

# Between the Nile and the Ocean The bead assemblage from Shenshef in the Eastern Desert (4th–6th centuries AD)

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**Abstract:** More than 200 beads and pendants were found in seven trash middens excavated at the 4th/5th to the 6th century AD settlement site in Shenshef in the Eastern Desert of Egypt. The site lies close to the Sudanese border and the Red Sea coast, and about 20 km to the southwest of the ancient port of Berenike. Although the purpose of the settlement has not been established, excavations provided a wide range of imports from the Mediterranean region and the Indian Ocean. An overview of the materials and manufacturing techniques applied in the production of the beads and pendants confirms the short- and long-distance contacts of Shenshef inhabitants. In addition to the many bead parallels that link the site with the Red Sea ports and the Nile Valley region up to the First Cataract, the presence of South Indian/Sri Lankan beads at Shenshef is especially meaningful. They may be proof of the intermediary role played by the Shenshef inhabitants in trading overseas imports into the Nubian Nile Valley region.

**Keywords:** beads, pendants, material culture, Indian trade, Red Sea, Eastern Desert, Egypt, Nubia

During the 1997 season the Berenike Project American–Dutch team excavated a few trenches in the Eastern Desert settlement at Wadi Shenshef. This settlement, also known as Hitan Shenshef, is situated in the extreme southeast of Egypt, 12 km west of the Red Sea and 21.3 km south-southwest of the site of Berenike (Gould 1999: 371). The site comprises approximately 300 structures of various sizes and functions, and at least 500 tumulus tombs. The settlement stretches for about 800 m east–west by almost 300 m north–south (Gould 1999; Aldsworth 1999; Sidebotham, Hense, and Nouwens 2008: 360; Sidebotham

2011: 275–276). The purpose of this large and well-built settlement has yet to be established.

Excavation of seven trenches, BE97-Sch.1 to BE97-Sch.7, in the 4th/5th to 6th century AD refuse middens near the houses has demonstrated close contacts between Shenshef, Berenike and many distant lands. Walnuts, olives, almonds, and umbrella pine were imported from the Mediterranean; amphoras came from the Eastern Mediterranean, mainly Cyprus and Cilicia (Tomber 1998: 170–179); black pepper, sorghum, and teak stemmed from South Asia; a sapphire from Sri

Lanka was also found. Interestingly, faunal remains indicated a population dependent on herding goats and sheep, but the Red Sea fish were poorly represented (Cappers 1999; Van Neer and Ervynck 1999; Sidebotham, Hense, and Nouwens 2008: 363; Sidebotham 2011: 276 and references therein). What is more, quantities of so-called Eastern Desert Ware have also been recovered at Shenshef. This pottery has been associated with a population living in the Eastern Desert. It was also found at the Red Sea ports (e.g., Barnard 2005–2006; 2008) and Nubian sites, and is usually ascribed to the Blemmyes (e.g., Ricke 1967; Strouhal 1984; Barnard and Magid 2006), a population known from textual sources (e.g., Dijkstra 2012; Obluski 2014).

An important collection of 200 beads, pendants and their fragments was excavated at the Shenshef settlement and is presently kept in the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) storage room at Quft.

While perforated mollusk shells of Red Sea origin have been described in detail (Van Neer and Ervynck 1999: Table 24-2, Pl. 24-3), the presence of beads and pendants made of other materials, including glass beads from Sri Lanka, was mentioned only briefly in the excavation reports (Gould 1999: 375; Francis 2000).

This paper aims at illustrating and expanding the typology of ancient beads found around the Indian Ocean between the 4th and the 6th century AD. This was the time when the Meroitic Kushite kingdom in Nubia fell and new kingdoms emerged: Nobadia in Lower Nubia and Early Makuria in Upper Nubia. Many bead types from Shenshef find parallels at contemporary late Roman Red Sea port sites and post-Meroitic Nubian ones. Therefore, the paper suggests that the Shenshef dwellers were potential middlemen who may have traded overseas items between the Red Sea coast and the inland sites of Northeast Africa.

## OVERVIEW OF BEAD MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

Beads and pendants found at Shenshef were made of organic (wood, bone, mollusk shells, ostrich eggshell), inorganic (carnelian), and man-made materials (faience, glass), and in this order they are described below. While glass objects (n=180) dominated the assemblage, the remaining materials were found in meager quantities (n=20).

### WOOD

One large oblate bead is made of wood and measures 7.3 mm in diameter and 8.3 mm in length [Fig. 6:3]. Wooden beads are rarely recognized in the bead

repertoires of Egypt and Nubia. Still, the most significant examples come from the Lower Nubian burial assemblages at Wadi Qitna, Kalabsha, and the royal cemetery at Ballaña, and they have been tentatively associated with the Eastern Desert population (Then-Obluska 2016a; in press b and references).

### MOLLUSK SHELL

A group of faunal remains registered from the Shenshef settlement included 25 perforated mollusk shells (Van Neer and Ervynck 1999: Table 24-2, Pl. 24-3). The published photo shows them to be per-

forated in two ways, either by removing the shell apex or by making a hole in the shell body. The shells belong to the following species: *Conus tessulatus* (n=8), *Conus* sp. (n=3), *Dentalium reevei* (n=1), *Engina mendicaria* (n=2), *Mitridae* (n=1), *Natica gualteriana* (n=1), *Nerita albicilla* (n=8), *Pyrene testudinaria* (n=1) (Van Neer and Ervynck 1999: Table 24-2, Pl. 24-3). The mollusk shell objects illustrated here are a shell of *Conus* sp. with the apex cut or ground down and perforated [Fig. 5:5], and a fragment of *Dentalium reevei* [Fig. 6:11]. Mollusk shells of unidentified species worked into beads were found as well [Figs 7:20; 9:18].

A similar abundance of perforated Red Sea mollusk shell species can be observed at the late 4th to 6th century AD port of Berenike (Then-Obluska 2015: Fig. 1). They are also recorded from post-Meroitic sites in Lower Nubia (Then-Obluska in press b: Fig. 2).

#### OSTRICH EGG SHELL

A few ostrich eggshell beads come from Shenshef [Figs 1:17-19; 2:5, 4:7; 5:4; 8:9; 9:2]. They are cylinder disks and short cylinders. A few specimens were also recognized from the Red Sea ports of Berenike and Marsa Nakari (Then-Obluska 2015; in press a). Ostrich eggshell beads are one of the most common materials used in bead production at Nubian Nile Valley burial sites of the post-Meroitic period (e.g., Then-Obluska 2014: Fig. Pl.3; 2016a: 41).

#### BONE

A preserved half of a large globular bead is most probably made of bone [Fig. 2:16]. The bead was partly perforated and split, apparently during the drilling process.

#### STONE

A few stone beads were found in the Shenshef assemblage. They were perforated from both ends. These are a small carnelian bead that was slightly faceted into a hexagonal bicone and well polished [Fig. 8:6], and a fragment of an oblate [Fig. 2:3]. Specimens faceted similarly to the former are known from late 4th to 6th century Berenike contexts (Then-Obluska 2015: Fig. 3:9,10; 2017a: Fig. 7:8,9; 2017b: Fig. 2:70).

#### FAIENCE

Even though faience beads almost disappeared from Egypt in the late Roman period, they were still to be found in Nubia. Two small faience beads are blue [Fig. 8:11] or yellow-glazed [Fig. 1:15]. A long tubular bead has a very porous core and partly washed glaze [Fig. 7:23]. It belongs to one of the most common bead types found in Nubia between the Fourth and Sixth Cataracts and dated from the late Meroitic to the post-Meroitic periods (e.g., Then-Obluska 2014: Pl. 2; 2016b: Fig. 1).

One green-glazed faience amulet is a schematic representation of Bes [Fig. 10:6]. Its appearance in the late Roman trash at Shenshef is not a surprise. Napatan- and Meroitic/Roman-dated Bes amulets have been found reused at late Roman sites in Egypt and at post-Meroitic ones in Nubia (Then-Obluska 2017b and references).

#### GLASS

Glass material dominates the bead and pendant assemblage at Shenshef (n=180). Glass bead bodies were made using a variety of techniques (drawing, winding, coiling, folding, or rod-piercing). Many beads are monochrome or additionally decorated

with trails or stripes while others are made of mosaic glass or metal-in-glass.

**MANDREL-WOUND GLASS BEADS**  
Single- and multiple-coiled blue ring beads are rather large in size, measuring 6 mm to almost 9 mm in diameter [*Figs 2:15; 5:9*]. Similar beads are present at the Blemmyan sites of Wadi Qitna, in the 4th century AD cemeteries (Then-Obluska 2016a: Fig. 6: P3039) and Bab Kalabsha (OIM E42035<sup>1</sup>), as well as at the late Roman Red Sea ports of Berenike (Then-Obluska 2015: Fig. 5:7,9) and Marsa Nakari (Then-Obluska in press a: Fig. 3.8).

Other coiled beads are a translucent purple in color [*Fig. 6:4,10*] and similar specimens can be observed in the bead assemblage of the late Red Sea port of Marsa Nakari (Then-Obluska in press a: Fig. 3.5–6).

Some beads were granular and most probably shaped in molds [*Figs 6:7; 8:2,13*]. While in the Meroitic period granular beads were usually made of faience (Then-Obluska 2016c: 699, Fig. 4:7), the post-Meroitic specimens were made of glass (OIM E19950 Qustul, blue glass; SJE25/47:4<sup>2</sup> Serra East; SJE332/9:1 Ashkeit; 333/31:2 Faras).

One black bead body was decorated with a central white trail [*Fig. 9:19*], whereas a large fragment of what is most probably a mandrel-wound bead is characterized by a black body decorated with a green wavy trail [*Fig. 1:3*].

Two beads with deeply applied white trails were most probably made of wound glass [*Figs 7:18; 9:11*].

#### ROD-PIERCED GLASS BEADS

A large teardrop-shaped pendant in opaque red may have had a rod-pierced perforation that is now broken [*Fig. 4:5*]. While glass and stone teardrop pendants are well known from Meroitic assemblages (e.g., Then-Obluska 2016c), this large roughly shaped specimen belongs to a red-glass type known from other post-Meroitic sites (e.g., MAN 1980/95/572<sup>3</sup> Nag el-Arab; OIM E20209J Qustul, Q 84-4).

A few beads made of rod-pierced mosaic cane sections with so-called flower motifs were recorded. A pattern with radial “petals” in yellow and green emanating from a yellow center within a red ring was shaped into two globular beads [*Fig. 6:5,6*]. A fragment of a conical bead was made most probably with similar mosaic glass [*Fig. 4:4*]. A similar pattern, but in tabular shape, was found at the post-Meroitic Lower Nubian sites of Wadi Qitna (Then-Obluska 2016a: Fig. 3: P3027d), Qustul (Williams 1991b: 143 and 300c; about AD 370/380–410), Serra East (Then-Obluska in press b: Fig. 7), and Ballaña (Williams 1991a: 235, Fig. 48h). In the latter instance, although published as Meroitic, the beads relate to the post-Meroitic reuse of the grave (Williams 1991b: 401). Egyptian parallels include specimens from the late Roman sites at Bagawat in Kharga Oasis (Metropolitan

<sup>1</sup> Oriental Institute Museum University of Chicago (OIM), personal observation.

<sup>2</sup> Scandinavian Joint Expedition (SJE) assemblage, stored in the Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger, personal observation.

<sup>3</sup> Museo Arqueológico Nacional (MAN), Madrid, personal observation.

Museum of Art, Accession No. 31.8.6, 4th–7th centuries AD), Gurob in the Fayum (Petrie Museum, UC58113, late Roman), and the port of Berenike (Then-Obłuska 2015: Fig. 5:37, 4th to 6th centuries AD). Similar yellow and green beads, with red centers, come from the late Meroitic contexts at Karanog in Nubia (Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910: Pl. 40:7906). The Shenshef assemblage provides similar examples of the mosaic motif, but with blue, instead of green “petals” [Fig. 2:6].

A mosaic-cane section with purple and white radial stripes atop a red-on-yellow layer was rod-pierced and shaped into a tabular bead [Fig. 5:11]. A similar motif but with red-on-white centers can be observed in a tabular bead from late Berenike (Then-Obłuska 2015: Fig. 5:38) and a globular one from Wadi Qitna (Then-Obłuska 2016a: Fig. 7: P3044b).

Pear-shaped ‘date beads’ are characterized by a green or striped body with a yellow stripe added at the larger end. These beads, either with a green body and yellow stripe [Figs 5:1; 8:18] or with a striped yellow and purple body with a yellow stripe [Fig. 6:1], were found at Shenshef. Made with a variety of techniques, these ‘date beads’ were common finds in Egypt and Nubia, but they seldom occurred elsewhere (e.g., Lankton 2003: 58; Then-Obłuska 2015, Berenike; Kucharczyk 2011: 66, Fig. 8:9, folded ‘date bead’ from Alexandria, layer dated to the 2nd–3rd century AD; Francis 2002b: 15, Fig. 1; Arveiller-Dulong and Nenna 2011: 176; Spaer 2001: 102, 111–112, Cat. 160a–c, 161, early 2nd century AD; Winter 2013: 19, Fig. 3:2 for late Roman and Byzantine period examples).

A biconical bead is made of yellow and green striped mosaic glass [Fig. 8:4]. Bicone striped beads, also in other colors, were very common in Roman Egypt (Arveiller-Dulong and Nenna 2011: 176).

A white-banded red bead is made of a mosaic strip most probably rod-pierced and folded around a rod [Fig. 9:17], resulting in a seam that is discernible next to the larger perforation (Then-Obłuska 2015: Fig. 5:33, late Berenike).

#### MANDREL-FORMED GLASS BEADS

A fragment of a long cylinder bead was made by folding a banded mosaic strip consisting of a blue central band bordered at both ends by red, white, and yellow [Fig. 2:12]. Another long bead seems to be made of double-folded mosaic cane sections [Fig. 5:10]. The banded mosaic pattern is white-blue-white on a red background.

A large conical, slightly faceted bead was made of mosaic glass in black and white [Fig. 3:1]. No parallel has yet been found. Two long dark blue beads were slightly faceted [Figs 3:9; 9:16].

#### DRAWN AND SEGMENTED GLASS BEADS

The beads from Shenshef also included drawn glass tubes that were most probably segmented in molds and broken up into single-segment and double-segment beads (n=46). Such molds were found in Alexandria in both early Roman and late Roman/early Byzantine contexts (Kucharczyk 2011; Rodziewicz 1984). Colors of the segmented beads include a monochrome opaque red (n=3), translucent dark blue (n=22), translucent

and opaque green and turquoise (n=15), opaque yellow (n=2), white (n=1), translucent purple (n=1), and black (n=2) [Figs 1:1,16,20; 2:1,2,10,11,14; 3:8; 4:1,8,9,12,13,16–25,26–29; 5:7,12,15; 6:2,9; 7:1,2,5,16,17; 8:8,10,15; 9:7,13,15; 10:3,4]. Monochrome segmented beads in green, blue and red are the most common glass objects at post-Meroitic Nubian sites (Then-Obluska in press b).

One bead is made of two glass layers with gold foil in between [Fig. 5:2]. Four single-segment drawn glass beads are made of two transparent glass layers with or without silver foil between them [Figs 4:3; 7:19,22; 9:8].

#### DRAWN AND ROUNDED GLASS BEADS

Drawn glass tubes could be cut into sections and then heat-rounded in some container. These types are associated with the Indo-Pacific bead tradition (Francis 2002a). Drawn and rounded beads comprise one-third of the Shenshef assemblage (n=69) [Figs 1:2,4–12,13,21–29; 2:7–9,13; 3:4,5,10–16; 4:6,10,11,14,15,30–33; 5:6,8; 7:3,4,10–13; 8:3,5,7,14,16,17,19–21; 9:3,6,10,12,14,20–24; 10:1,2]. They measure from 1.5 to 7.0 mm in diameter. Green (n=29) and blue-green (n=15) beads

dominate this type, but yellow (n=8), orange (n=7), red (n=6), white (n=2), and black (n=1) are also present in smaller quantities. Additionally, one black bead is decorated with stripes in white and red [Fig. 1:14].

Drawn and rounded beads in similar colors have been associated with a Sri Lankan origin (Francis 2000; 2002a). Monochrome drawn and rounded beads were macroscopically analyzed at the Red Sea ports of Quseir, Berenike, and Marsa Nakari and found to stem from a Sri Lankan location (Francis 2000; Then-Obluska 2015: Fig. 4:31–41; in press a). Furthermore, South Indian or Sri Lankan provenance for one yellow bead from Quseir has been confirmed by laboratory analysis (Then-Obluska and Dussubieux 2016). Interestingly, drawn and rounded beads appear at many post-Meroitic Nile Valley sites (Then-Obluska 2016a; 2016b; 2016d; in press b), and a study of the chemical composition of the specimens found in Lower Nubia has also indicated their South Indian/Sri Lankan provenance (Then-Obluska and Wagner 2017).

#### MODERN BEADS

Two beads in opaque red [Fig. 3:3] and light blue [Fig. 5:14] are modern intrusions.

Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 1, recorded by locus and PB number

1–3	–	BE97-SH.01/002/PB002	Glass
4–14	–	BE97-SH.01/004/PB004	Glass
15	–	BE97-SH.01/004/PB004	Faience
16	–	BE97-SH.01/004/PB004	Glass
17–19	–	BE97-SH.01/004/PB004	Ostrich eggshell
20–29	–	BE97-SH.01/005/PB005	Glass





Fig. 1. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 1, recorded by locus and PB number (for a description, see opposite page)

Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 1 (continued), recorded by locus and PB number

1–2	–	BE97-SH.01/005/PB005	Glass
3	–	BE97-SH.01/005/PB005	Carnelian
4	–	BE97-SH.01/005/PB005	Glass
5	–	BE97-SH.01/005/PB005	Ostrich eggshell
6	–	BE97-SH.01/005/PB005	Glass
7–12	–	BE97-SH.01/006/PB006	Glass
13–15	–	BE97-SH.01/007/PB007	Glass
16	–	BE97-SH.01/007/PB007	Bone





Fig. 2. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 1, recorded by locus and PB number

Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 1 (continued), recorded by locus and PB number

1-7	-	BE97-SH.01/008/PB009	Glass
8-9	-	BE97-SH.01/012/PB012	Glass
10	-	BE97-SH.01/003/PB003	Glass
11-16	-	BE97-SH.01/baulk clean/PB008	Glass

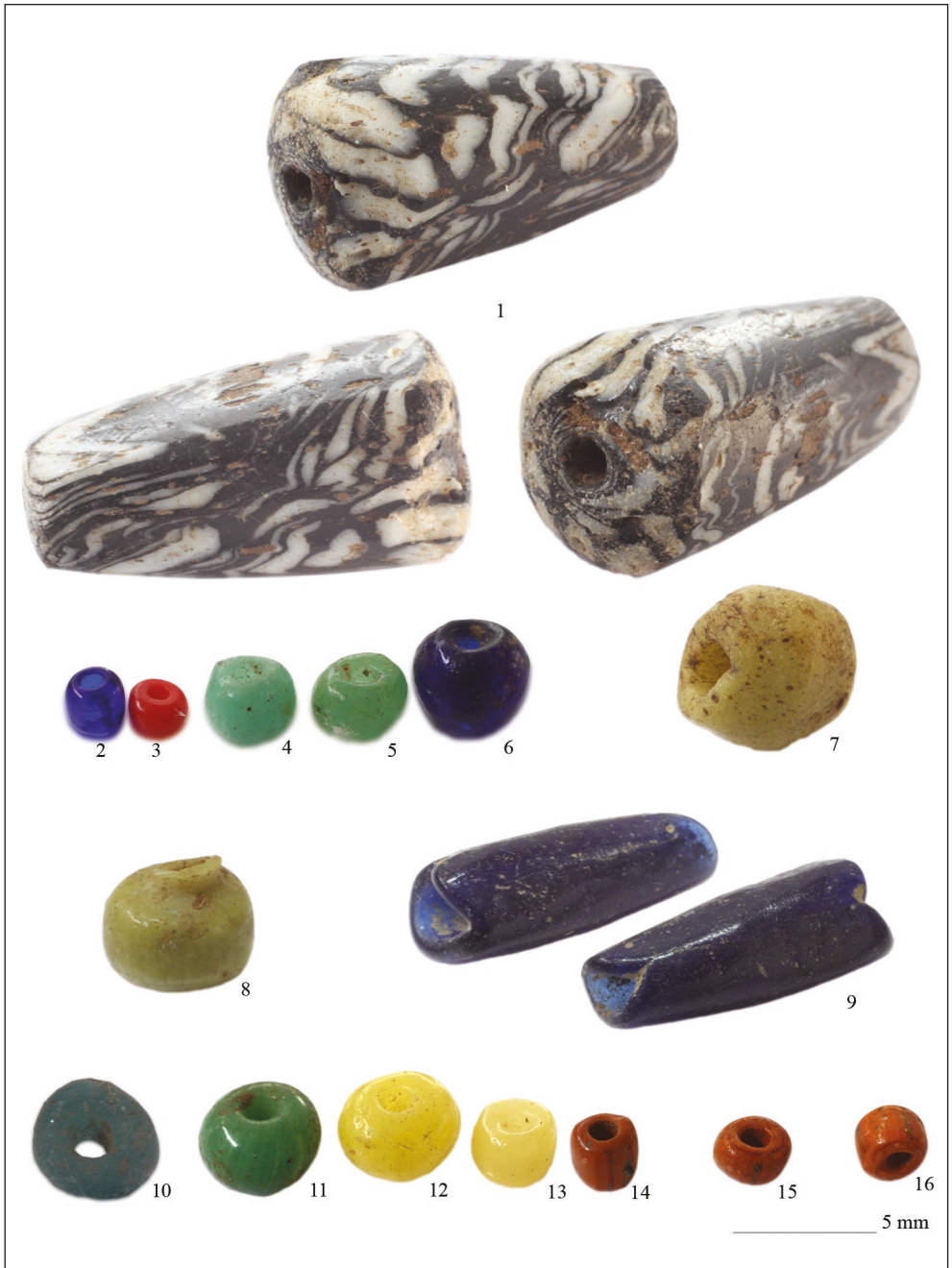


Fig. 3. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 1, recorded by locus and PB number

Beads and pendants from Shenshef'Trash Nos 1(continued) and 2, recorded by locus and PB number

1-6	-	BE97-SH.01/ baulk clean/PB008	Glass
7	-	BE97-SH.01/baulk clean/PB008	Ostrich eggshell
8-11	-	BE97-SH.02/001/PB001	Glass
12-34	-	BE97-SH.02/003/PB003	Glass

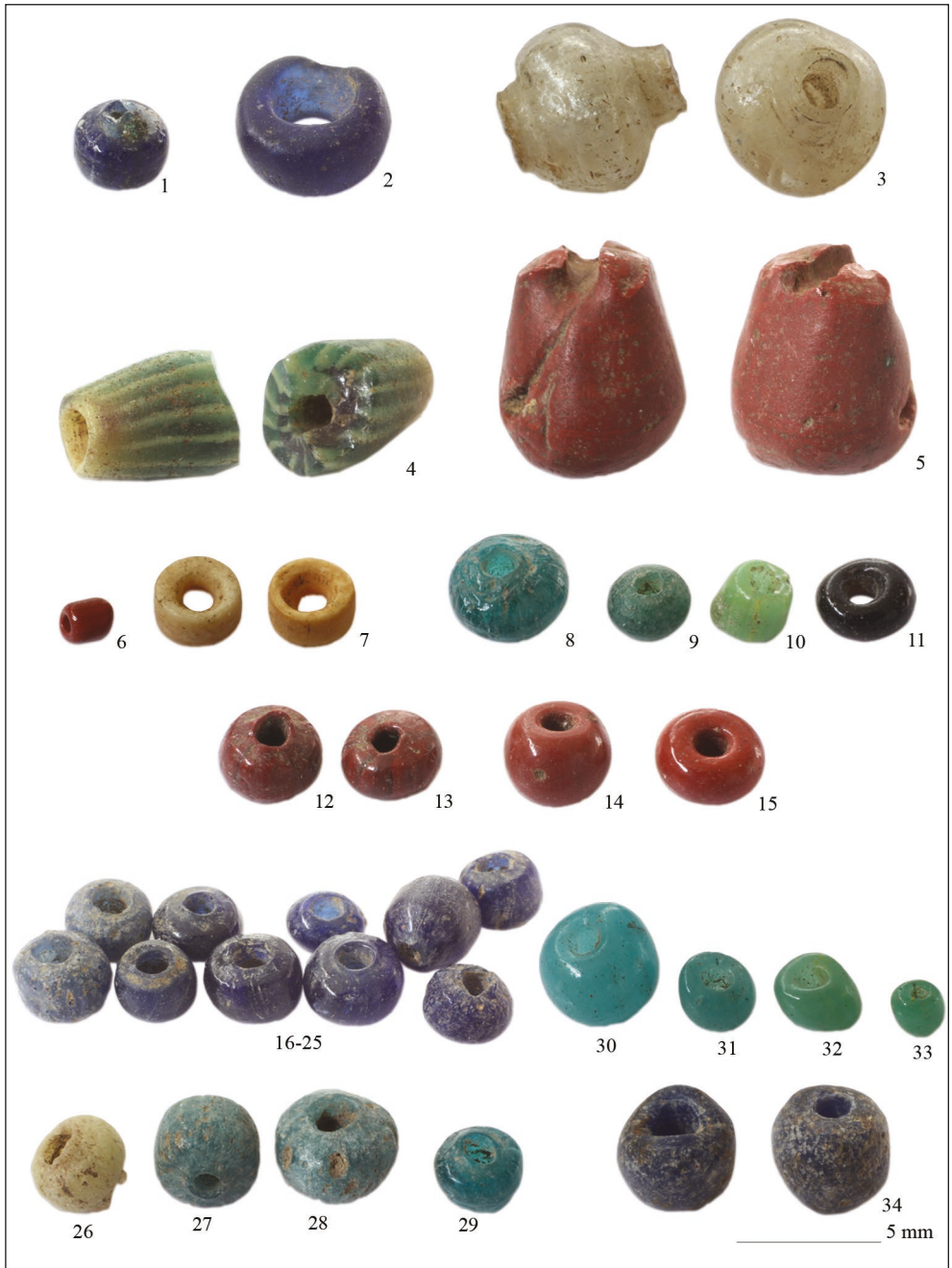


Fig. 4. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash Nos 1 and 2, recorded by locus and PB number

Beads and pendants from Shenshef'Trash No. 2 (continued), recorded by locus and PB number

1	-	BE97-SH.02/003/PB003	Glass
2	-	BE97-SH.02/003/PB003	Gold-in-glass
3	-	BE97-SH.02/003/PB003	Glass
4	-	BE97-SH.02/003/PB003	Ostrich eggshell
5	-	BE97-SH.02/003/PB003	Mollusk shell
6-11	-	BE97-SH.02/004/PB005	Glass
12-13	-	BE97-SH.02/005/PB006	Glass
14-16	-	BE97-SH.02/006/PB007	Glass



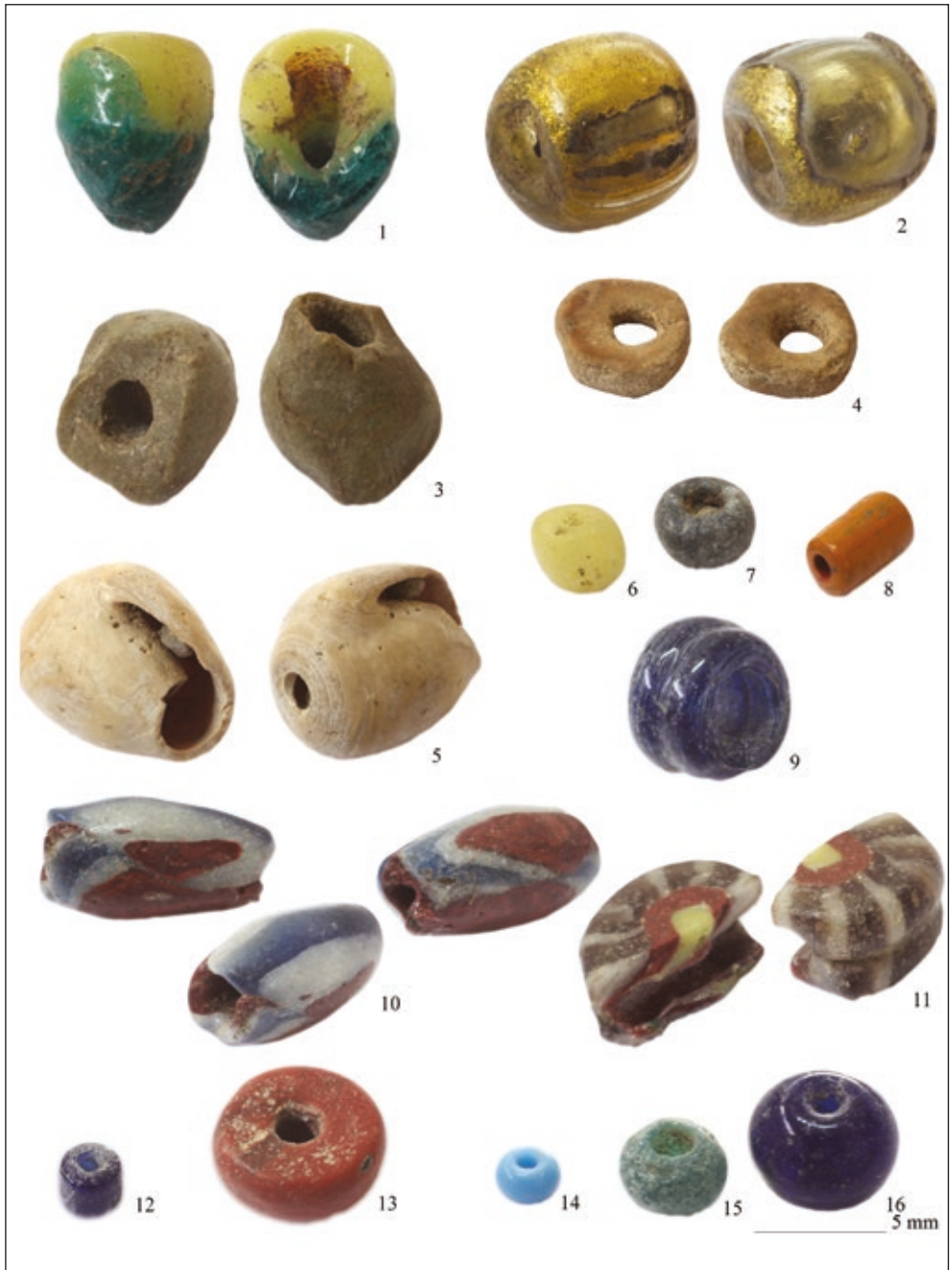


Fig. 5. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 2, recorded by locus and PB number

Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 3, recorded by locus and PB number

1–2	–	BE97-SH.03/001/PB001	Glass
3	–	BE97-SH.03/001/PB001	Wood
4–10	–	BE97-SH.03/002/PB002	Glass
11	–	BE97-SH.03/002/PB002	Mollusk shell



Fig. 6. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 3, recorded by locus and PB number

Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 3 (continued), recorded by locus and PB number

1-9	-	BE97-SH.03/002/PB002	Glass
10-19	-	BE97-SH.03/003/PB003	Glass
20	-	BE97-SH.03/003/PB003	Mollusk shell
21-22	-	BE97-SH.03/003/PB003	Glass
23	-	BE97-SH.03/003/PB003	Faience



Fig. 7. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 3, recorded by locus and PB number

Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash Nos 3 (continued) and 4, recorded by locus and PB number

1	– BE97-SH.03/003/PB003	Glass
2–5	– BE97-SH.04/001/PB001	Glass
6	– BE97-SH.04/001/PB001	Carnelian
7	– BE97-SH.04/001/PB001	Glass
8	– BE97-SH.04/002/PB002	Glass
9	– BE97-SH.04/002/PB002	Ostrich eggshell
10	– BE97-SH.04/004/PB004	Glass
11	– BE97-SH.04/005/PB005	Faience
12	– BE97-SH.04/005/PB005	Glass
13	– BE97-SH.04/006/PB006	Glass
14–15	– BE97-SH.04/006/PB006	Glass
16–18	– BE97-SH.04/006/PB008	Glass
19–22	– BE97-SH.04/007/PB009	Glass





Fig. 8. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash Nos 3 and 4, recorded by locus and PB number

Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash Nos 4 (continued) to 6, recorded by locus and PB number

- |       |   |                      |                  |
|-------|---|----------------------|------------------|
| 1     | - | BE97-SH.04/010/PB010 | Glass            |
| 2     | - | BE97-SH.04/010/PB010 | Ostrich eggshell |
| 3     | - | BE97-SH.04/010/PB010 | Glass            |
| 4-8   | - | BE97-SH.05/001/PB001 | Glass            |
| 9-10  | - | BE97-SH.05/001/PB002 | Glass            |
| 11-13 | - | BE97-SH.05/001/PB002 | Glass            |
| 14-17 | - | BE97-SH.05/002/PB003 | Glass            |
| 18    | - | BE97-SH.05/002/PB003 | Mollusk shell    |
| 19-21 | - | BE97-SH.05/003/PB004 | Glass            |
| 22-23 | - | BE97-SH.05/004/PB005 | Glass            |
| 24    | - | BE97-SH.06/001/PB001 | Glass            |



Fig. 9. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash Nos 4 to 6, recorded by locus and PB number

Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 7, recorded by locus and PB number

1	-	BE97-SH.07/001/PB001	Glass
2-5	-	BE97-SH.07/002/PB003	Glass
6	-	BE97-SH.07/002/PB003	Faience
7	-	BE97-SH.07/003/PB004	Glass



Fig. 10. Beads and pendants from Shenshef Trash No. 7, recorded by locus and PB number

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Trash middens at the late antique settlement of Shenshef in the Eastern Desert, about 23 km from the Roman Red Sea port of Berenike, provided a rich bead assemblage that is dominated by glass. While 70 drawn and rounded glass specimens are most probably of South Indian or Sri Lankan provenance, the remaining glass beads can be associated with the Egyptian and Eastern Mediterranean tradition. They all find parallels at contemporary sites in the Nubian Nile Valley and at Red Sea coastal sites. A similar domination of glass beads, with a comparable share of drawn and rounded ones, can be observed only at the 4th to 6th century AD Red Sea port sites of Berenike and Marsa Nakari (e.g., Then-Obluska 2015; 2017a; in press a). However, the green, blue-green and orange colors of the drawn and rounded beads at Shenshef are found not only at the Red Sea port sites, but also at the Lower Nubian Nile Valley sites, dated to between the 4th and 6th century AD (Then-Obluska 2016a; in press b). Furthermore, such drawn beads with rounded ends accompanied the typical early Makurian beads at the el-Zuma and el-Detti tumuli cemeteries, which are dated to the second half of the 5th and first half of the 6th century AD (Then-Obluska 2016b; 2016d; 2017c).

A few beads from Shenshef represented organic materials (wood, mollusk shells, ostrich eggshell, bone), stone, not to mention faience. Interestingly, many of them have also been documented in the Nubian Nile Valley. Some wooden beads were recorded in the Blemmyan and royal Nobadian tombs, where they were tentatively associated with the beadwork of the Eastern Desert dwellers (Then-

Obluska in press b). Ostrich eggshell beads dominated the post-Meroitic bead assemblages in Lower Nubia (Then-Obluska 2014: Pl. 3; 2016), but some specimens are also recorded at the late Red Sea ports of Berenike and Marsa Nakari. The few faience objects from Shenshef belong to a Nubian bead repertoire. A reused Napatan or early Roman/Meroitic pendant in the form of the god Bes, a type usually made of faience or glazed bone, is one of the most widely recognized amulets at post-Meroitic and late Roman sites. Many of the Shenshef bead types were also found in the Nubian Nile Valley and, in particular, in graves from the royal Nobadian and Blemmyan cemeteries. Together with the glass parallels, their presence at Shenshef would indicate a strong connection of the site with the Red Sea ports and, to some extent, with post-Meroitic Nubia.

Other archaeological artifacts linking the Red Sea ports, the Eastern Desert (Shenshef included) and the Nubian Nile Valley comprise sherds of handmade pottery called Eastern Desert Ware (see above). They were associated with a population from the Eastern Desert and Lower Nubia.

The archaeological evidence for long-distance imports is abundant in general lists created for both the Meroitic and post-Meroitic periods in Nubia (e.g., Török 1988; 1989); they, however, do not mention Asian finds. Still, in tracing the overseas trade contacts, black pepper of Indian origin could be of high significance. Pepper was uncovered both in Berenike and at Wadi Shenshef (Cappers 1998; 1999; 2006). A find of one Indian peppercorn in the Nile Valley has been confirmed from

Qasr Ibrim in Nubia (Cappers 2006: 117). Furthermore, a Coptic letter from Moses to the phylarchos of Nobadia, Tantani, dated to about AD 450 and found at Qasr Ibrim, suggests a transport of pepper to Philae (Egypt) from Nubia. This stands in contrast to the expected direct transport from one of the Roman Red Sea ports to Philae (Obluski 2014). This letter may be an indication that Nobadia was also involved in trading Asian goods into the Nile Valley.

Although proof of Nubian contact with Asia is scarce, the drawn and rounded glass bead imports in Nubia provide the main evidence for this link in the post-Meroitic period. This is supported by other finds of imported beads from the Asian region, namely the 'etched' carnelian beads found in the Fourth Cataract region (Then-

-Obluska 2013; in press b). The presence of South Asian glass beads in Nubia may derive from contacts with the Egyptian Red Sea ports via the middlemen living at Shenshef, thus making the site a significant link in the overseas trade.

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