

OBSIDIAN.

The peculiar glass-like stone of volcanic origin, called obsidian, which played such an important part in the household of the ancient Mexicans, has not been met *in situ* within that large portion of the United States (probably of North America in general) that lies north of Mexico and to the east of the Rocky Mountains. Messrs. Squier and Davis, nevertheless, have found obsidian in the shape of points for arrows and spears and cutting implements, though mostly broken, in five mounds of the Scioto valley, in Ohio; an object made of this material was likewise found in Tennessee,* and the numerous unopened mounds of the United States may inclose many more articles of this class. The copper used by the Indians, it has been seen, occurs as a product of nature within the area over which it was spread by human agency; it is different, however, with regard to obsidian, and the question therefore arises, from what region the builders of the large inclosures and tumuli in Ohio obtained the last-named mineral. Obsidian, we know, is found in the present territory of the United States on the western side of the Rocky Mountains. Captain Bonneville noticed, about forty years ago, that the Shoshonees or Snake Indians in the neighborhood of Snake river (or Lewis river) used arrows armed with points of obsidian, which, he adds, abounds in that vicinity.† The latter fact is confirmed by Samuel Parker, who found‡ some years later (1835), in the volcanic formations of that region, "many large and fine specimens of pure obsidian or volcanic glass."§ According to Wyeth, the Shoshonees also employ sharp obsidian flakes of convenient shape as knives, which they sometimes provide with handles of wood or horn. The same author mentions the frequent occurrence of obsidian in the district inhabited by the Shoshonees.¶ It is known that various tribes in New Mexico, Arizona, and neighboring parts, Apaches, Mojaves, and others, frequently employ obsidian in the manufacture of their arrowheads.

Mr. John R. Bartlett, from 1850 to 1853 commissioner of the United States for determining the boundary line between the latter and Mexico, found pieces of obsidian and fragments of painted pottery along the Gila river, wherever there had been any Indian villages; and also among the ruins of the *Casas grandes*, in Chihuahua, as well as those of the Gila and Salinas rivers.|| The same observation has been made by earlier and later travelers. The natives of Upper California employ obsidian extensively for making arrowheads. Mr. Caleb Lyon, who

* Troost, *Ancient Remains in Tennessee*, in: *Transactions of the American Ethnological Society*, New York, 1845, Vol. I, p. 361.

† Irving, *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, New York, 1851, p. 255.

‡ Parker, *Exploring Tour beyond the Rocky Mountains*, Ithaca, New York, 1844, p. 98.

§ Wyeth, in *Schoocraft's Indian Tribes*, Vol. I, p. 213.

|| Bartlett, *Personal Narrative*, &c., New York, 1854, Vol. II, p. 50. Compare: Humboldt, *Essai politique sur la Nouvelle-Espagne*, Paris, 1825, Vol. II, p. 243, and Clavigero, *History of Mexico*, Philadelphia, 1817, Vol. I, p. 151.