

Beryl, more than just a token?

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This brief essay speculates upon further uses for the beryl found by Strider on the Last Bridge.

“[Aragorn] held out his hand and showed a single pale-green jewel. ‘I found it in the mud in the middle of the Bridge,’ he said. ‘It is a beryl, an elf-stone. Whether it was set there, or let fall by chance, I cannot say; but it brings hope to me. I will take it as a sign that we may pass the Bridge; but beyond that I dare not keep to the Road, without some clearer token.’” (Tolkien, 196)

As we find out later, Strider was right, the beryl was indeed a token indicating safe passage, left there by Glorfindel. But maybe it was more than just a “you shall certainly pass” sign letting the ranger know he could cross the Bridge.

But what’s beryl, precious, eh, what’s beryl?

According to science, beryl is a mineral composed of beryllium aluminium cyclosilicate. The most popular varieties of beryl are aquamarine and emerald. If pure, beryl is colourless, though it’s frequently tinted by impurities. Possible colours are blue, green, yellow, white, and red.

Now, why a beryl? The most obvious answer is a rhetorical question: what better token than an elf-stone for someone foretold to be called Elessar (i.e. elf-stone)?

And what makes a stone an elf-stone? It must be something more than just beauty.

Many gemstones and jewels in Middle-earth had powers of some kind or another, for good or evil. In some cases they were made by the elves, like the Silmarils and the Elessar, but some were “natural”, like the Arkenstone.

In our Primary World, beryl has been attributed since ancient times with a myriad of metaphysical properties, some of which might have been quite useful to four hobbits, a ranger, and a pony on the run from evil forces. Since Tolkien’s Secondary World draws heavily from this Primary one, it is quite possible that the peoples of Middle-earth attributed certain “magical” characteristics to these shiny creations of Aulë too.

Once upon a time in our world, it was believed that beryl averted ambushes, and protected travellers and adventurers from various dangers on the road, specially illness. Speaking of which, beryl, and emerald in particular, has been thought to be a great aid in averting sickness, and in healing. (Sinkankas, 69, 70) We see this with the Elessar in the Houses of Healing.

Another very helpful property for people being chased by Ringwraiths would be the believed ability of beryl to repel demons, evil spirits, and their spells. (Sinkankas, 71)

One last property must be mentioned, though I admit it might be a bit of a stretch. It was believed in old Greek lore that beryl appeased Poseidon, so fishermen and other folk who travelled on the waters might’ve carried with them amulets of this kind. (Sinkankas, 70) Glorfindel knew about

the rise of the waters of the Bruinen in case the Ringwraiths attempted to cross it. Though the waters were unleashed by Elrond, beryl could’ve been some extra insurance in case the wrath of Ulmo, Middle-earth’s “counterpart” for the ancient Greek god with power over all waters, got out of hand.

So maybe it was more than just Strider’s skills that got Frodo to Rivendell. The Ring-bearer’s illness inflicted by the Nazgûl blade advanced slowly enough to allow him to reach Elrond; the ambush at the Ford of Bruinen by the Ringwraiths failed, and the enraged waters of the Loudwater didn’t swallow our heroes.

Works Cited

Sinkankas, John. *Emerald and other beryls*. Prescott: Geoscience press, 1989
Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. London: Harper Collins, 1995

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