

ANCIENT EGYPT ORE TREATMENT

**Thousands of Condemned
Men And Women En-
gaged in The Disa-
greeable Work.**

Most of the gold mines of Ancient Egypt are still in a fair state of preservation, and the method of work is easily conjectured. Generally speaking, the conditions observed are in accordance with the description of Agatharchides, who wrote 113 B. C. The following is a free translation from the text of Muller:

"The metal bearing rocks which are called gold-bearing are intensely black, but among them is produced a stone than which nothing is whiter. Of these mountains, those which are rugged and have an altogether hard nature they burn with wood, and when they are softened by fire they experiment on them and cut the loosened stones into small pieces with an iron chisel. But the principal work is that of the artificer who is skilled in stones. This man shows to the diggers the track of the metal, and apportions the whole work to the needs of the wretched men in the following manner: Those whole in strength and age break the places where shines the white stone with iron cutting hammers.

"They use not skill, but brute force; and thus drive in the rock many galleries, not straight, but branching in all directions like the roots of a tree, wherever the stone pregnant with gold may diverge. These men, thus, with candles bound on their foreheads, cut the rock, the white stone showing the direction for their labors. Placing their bodies in every conceivable position, throw the fragments to the ground—not each according to his strength, but under the eye of the overseer, who never ceases from blows. Then boys, creeping into the galleries dug by the men, collect with great labor the stones which have been broken off and carry them out to the mouth of the mine.

"Next, from these a crowd of old and sickly men take the stone and lay it before the pounders. These are strong men of some thirty years of age, and they strenuously pound the rock with an iron pestle in mortars cut out of stone, and reduce it until the largest piece is no bigger than a pea. Then they measure out to others the pounded stone in the same quantity as they have received it. The next task is performed by women, who, alone or with their husbands or relations, are placed in enclosures. Several mills are placed together in a line, and standing there together at one handle, filthy and almost naked, the women lay to it at the mills until the measure handed to them is completely reduced. And to every one of these who bear this lot death is preferable to life.

Others, called Selangeus, take from women the powder thus produced. These are the artificers, in whom lies the power of carrying to the end this work of royal utility. They pour the stone already milled on a table, rather broad and polished with a

smooth surface, which, however, does not lie flat, but has a slight inclination. On this table they rub with their hands the dust mixed with water, first lightly and then with greater pressure. By this means the earthy particles are dissolved and flow down the slope of the table, but that which is heavy and worth anything remains on the wood. And when the Selangeus has frequently rinsed the matter out with water, he handles the dust lightly with soft, thick sponges, and pressing lightly from time to time he absorbs from the table and throws away that which is soft and light, entangled in the web of the sponge. There remains to the Selangeus separated on the table that which is heavy and shines, and which, on account of its weight, is not easily movable.

"This he transmits to the cooks, who, immediately they receive it by weight, put it into a clay pot, and in proportion to its quantity they add a lump of lead, some grains of salt, a little alloy of silver and lead, and barley bran. The pot's mouth being carefully covered and luted round, they cook it five days and five nights consecutively. On the following day, when the burnt materials are cooled, they pour them into another vase. They find none of the things which were put in together, but only a mass of molten gold, little less by weight than the original matter."

It is doubtful whether the historian's description refers to the period of the Ptolemies or to an earlier epoch of the Pharaohs; but the things of which he speaks are therein evidence today: the iron cutters and stone mortars of the men; the mills at which the women toiled; the tables of the skilled Selangeus; the furnace of the "cook"; the pots in which he fused his gold; the slags therefrom, and even the very charcoal of his fire; all are there, all save the miserable wretches who wrought this Herculean task, and of them there is no tale except the multitude of lowly mounds which mark the last resting place of man and woman and child. Of these people Diodorus writes:

"The kings of Egypt condemn vast multitudes to the mines who are notorious criminals, prisoners of war and persons convicted by false accusation—the victims of resentment. And not only the individuals themselves, but even whole families are doomed to this labor, with the view of punishing the guilty and profiting by their toil. The vast numbers employed are bound in fetters and compelled to work day and night without intermission, and without hope of escape, for they set over them barbarian soldiers, who speak a foreign language, so that there is no possibility of conciliating them by persuasion or through familiar intercourse. No attention is paid to their persons; they have not even a piece of rag to cover themselves, and so wretched is their condition that all who witness it deplore the excessive misery endured. No rest, no intermission from toil is given either to the sick or maimed; neither the weakness of age nor woman's infirmities are regarded; all are driven to their work with the lash, till at last, overcome with the intolerable weight of their afflictions, they die in the midst of their toil. So these unhappy creatures always expect worse to come than they endure at the present, and long for death as preferable to life."—Mining Reporter.

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