the tops only, and not forming the whole tops (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 5 (Plate II.) shows an inkpot of Samian pottery in the Hilton-Price Collection (London Museum), which was broken to pieces, but has been carefully mended. This is specially interesting as it has a funnel-shaped addition inside leading downward from the circular opening at the top, so arranged as to prevent the ink spilling over if the pot is shaken or falls on to its side; thus showing that the Romans required the same safeguards in their inkpots as are found in many office inkpots to-day.

It will be seen that in our Patcham inkpot the top itself seems to have been formed of a separate piece of glass, welded on to the body of the pot, and sufficiently



FIG. 6.—BRONZE
LOCALITY UNKNOWN.
(British Museum.)

FIG. 5.—SAMIAN POTTERY.
LONDON.
(London Museum.)

FIG. 4.—GLAZED POTTERY.
OXYRHINCUS, EGYPT.
(British Museum.)

PLATE II.—CLASSICAL INKPOTS.

funnel-shaped to prevent the ink splashing over when the pot is shaken. And the three ringed handles seem to indicate that this, like the Slade specimen (Fig. 2), was intended to be used by a "writer," slung to his belt in the same way that auctioneers till quite recently carried their long ink bottles, now entirely superseded by fountain pens. This reminds us of the man mentioned by Ezekiel in chapter ix. verses 2 and 3 (about B.C. 600), who was among the six men with destroying weapons, and who had a *writer's inkhorn* on his loins (*atramentarium scriptoris ad renes ejus*, see Vulgate; the Septuagint speaks of ζώνη σαπφείρου ἐπὶ τῆς ὀσφύος αὐτοῦ). No doubt "writers" of old needed their inkpots to be carried on their clothing and yet safe from spilling over, leaving their hands free, exactly as their modern successors.

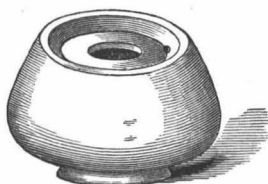


FIG. 7.—POTTERY (ROMAN), LONG LAWFORD, NEAR RUGBY.

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The funnel-shaped top, while safeguarding from accidental spills, causes difficulty when the ink dries and has to be washed out. This no doubt gave rise to the second hole in the top of the Oxyrhynchus pot (Fig. 4), which appears to have been contrived by the original maker. Not so a Roman pottery specimen found at Long Lawford, near Rugby, and figured in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquarians of London*, (Vol. VI. p. 346), a copy of which figure is, by the kindness of the Society, reproduced here (Fig. 7). This was originally made with but one circular opening at the top, about seven-eighths of an inch in diameter. But, exasperated at the trouble involved in washing out by this one hole the mixture of half-dried ink and dust which collects at the bottom of such a pot, the owner

bored a small hole one-eighth of an inch across, at the extreme edge of the top, and no doubt rejoiced at the result whenever he had to clean out his pot. Let us hope that his temper was never tried by the ink, when fresh and liquid, splashing out at his second hole. The modern clerk extracts the dregs, well rinsed with water, through the one central funnel-shaped hole of his inkpot by means of blotting paper—a notable advance on his ancient predecessors and their methods.

No doubt the ink-horn recorded by Ezekiel was made of metal or glass. In mediæval and later times horn was used for the purpose commonly, so that at the dates of the English translations “ink-horn” was the natural word for the English translators to use for the purpose. The London Museum Collection contains many examples of such horn inkpots, most of them much weathered and worn. But the word in the original is, I understand, *keseth*,⁴ signifying a “box,” i.e. a pot or jar (like the “alabaster box of ointment”). Thus *πυξίς*, originally signifying a box-wood vessel (whence *box*), was on occasion used to denote an inkpot. And just as a box may be made either of boxwood or any other wood, or of metal, tortoiseshell or the like, so a *πυξίς* might be made of metal even in A.D. 70 (see Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* I., 30, 7). And such a metal box would be used, no doubt, for many purposes. One, a toilet box from Tarentum, Greek rather than Roman in character, is exhibited in the British Museum. It is much like one of the bronze inkpots with hinged covers, except that the cylinder is of larger diameter; and the whole top is hinged to form the cover of the box, instead of a small circular cover only to the central hole for the pen. But when the covers are on, the two look much alike, the central knob or handle to the hinged lid of the toilet box corresponding closely with the hinged cover of the inkpot. Such a box is depicted in a Pompeian wall painting reproduced in *Real Mus. Borb.*, Vol. IX., plate XV.

⁴ As again emphasizing the rarity of ancient references to inkpots, it appears that this is the only occurrence of the word *keseth*.



IRON, LINED WITH THIN BRONZE. BARRINGTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE.
(University Museum, Cambridge.)

PLATE III.—SAXON INKPOT.

A curious iron vessel, somewhat similar in shape to the long double inkpots portrayed at Pompeii, but single, *and lined inside with thin bronze*, was found in 1880 in the Saxon Cemetery at Barrington, Cambridgeshire, by coprolite diggers, before the careful excavations were commenced which are recorded in the *Cambridge Antiquarian Society's Communications*, Vol. V. This was broken into three pieces by the carelessness of the men, who lost one small piece. But the other two pieces, the bottom and top, were secured by me. Most unfortunately the top was lost one evening when the pieces, with the rest of my collection from that cemetery, were exhibited to the Cambridge Society, and before a drawing of it was made. I append three drawings (Plate III.), two of which are made from the original, still in my possession,⁵ and the other is completed from my recollection of the top. I have little doubt that it was an inkpot.

May I here express my thanks to those who have so kindly helped me in the preparation of this paper. Mr. Reginald Smith, at the British Museum, not only referred me to the Slade and Hilton-Price examples and the paper in Vol. VI. of the *Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, but also most kindly enabled me to obtain the photographs reproduced in Plates I. and II.; Miss F. de G. Merrifield translated Quaranta's Italian notes; Mr. Murray gave the use of Fig. 3; the Society of Antiquaries and their Secretary lent their books and the use of Fig. 7; and my son Henry copied out long extracts from obscure authors at the University Library at Cambridge. The Rev. Canon and Mrs. Johns gave me the information about early Egyptian and Mesopotamian writing; and the Dean of Ely and Mr. Rackham of Christ's College helped too. And finally, Miss Jessie Ryle made the drawings for Plate III.

⁵ This will now be deposited in the University Museum at Cambridge, where the Walter Foster Collection from the same cemetery are already exhibited.

The Patcham inkpot, with an auctioneer's glass carrying-inkpot and a common glass office inkpot with funnel-shaped mouth, will now be deposited at the Brighton Public Museum.