
Title of Object

Broad Collar

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown

Country: Egypt

Date of Object: 2040 – 1783 BCE

File Created: 5/11/2016

Accession Number: 27.42.4

Author of File: Jennifer Youngberg

Material/Medium: Egyptian Faience

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Art of Africa

Last Updated/Reviewed: 7/5/2016

Culture: Ancient Egyptian

Tour Topics

Group 6 tour, Esteemed Animals, ancient culture, birds, fashion/dress, fertility, funerary/afterlife, gods/goddesses, mythology, power/status, ritual/ceremony, symbolism

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

- What do you see?
- What material do you think this is?
- Do you think this was an everyday piece of jewelry? What do you see that makes you say that?
- I know we have peregrine falcons here in the cities. Does anyone know where they can be seen?
- What animal representations of a deity have been woven into our current religions?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

The Collar – Collars are the most elaborate and common of all the Egyptian forms of personal ornament, and are equally persistent in every period. From the earliest times, in the statues, reliefs, and paintings of ancient Egypt, the broad collar appears with unceasing regularity on men and women, both living and dead, on kings, queens, gods, goddesses, sacred animals, and even on inanimate objects, such as the prows and sterns of divine barques. They are clearly objects of familiar and everyday use.

For the living, they were both ornamental and ceremonial. Collars, often in gold, seem to have been common rewards for a king to bestow on successful officials. At banquets, collars – probably the flower and seed type – were commonly presented to the guests. In a divine ritual, the king would kneel before the gods, and present a ceremonial collar.

For the deceased, the ancient Egyptians' desire for an afterlife of pleasure, free from physical toil and danger, led them to place in their tombs objects designed to ensure the owner's resurrection and welfare in the afterlife. Placing numerous items of jewelry on the mummies of wealthy individuals was a popular method of providing magical protection for the deceased. The most important class of funerary jewelry were broad collars, in particular the falcon-collar.

There is an easily discernible difference between the collars of the living and those of the dead. The former, are made of materials capable of standing wear, are equipped with metal clasps or with strong cord ties, and with counterpoises to keep them from sagging or slipping down on the breasts of their wearers. The funerary jewelry, destined only to be bandaged in place on a flat, motionless body, show none of these characteristics. Fragile faience is used in place of hard stone; gilded plaster or gilded wood is substituted for gold; ties are of the flimsiest thread or are omitted altogether; and the collars are almost never provided with counterpoises.

There were collars made from:

Metal: gold, silver, electrum (a gold-silver alloy used for making jewelry esp. in ancient times)

Cloisonné: decorative work in which enamel, glass, or gemstones are separated by strips of flattened wire placed edgewise on a metal backing.

Stone: lapis lazuli, turquoise, carnelian

Flowers and seeds

Beads: faience (gold leaf on plaster or faience was common)

Our collar is comprised of tubular beads of greenish-blue faience, an outer row of drop-shaped pendants and a pair of falcon-headed shoulder plates of the same material. The bottom is finished with brownish beads.

Most of the surviving funerary equipment was made for royal personages, important state officials and members of the priesthood, and their families. Poor people typically had to be content with the simplest grave goods or none at all.

The Material – Faience

Egyptian faience was manufactured throughout the history of ancient Egyptian civilization. It allowed for the easy production of beads and other ornaments which closely resembled those cut from lapis lazuli, turquoise, and green feldspar.

The Egyptian word for the material called “faience” means “brilliant,” and indeed the surface of fired faience objects is usually brilliant in color, most often blue or green. Egyptian faience is not glazed earthenware like the “true” Italian faience. It is a paste of ground quartz. It was made from ground desert sand—which naturally contains some limestone, clay, and mineral particles—to which natron (mineral salts) and water were added. Firing this paste produced the typical porous, whitish or grayish core of Egyptian faience.

The vitreous (glass-like) surface glaze was achieved in a number of ways. In one technique, called self-glazing, the coloring material (copper, often in the form of malachite) was added directly to the core paste, and during the drying and firing process the glaze formed by efflorescence on the surface. The cementation method consisted of placing the unglazed but dried faience object in a powder that, upon being heated, partially melted to form the glaze on the surface. In other techniques, the glaze was applied with a brush or by dipping the object into the glaze.

Objects made of faience were often molded into beads, vessels, tiles, and figures of animals and human beings; vases were usually turned on a wheel.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

Middle Kingdom: 2040 – 1783 BCE - one of Egypt’s most glorious eras. Approximately 250 years long. Sesostri III and his son Amenemhat III marked the apex of royal power in the Middle Kingdom.

“The majestic falcon, symbol of the sky god Horus, was associated with the king as early as the First Dynasty (circa 3100– 2800 B.C.E.). By the Middle Kingdom, falcon heads began appearing as decorative elements on non-royal jewelry, particularly as end pieces for broad collars made of multiple strands of beads.” (brooklynmuseum.org)

Horus – From the very earliest of times, the falcon was worshipped in Egypt as representative of great cosmic powers. Many falcon gods existed throughout Egypt, though over time, many of these assimilated into the god Horus. The original form of Horus was probably that of a sky god. The Egyptian word from which the god's name is derived means "the one on high", or "the distant one", possibly in reference to the soaring flight of the hunting falcon.

It is difficult to precisely identify which falcon represented Horus in Egyptian art, but many authorities believe that the peregrine falcon was the most likely species being depicted. The falcon is a tremendously skilled hunter with exceptional eyesight, and the ability to fly at high speed and to change direction rapidly. Peregrine falcons, in particular, have been recorded diving at speeds of 200 miles per hour, making them the fastest-moving creatures on Earth.

The Mummy – In order to preserve the deceased as well as possible, the body was embalmed. The internal organs were removed, and together with the mummy they were dried in natron (a mineral salt). Following treatment with fragrant oils, the body was bandaged and adorned with jewelry and a mask. Beneath the bandages the desiccated body was normally adorned with a broad collar of cylindrical beads of blue-green Egyptian faience. The collar was not merely an adornment; it was also an amulet to protect the deceased (it was believed to have specific magic powers).

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

This broad collar with falcon head terminals is made of Egyptian faience, a glazed ceramic made not of clay but silica, one of the ingredients of glass. Its characteristic green color was likened to new plant shoots and was symbolic of regeneration, while its luster evoked the brilliance of the sun. Because Egyptians believed they could be reborn into the afterlife, these associations made faience the ideal material for funerary jewelry.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Some relevant books in the Mia Reference Library include:

Tomb Treasures from Ancient Egypt (N5350.J67.2002)

The Scepter of Egypt, Part I: From the Earliest Times to the End of the Middle Kingdom, William C. Hayes, 1953

On-line resources include:

Oxford Art Online: Egypt, Ancient, Funerary equipment

Faience, from Petrie Museum, London: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/faience/history.htm>

A broad collar of the Middle Kingdom at the Met Museum:
<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544321>

And a gold collar from the New Kingdom, Met Museum, with falcon ends:
<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548449>

Falcon head, faience, Brooklyn Museum:
<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3523>

A Faience Broad Collar of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Ambrose Lansing, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Mar., 1940) pp. 65-68. J Stor. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3256821>

The Metropolitan Museum website:
<http://www.metmuseum.org/~media/Files/Learn/For%20Educators/Publications%20for%20Educators/The%20Art%20of%20Ancient%20Egypt.pdf>

Wikipedia, article on Horus: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horus>