

Hands On Learning

with Reading Museum Service

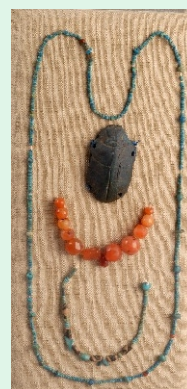
EGYPTIAN JEWELLERY

AH 41

This box contains some examples of jewellery from ancient Egypt. Jewellery was very popular with the Egyptians and was worn by men, women and children, rich and poor. It was worn not only for decoration but also because it was thought to magically protect the wearer. Many people were buried with their jewellery so that it could continue to protect and decorate them in the afterlife. Jewellery often had images of the gods or sacred symbols on it. Minerals and metals were also identified with certain gods or thought to bring good luck. Rich people would have worn jewellery made of rare and precious metals and stones. Especially popular materials were silver, gold, turquoise and lapis lazuli (a dark blue stone shown here on the right). Poorer people would have had jewellery made of materials such as clay and faience.



Faience was made by adding lime and ash to crushed sand. Water was then added and the paste could be shaped by hand or pressed into a mould. Sometimes minerals were added to produce strong colours. The object would then be baked in a hot oven. When it was taken out of the oven it would have dramatically changed colour and developed a shiny finish. This transformation was probably one of the reasons why it was thought to be such a special, magical substance. Indeed the Egyptian word for faience was *tjehehet*, which means dazzling or gleaming. The blue-green colours on the beads in this box would have been achieved by adding copper to the mixture before it was baked. Green was especially popular as it reminded people of growing plants and therefore new life. Blue was also a favourite as it was the colour of the heavens and the life-giving waters of the river Nile.



Hands On Learning

with Reading Museum Service

EGYPTIAN JEWELLERY

AH 41

Case 1

Blue-green necklace

The blue-green coloured beads on this long necklace are made of faience. Look how small and tightly packed the beads are. It must have been very difficult to drill a tiny hole in the centre of each bead so that they could be threaded onto the string. Do you think you could estimate the number of beads on this necklace?



Coloured bead necklace

Many of the beads in this beautiful necklace are made from glass, others from stone. How many different shapes of bead can you count?



Small string of beads

These cream coloured beads are made of clay and stone. There is a shell at one end. Note the small bronze amulet in the shape of a bird.



Yellow, green and black beads

These large beads are probably made from glass. Imagine what the necklace would have looked like if it were complete.



Hands On Learning

with Reading Museum Service

EGYPTIAN JEWELLERY

AH 41

Case 2

Long bead necklace

The blue and green beads in this necklace are made from faience. There are also some smaller reddish coloured beads that are probably made of carnelian, which is a naturally occurring gemstone found in parts of Egypt. People were attracted by its colour, which was associated with life and victory.

Short string of beads

Many of these beads are made from faience. There are also several barrel shaped beads made of clay, decorated with dark stripes. The two faience beads of unusual shape may be amulets. The one hanging from the centre may be in the shape of a fly. The Egyptians connected flies with the idea of bravery, as flies are difficult to fend off. Soldiers who had proved themselves good fighters were awarded an honour, known as the 'Golden Fly'.

Large beads



These beads are made of carnelian, or possibly amber. They are beautifully worked and some are faceted. This means that small pieces have been chipped off the round surface to form triangle shapes. Can you see them shining in the light? The picture on the right shows a piece of tanzanite, which has very beautiful and detailed facetting.



Large Scarab



Scarabs (dung beetles) were considered to be sacred by the ancient Egyptians and images of them were thought to bring good luck. Scarab beetles lay their eggs in a ball of dung, which they then roll around. The motion of the ball being rolled reminded the Egyptians of the way the sun moves across the sky. Indeed, the Egyptian god of the rising sun was known as Khepri, and he was often shown as having the head of a scarab beetle. The picture on the right shows a seated Khepri.

