During the reconstruction of the Egyptian Galleries it has fortunately been possible to keep much of the Museum’s extraordinary collection of Egyptian jewelry on display, including the “Lahun Treasure” and the “Treasure of the Three Princesses,” both world-famous. With the reopening of the Jewelry Room, it may be rewarding to examine some of the pieces that have been inaccessible and are less well known—and also to look once again at a few of our more familiar examples.

The reasons for acquiring and wearing jewelry in the Western world are many—adornment, ostentation, sentiment, as an investment, sometimes as a religious symbol. Few of us, however, would admit to putting much faith in the type of charm that dangles from our bracelets, or in the “lucky pieces” tucked away in our pockets. Nevertheless, jewelry was first worn for its amuletic value: material, design, and color were still being combined to form talismans for the Egyptian at the end of the dynastic period, as for the earliest wanderer over the desert. The prehistoric Egyptian, like other primitive people, tied various objects (whose exact significance we can only guess at) around his neck and waist, wrists and ankles, in the hope of protection from a hostile world. He felt himself surrounded by powers he did not understand. The bright daytime sky and the darkness of the night, the desert itself, the river whose inundation suddenly made the desert bloom, the sun, the moon, the wind, the spirits of the dead, the animals of the desert and of the swamps (to him another kind of people)—these were the forces with which he had to reckon. Now and then he would pick up a stone that attracted his attention; it might be blue like the sky, or green like fresh vegetation or red like blood. It might be a shiny yellow stone that didn’t break when he hit it with another but flattened and spread, and then bent, and became more and more shiny. Sometimes he found other strange stones with similar properties, especially around a campfire: perhaps if he put an unpromising lump into the fire it too would change into something shiny that one could flatten and bend. But the strange yellow stone never got dull, as the others did in time. Surely the very gods must be made of this gleaming, indestructible material.

1. Teye, Mistress of the Harem, Dynasty XVIII, about 1375 B.C. Wood, details painted and inlaid, with necklace of real beads (carnelian, gold, and blue glass). Height including base 9½ inches. Rogers Fund, 41.2.10
By the time the clay statuette in Figure 2 was made, it was realized that what were primarily talismans could also be attractive. Girls such as this knew that a line of green paint around upslanting, large black eyes not only protected them from the blazing divinity of the sun but enhanced their beauty (we still admire shadowy black eyes, though our standards of beauty may have changed in other respects). And in addition to other ornaments, the figure wears two necklaces of pretty green and red beads around her neck, for the hardest stones could now be polished and drilled for stringing. It should be understood that the Egyptians did not have access to the flashing stones we now associate with the word “jewel.” The stones they considered finest were the ones we call semiprecious, which they valued for their color: turquoise, carnelian, lapis lazuli, amethyst, green feldspar, and red, green, black, and yellow jasper—all hard and difficult to work. By 4000 B.C. the Egyptians also knew how to coat the soft, whitish stone we call steatite with a clear green or blue glaze (Figure 3) and so imitate the rare turquoise and feldspar, though it would be another two thousand years before they tried to make little beads of the glaze alone without any base, and five hundred more before they realized that they had invented glass.

When dynastic history began, with the unification of Egypt about 3100 B.C., the standard of living quickly reached new heights. Nevertheless, jewelry of the oldest dynasties is rare, largely because tombs have almost always been robbed of intrinsically precious materials; the robbery often occurred directly after the funeral. The outstanding jewelry from the first two dynasties comes from the tomb of Djé, the third king of Egypt. A workman sent to clear out the tomb in the reign of Amenophis III (about 1400 B.C.) came on a body, probably that of Djé himself, and on investigation found four bracelets still in place. In his hurry to conceal his treasure he tore off wrist, wrappings, and bracelets all together, and pushed them into a hole at the top of a wall. He never recovered them, and there they remained another thirty-three centuries, until discovered by the founder of modern archaeology, Flinders Petrie. This jewelry, now in Cairo, demonstrates a mastery of such technical problems as the casting and soldering of gold, and unusual inventiveness of design and harmony of color. Our own earliest important piece is a plain gold bracelet (Figure 11) from the tomb of Khasekhnumwy, the last king of Dynasty II (about 2700 B.C.), whose annals record his erection of the first stone building in history.

Jewelry of the Old Kingdom (Dynasties III-VI) is also rarely preserved, although it is widely represented on statues and reliefs. The most popular pieces, if we can trust the
The jewelry illustrated in this article is divided by function, and examples are arranged chronologically to show the historical development of each form.

Necklaces

3 (opposite). Beads of bone, shell, hard stone, and glazed steatite, Predynastic Period, about 4000 B.C. Largest necklace 9½ inches across. Rogers Fund, 32.2.26-28, 36-38

4. Mityet's necklaces, Dynasty xi, about 2050 B.C. From center: Gold discs; minute beads of silver, carnelian, and green feldspar; minute beads of carnelian, and silver alternating with dark blue glass; beads of carnelian; hollow gold ball beads. Total length of ball-bead necklace 24 inches. Museum Excavations at Thebes, Rogers Fund, 22.3.320-324

5. Gold necklaces of the New Kingdom. From center: Two necklaces from the tomb of the Three Princesses, Dynasty xviii, about 1450 B.C. Plaques of the smaller engraved with figures of Maat, goddess of Truth; pendants of the larger in the form of flies (symbols of pertinacity and bravery). Outer necklace associated with Queen Te-Wosret, who reigned for a short time at the end of Dynasty xix, about 1200 B.C. Length of outer necklace 24 inches. Fletcher Fund, 26.8.64-65; Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 30.8.66
artists of the time, are “broad collars,” made of row upon row of cylindrical beads, often with wristlets, anklets, and shoulder straps of matching design. However, artists who were representing their clients for eternity were not interested in the latest fashions and were usually reluctant to portray them. The rich tomb owner is never shown wearing bracelets like those of Djer, nor of Queen Hetep-heres, the wife of Sneferu and mother of the builder of the Great Pyramid; the queen’s bracelets, found by the expedition of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, are heavy gold hoops with an inlaid design of brightly colored butterflies. Amulets, furthermore, are scarcely ever shown, although they were the commonest type of jewelry and existed by the thousands. Of various shapes and materials, and each with its own specific role, they were usually tied around the finger, wrist, or neck by a piece of string; the esteem in which they were held by their owners is reflected in a story that has come down to us from the age of the pyramids:

It seems that one day King Sneferu was feeling depressed, and after a hasty consultation—though not presumably with Hetep-heres—it was decided that what was needed was a picnic on the river, the rowers to be the twenty most beautiful girls that could be rounded up, draped in fishnets instead of more orthodox garments. As might have been expected, one girl, unfortunately the stroke, managed to get into a tangle, upsetting the others and dropping her “fish-shaped pendant of new turquoise” (see Figure 18) into the water in the confusion. In spite of the fact that Sneferu promised her another if she would only start rowing again, she refused, with the memorable words:

*“I want my own and not one like it.”

The exasperated monarch was forced to call in the court magician to retrieve the pendant. She must have been a very pretty girl.

Although the ancient Egyptians, like their modern descendants (and, some would claim, archaeologists as well) continued to plunder
Broad collars

6 (opposite, above). Wah’s, Dynasty XI, about 2030 B.C. Cylindrical beads, leaf-shaped pendants, and counterpoises of bright greenish blue faience, on original string. 15½ inches across. Museum Excavations at Thebes, Rogers Fund, 40.3.2

7 (opposite, below). Senebtisy’s, Dynasty XII, about 1980 B.C. Beads of carnelian, turquoise, faience, and faience covered with gold leaf. Counterpoises of plaster in the form of falcons’ heads, covered with gold leaf; eyes of carnelian and other details of dark blue paste. 10 inches across. Museum Excavations at Lisht, Rogers Fund, 08.200.30

8. Amarna Period, late Dynasty XVIII, about 1350 B.C. Imitation, in yellow, green, red, and white and blue faience, of a garland of real flowers. 12½ inches across. Rogers Fund, 40.2.5

9. Ptolemaic Period, 332-30 B.C. Miniature of gold, inlaid with carnelian, turquoise, and lapis lazuli to represent conventionalized flowers. 4 inches across. Dick Fund, 49.121.1
the tombs of their ancestors, more examples of fine jewelry remain to us from the Middle Kingdom than from the Old, and more still from later periods. The Mediterranean world and the South were being opened up, wealth was pouring into Egypt, and kings and nobles were deck ing themselves and their families with golden ornaments. The Middle Kingdom jeweler maintained a standard of excellence of workmanship and design that has never been surpassed. His clientele included men as well as women, the dead as well as the living, and the gods in their temples.

The jewelry of Miuyet, Sole Favorite of the King, made in Dynasty XI (about 2050 B.C.) is a fine example of early Middle Kingdom workmanship (Figure 4). Miuyet (her name means "Kitty") was one of six young girls (each called herself the "Sole Favorite") from the harem of Montuhotep II who were either wives or wives-to-be of the king, and who were buried under shrines especially made for them in his temple. Miuyet, however, never reached an age when the title could have had any significance. As H. E. Winlock described the excavation of her tomb in the Museum's Bulletin for November 1921: "When we opened the big sarcophagus (the lid must have weighed two tons) the little whitewashed wooden coffin of Miuyet lay within. . . . Inside we found a second coffin with strips of cloth covering the little mummy. There Miuyet lay upon her side with the

Bracelets and anklets
eyes of her plaster mask gazing through the eyes painted on her coffins. The coffins were small, but the wrapped mummy with its mask was much smaller, and as we came to unwrap it we found that, small as it was, it was mostly padding at head and foot to disguise the tiny proportions of the pathetic little infant within. . . . Bandage after bandage was removed, and then suddenly there was a glint of carnelian beads. Miuyet may have been hastened off to the grave in whatever coffins could be found, but at least she was decked out in all the finery she had worn during her brief life.

"There was a string of great ball beads of hollow gold; another of carnelian beads; two necklaces of minute beads of silver, carnelian, green feldspar, and rich blue glass; and a necklace of gold disks so fine that strung on leather bands they look like a supple tube of unbroken gold. Removing each necklace carefully we were able to preserve the exact arrangement of every bead [and] we recovered all of the brilliant, joyous color scheme of the jewelry as little Miuyet wore it four thousand years ago." Miuyet’s beads are the earliest glass in the world that can be dated without question.

The Estate Manager Wah may have been a poorer relation of the Chancellor Meket-Re, who served under both Montuhotep II and his son Seankhkare, and whose funerary models are among the most popular exhibits

14. From the tomb of the Three Princesses, Dynasty XVIII, about 1450 B.C. Gold, with hinge and pin clasp, inscribed within: “The Good God Men-Kheper-Re, Son of Re, Tuthmosis, Given Life Forever” (the throne and personal names of Tuthmosis III). Diameter 2 1/2 inches. Fletcher Fund, 26.8.133-134

[Left: Roman Period, 1 century A.D. Gold, with hinge and pin clasp, ornamented with figures from classical mythology flanked by crowned serpents (probably those of Isis and Serapis). Rogers Fund, 23.2.1]
in the Museum. At any rate, Wah was given a corner in Meket-Re’s tomb. His mummy, found intact by our Expedition, remained so until 1936, when an X-ray examination revealed the presence of a broad collar, necklaces, bracelets, a mouse, a lizard, and a cricket, all wrapped in the bandages—the last three presumably by oversight. So Wah was unwrapped, his jewelry was removed, and his bandages (all 460 square yards of them) were replaced exactly as they had been on his body. He proved to have been a man of about thirty years of age, small, with delicate features, who suffered from a disease of the bones of the foot.

Wah’s necklaces are reminiscent of those of Miuyet, but his ball beads are even larger, and are of hollow silver. His broad collar (Figure 6) is faience of an intense green-blue and, like the rest of his jewelry, is on its original string (ancient string is friable and must usually be replaced).

The most interesting piece is the scarab shown in Figure 16. Scarabs, the best-known of all Egyptian antiquities, were just coming into vogue in Wah’s day. They were a combined seal and amulet, necessary to the Egyptians, who did not have locks and keys, cupboards and drawers. Their possessions were normally stored in chests, baskets, and jars, to which were tied up with cords; over the knot was a lump of clay into which the owner’s private seal was impressed. These seals took a variety of forms, often animal, of which that of the scarab beetle became the most popular, as its naturally flat underside was suitable for engraving. Scarabs are never real beetles, but copies in various stones, faience, or sometimes metal, of the natural form (Figures 19, 20, 21): the expert can date a scarab by the style of its back and sides, by its inscription, and often by its material.

Wah’s scarab is of a typical Middle Kingdom style, its base engraved with a design of spirals and hieroglyphs. It is exceptionally large, however, made of solid silver, and its back is unique, inlaid in pale gold with the names and titles of Wah and his patron, the Chancellor Meket-Re. The scarab shows signs of having been worn during Wah’s lifetime, but for the burial it was strung up on heavy linen cord with one barrel-shaped and one cylindrical bead, to form an amulet whose exact significance we do not know.

Wah, like Miuyet, lived at Thebes, the capital of the kings of Dynasty XI. The founder of Dynasty XII, Amenemhet I, moved his seat of government to the north; his cemetery was at Lisht, where our Expedition excavated for many years. The House Mistress Senebtisy was apparently related to Amenemhet’s vizier and was buried near him. She was a rich woman, and, although her tomb was small, her funerary equipment was expensive (Figure 7). But she decided to wear for her journey to the next world a simple but charming circlet of looped gold wire she had been fond of in life. It is shown (Figure 23) on a cast of a head of Queen Nefretity, and the wig is modern. Senebtisy’s own wig could not be preserved, but enough was left to show that the little gold flowers, resembling daisies, were sewed to the hair at regular intervals and were worn with the circlet. The Egyptians loved flowers and, particularly in the earlier representations, were often shown with their hair held in place with twisted garlands; many later elements of design go back to these natural forms. Senebtisy’s flowers, in turn, are echoed in the wig ornaments of brightly colored faience sometimes worn by ladies of the New Kingdom.

Senebtisy lived about fifty years after Wah; Princess Sit-Hathor-Yunet 130 after Senebtisy. This princess was the daughter, sister, and aunt of kings who ruled during what later generations looked back on as Egypt’s golden age. Her mummy has disappeared, but
she must have been tiny, for her jewelry would have fitted Senebtisy, who was just four feet eight inches tall. She could not have been less than forty when she died, even if she were the child of her father’s old age, as her brother reigned for thirty-five years, and she lived into the reign of her nephew.

Sit-Hathor-Yunet’s jewelry (Figures 10, 12, 13, 17) is one of the glories of the Metropolitan Museum. The story of its discovery has been told many times; how it remained safely hidden in a niche in the tomb, and how the individual elements and inlays, disordered by ancient floods, were removed one by one by the English archaeologist Guy Brunton, who remained in the niche without leaving it for five days and nights, so that we know not a single fragment was lost.

The pectoral ornament (Figure 10) given her by her father, Sesostris II, is considered one of the two finest antiquities in the Egyptian collection (the other is the statue of Haremhab in the Sculpture Court), and the finest piece of jewelry to have come down from ancient Egypt. Although one of the best-known of Egyptian antiquities it never loses its fascination. Elegant in design and of superb workmanship, it bears the cartouche of Sesostris, supported by two falcons representing the sun god and by hieroglyphs reading “hundreds of thousands of years” and “life.” The base is of gold, to which are soldered fine gold wires to outline the details of the design. Each little detail is filled with a minute piece of turquoise, lapis lazuli, or carnelian, cut to exact size; the eyes of the falcons are of garnet. In all there are 372 pieces of semiprecious stone, each cut and polished separately. The details of the design are modeled and engraved on the golden back, which in its own way is as extraordinary as the brightly colored front.

Our second “treasure” (Figures 5, 14, 21, 24-27) – the most extensive find of Egyptian jewelry and related objects ever to appear on the market – was made four hundred years later, in Dynasty XVIII, for three minor wives of Tuthmosis III: Syrian girls called Merhet, Menwy, and Merty. They had been buried with their treasure about 1450 B.C., in a tomb discovered and plundered during the First World War by inhabitants of a nearby village. The circumstances of the discovery and the jewelry itself were described by Mr. Winlock in The Treasure of Three Egyptian Princesses, in 1948. By that time the Museum had been able to acquire three sets of gold, silver, glass, and fine stone tableware (the glass vessels among the earliest ever made); three sets of cosmetic jars mounted in gold; two silver and gold mirrors; three sets of funerary jewelry of gold; and jewelry worn during life – on special occasions or in the harem – most of which showed signs of use. The latter jewelry included bracelets, anklets, rings, necklaces, earrings, a circlet, a headdress, parts of three broad collars, one girdle and parts of two others, and parts of two belts—all of gold embellished with brightly colored stones or glass.

These objects and a number of large stone vessels had all found their way into the hands of dealers by the early twenties and were acquired in lots. At the time of the last purchase, however, it was known that one lot had got away. This was understood to consist of many elements of jewelry, including a number of “nasturtium seed” beads packed in a cigarette box and additional gold vessels. These elements and two goblets, each of a shape not represented in the earlier purchases, were finally acquired in 1958.

When the treasure first became known it was believed to have been undisturbed until found by the villagers. Nevertheless, certain objects we should have expected to find in such a burial are missing, among them the third mirror, ritual vessels (of which we have...
two handles) and other instruments used in religious ceremonies, crown pieces for two headdresses, two additional circlets, and a third belt (for which we have the clasp). These objects would have been of great intrinsic value. We cannot tell now whether all of them ever existed, whether they were stolen at the time of the funeral, or whether the man or men to whose share they fell in 1916 hammered them down to sell as gold. But it is probable that if they still survived in their original form they would have come to light by now.

Owing to the regrettable way in which the tomb was cleared it will never be possible to say with certainty how the various small elements were originally combined. Undoubtedly many are missing, lost in the darkness as the thieves were dividing their loot; a few have been dispersed among other collections. But the most difficult problems of sorting and arranging had been met by Mr. Winlock when the earlier purchase was first put on display, and many of the recently acquired pieces belong to jewelry already partially assembled by him, including the broad collars, belts, and girdles. In addition we now have another girdle, made of the gold nasturtium seeds referred to above, a second headdress, and elements presumably from the missing third one.

For the restrung collars, we have parallels in wall paintings of the period, which show that the fashion in these traditional ornaments had changed. Instead of consisting of solid rows of tubular beads as before, the smarter of the new collars were made up of elements like ours, of many forms and colors, meshing together to form an openwork design (Figure 8 is a later example of the type). The most important of the jewels, however, are the headdresses. Unlike the broad collars—unusually elaborate examples of a well-known article of dress—the headdresses are unique. Two are composed of rosettes of inlaid gold, fitted together to make long, tapering strands that in turn mesh at the sides. On one of these (Figure 25), the solid fabric thus formed is joined to a crown piece, giving the effect of a wig of gold, encrusted with glass.
Headdresses

All headdresses are shown on casts of a quartzite head of Queen Nefretity (Dynasty xviii, about 1370 B.C.), with modern wigs that illustrate ancient styles of hairdressing.

23 (opposite, above). Senebtisy’s gold wire circlet and floral wig ornaments, Dynasty xii, about 1980 B.C. Diameter of circlet 9 inches. Museum Excavations at Lisht, Rogers Fund, 07.227.6-7

24 (opposite, below). Headdress from the tomb of the Three Princesses, Dynasty xviii, about 1450 B.C. Gold, inlaid with carnelian and blue glass. Funds from the Huntley Bequest, 58.153.1-2

25. Great headdress from the tomb of the Three Princesses. 796 gold rosettes, inlaid with carnelian, blue glass, and turquoise; gold crown piece engraved with leaf designs that once alternated with inlaid leaves of glass. Length in front 14 inches. Gift of Edward S. Harkness and Henry Walters, 26.8.117
26. Gazelle circlet from the tomb of the Three Princesses. Two flexible bands of gold, joined in front and tied with a cord behind. Two gazelles’ heads are fastened to the center, flanked above and on each side by two rosettes inlaid with carnelian and blue and green glass. Length of forehead band 17 inches. Gift of George F. Baker and Mr. and Mrs. V. Everit Macy, 26.8.99

and semiprecious stones. This headdress was part of the first purchase, and has not been altered. The recently acquired rosettes, of the same type, belong to the second, for which, unfortunately, we have no crown piece. We have therefore made it somewhat shorter and fuller (Figure 24), forming a chaplet of gold, carnelian, and turquoise-blue florets to tie on over the wig and frame the face. There is a third set of rosettes, all of the same size, but these are not sufficiently numerous to arrange.

As mentioned above, there may also have been two more gazelle-head circlets, like the one that survives (Figure 26). Similar circlets are known from wall paintings; the gazelle heads (Figure 27) replace the vulture and uraeus worn by women of royal birth.

This treasure of gold and silver and brightly colored stones, presented to three of his favorites by the greatest of the pharaohs, testifies to the wealth and sophistication of his court and forms one of the most spectacular groups of Egyptian goldsmiths’ work in existence. But though Merhet, Menwy, and Merty may not always have been conscious of it as they admired themselves in their silver mirrors with the golden handles, their great headdresses, their bracelets and anklets (so like those of the prehistoric girl), their rings, necklaces, and broad collars were all intended not only to make them even more alluring to their lord and master but to protect them from the malice of their rivals in the harem and the perils and pitfalls of everyday life, and to keep them safe from the dangers they would encounter on their journey to the hereafter.