

Electric Lighting in ancient Times?

Article by W. Bro. Rob Lund

We know that electricity was used in ancient times – at least 2000 years ago. This has been evidenced by the discovery of ancient batteries- notably the Baghdad batteries (picture below), discovered in the 1930's in what is now Iraq. What were these electric batteries used for? The general consensus is that they were used for electroplating, and there is some evidence to support this conclusion. But, could these batteries have been used for anything else, such as lighting? Possibly. While there is no hard evidence to support the idea, there are some things to consider.

Interestingly, ancient Egyptian paintings, which show articles used in everyday life, seldom illustrate torches or lamps. In addition, freshly discovered tombs and other monuments which are richly illustrated with pictures and writing, and were cut off from natural light, showed no traces of soot or other combustible materials, which would be the residue from lamps or torches. Good light would have been required to work in the deep passages where intricate work could not have been carried out in the feeble light of lamps or torches. The use of lamps or torches would also have created problems with the supply of fresh air for the workers, who would have had to spend long hours in these recesses. Using critically aligned mirrors to direct the light of the constantly moving sun into these areas would have been impractical.

We know that there were recipes for creating glass in ancient times, which could have been used to create light bulbs. The mysterious carvings in the Temple of Hathor, in the Dendera Temple complex (see picture) strongly suggests some kind of light-producing device, connected by cable to some energy source. See a reconstructed working model:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eggMMiqLOo>

The historian Lucian reported on an ancient Syrian goddess who wore a “stone” on her head, called a lamp, which shone at night, enabling the whole temple to be filled with light. The “stone” could be some sort of carbon which could be used to create an arc light.

St. Augustine, in the 3rd century AD, reported that in Egypt there was at that time, and before, “a Temple of Venus, in which a lamp burns so strongly in the open air that no storm or rain extinguishes it”, and that the

“*asbestos stone, which has no fire of its own, and yet, when it has received fire, blazes so fiercely with a fire not its own that it cannot be quenched*”. A couple of centuries later, Arculfus reported that, in the Church of the Ascension, on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, eight lamps shone out of the windows that were so bright as to not only illuminate the area around the summit of the mount but also the steps which led up to Jerusalem on the opposite side of the Valley Josaphat. Candles or oil lamps could never have created this kind of brightness, and the priests who looked after them kept their technology a secret.



We should consider the words of H. P Blavatsky, as written in *Isis Unveiled*: “Whenever, in the pride of some new discovery, we throw a look into the past, we find, to our dismay, certain vestiges which indicate the possibility, if not the certainty, that the alleged discovery was not totally unknown to the ancients. It is generally asserted that neither the early inhabitants of the Mosaic times, nor even the more civilized nations of the Ptolemaic period were acquainted with electricity. If we remain undisturbed in this opinion, it is not for the lack of proofs to the contrary”.