

11. AN ENIGMATIC ARTIFACT, by Peter Francis, Jr. (1982, 1:3)

What We Know

The lithified object pictured [Fig. 1] was found on the surface near Poona, India. It weighs 4.91 g, has a sp. gr. of 1.63, and H 5-6. It twice tested negatively to HCl reaction (no carbonate), but positively to containing some phosphate. It appears to be a fossil in opaline form. Given the geology of the Poona region (in the middle of the Deccan Trap lava flows), it must have been manuported there. This may have happened any time in the last 10,000 years; the immediate area has evidence of occupation by microlith users, and is today a suburb of an old urban area.

What We do not Know

We do not know what the object is. I have taken it to several institutions in the U.S. and in India, and have

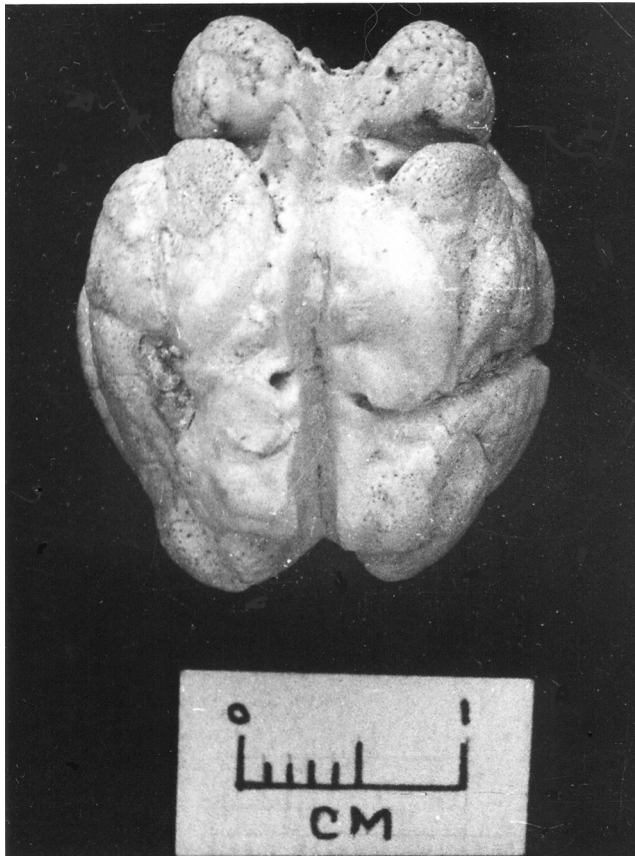


Figure 1. Opaline fossil apparently used as a bead. Found near Poona, India.

received numerous suggestions. Thus far, none of these has proven completely satisfactory.

What we can Surmise

The object is an artifact, probably used as a bead. It has a number of grooves which allow it to be suspended in several different ways. The large transversal groove visible in the photo may or may not be man-made, but on the opposite side of the object (which has a very different appearance) points of wear correspond exactly to the path a strand would have taken had it been wrapped around the object through this groove. There are also clearly artificial cuts, including the widening of the gap under the right lobe at the top of the photo. A string can suspend the object in 3 ways: transversely through the large groove, below the two lobes, or crossing in front in a diamond pattern. Each of these paths have wear marks and/or cuts which must be humanly produced.

Grooved pendants and beads are generally characteristic of a relatively low technology. Such pendants are found in the lowest Upper Paleolithic levels in Europe, disappearing thereafter, only to return on some hard stones early in the Chalcolithic. This object, pendant, if you will, must have been made and worn by people with fairly primitive technology, whether ancient (e.g., microlith users) or modern (e.g., tribal aborigines).

If anyone can suggest the nature of this object or shed any further light on this mystery, I would appreciate it greatly. It has been puzzling me for 4 years.

Postscript (1983, 2:4)

From the Ichthyology section, L.A. County Museum of Natural History comes the suggestion that the enigmatic artifact (*Forum* 1) may be a fossilized (marine) mammal skull. This is the 5th different identification received from zoologists and paleontologists.

12. MOLLUSCAN SHELL AS BEADS, by Peter Francis, Jr. (1982, 1:4-5)

No one interested in primitive ornaments can overlook the use of molluscan shells. Beads made of shell are among the earliest recorded beads from Europe and Asia.

The problem of molluscan shells used for beads raises several questions: 1) what is their antiquity and distribution?;