Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

EGYPTIAN JEWELLERY AH41/A

This box contains some examples of jewellery from ancient Egypt. Jewellery was very popular with the Egyptians and was worn by men and women, children and adults, rich and poor. It was worn 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 pictured on the right). Poorer people would have had jewellery made of materials such as clay and faience.



Faience was made by mixing lime and ash with 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 *tjehenet*, 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.

Necklace with cylindrical beads

Upon first glance this necklace appears quite plain. However, if you look closely you will see that some of the beads are in the shape of animals. Can you find the baboon, hawk and jackal? Wearing images of animals associated with the gods was thought to bring the wearer good luck or protection. Other amulets (charms) on this necklace include a hand, which the Egyptian's thought able to ward off demons, and an ankh, the Egyptian symbol for life (pictured below).





Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

EGYPTIAN JEWELLERY AH41/A

Necklace of amulets

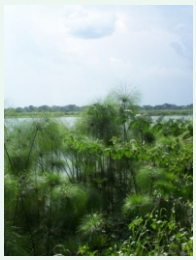


Many of the beads on this necklace are in the form of symbols that the Egyptian's thought of as religious or magical. At least ten of the beads are in the shape of an eye. Two others, although now very worn, are decorated with four eyes on each of them. These represent the eye of the sky god, Horus. He was believed to have lost his eye in battle and later had it magically restored. The eye therefore symbolised healing and also had protective powers. In fact, Horus is also said to have given his magical eye to his father, Osiris, to bring him back to life. Horus is shown in the picture on the right with the head of a hawk. The eye symbols look like this:





If you look closely you will see three of the circular beads are also decorated. These appear to have the face of the god Bes on them, a protective household god, who was thought to ward off evil spirits. Bes is also said to have protected women in childbirth. This picture shows a stone carving of Bes at Dendera Temple.



You can also see an amulet shaped like the bud and stem of the papyrus plant. The papyrus was an extremely important crop and in Egyptian religion this charm was thought to give the wearer youthfulness and helped to ensure rebirth in the Afterlife. This picture shows papyrus growing in the wild.



There is also an amulet in the form of the Egyptian god Anubis, who protected the dead - can you find it? First you may need to find out what animal he looked like.