

This study of ancient Egyptian beads is based on the Petrie Collection in University College, London, with the addition of those materials as can be gathered from a perusal of various publications as well as a rough examination of specimens in the Ashmolean Museum and the Cairo Museum. Due to the special circumstances under which I am working, I am unable to study other equally valuable collections. But it must be said that the Petrie Collection provides ample material to cover all the periods of ancient Egypt. As early as 1891, Sir Flinders Petrie conceived the plan to make up a great standard collection of dated beads, type specimens and strings of all the more usual varieties.¹ With his sagacious selection and his unrivalled chance of acquiring new specimens, this Collection certainly is one of the best representative collections.

Moreover, the majority of specimens came either from excavations of his own or from excavations of other members of his school. The careful way in which the beads were extracted gives us a sound basis to work upon. In his report of the Nagada excavation, he gave us the following interesting account “Where any beads were noticed, the workmen always left them for me to clear out myself. If the find was important the boy was generally sent over to look for me, and show me the sample of what had been already disturbed. Then I used to lie down with my eyes close to the ground, and begin searching for the undisturbed part of the beads in the dust. By blowing gently it was often possible to uncover half a dozen at once and so to note the pattern and arrangement of them. An anklet of very small beads occupied about two hours to pick out and secure”.²

The word “Egyptian” is used here in a wide sense, including not only the beads made in Egypt, but also those of foreign origin discovered in Egypt. On the other hand, geographically, the word “Egyptian” is used here in the historical sense, not in the modern sense. Anciently, Egypt

was separated from Nubia at Aswan near the first cataract, but it almost always included Sinai. While so far as I know, we have not got any beads from excavations in Nubia in this Collection, there are some strings from Petrie’s excavation at Sinai.

The periods covered by the term “ancient” should include the Roman–Coptic period, in consideration of the great burst of new types of glass beads which are well represented in this Collection. Accordingly, the beads corpus will include these later types. But due to pressure of time, I have to leave them out except for a very brief reference in the text.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the definition of beads is “a small perforated body, spherical or otherwise, of glass amber, metal, wood, etc., or sewn upon various fabrics”.³ In this broad sense, the word “beads” can include both amuletic beads which are worn about the person as a charm against evil or disease and pendants which are either special kinds of beads with their perforation out of centre or ordinary beads but specially strung so as to form a loose hanging part of anything. Thus, the distinction between common beads and amulets or amuletic beads is purely subjective. A common bead can be used as an amulet because of its shape, material, colour or even simply because of the subjective attitude of the wearer.⁴ In modern Egypt, necklaces of ordinary blue beads were worn as charms against the evil eye.⁵ Archaeologists, due to the nature of the subject of their study, have to depend almost entirely upon objective rather than subjective criteria. For our purpose, it seems better to use the term “amulets” for those amuletic beads which take the form of amuletic beads which take the form of natural objects. Amulets in this narrow sense form a subject quite distinct from common

¹ Petrie, *Seventy Years in Archaeology* (London, 1931) p. 128.

² Petrie *Nagada and Ballas*. p. x.

³ Murray, *a new English dictionary*.

⁴ Beck, *Beads and Magic*, pp. 14–16.

⁵ W. S. Blackman, *Fellahin of Upper Egypt* (London, 1927) p. 49, 221.

beads, with its own principle of classification and its own line of development. Since the amulets of this type in the University College Collection have been adequately published by Petrie in 1913, they are excluded here. But some of them have such simple or debased forms that they may be dealt with again under the heading of beads. Such overlapping is sometimes not only unavoidable, but also desirable. On the other hand, pendants are preferably treated together with ordinary beads, except those amuletic pendants which form an important part of method of threading usually uncertain amulets. Since the method of threading because of the decay of the string, only those pendants which can be shown to such by their perforation are called here as pendants. Throughout this essay, the term "beads" is used in this qualified sense, that is, it includes ordinary beads and pendants, but excluding amulets.

Such objects as scarabs, cylinder seals and button seals were frequently threaded on the same string as the beads. But since it is perfectly obvious that their main purpose was not merely for ornamentation, it seems better to regard them as something other than a bead. To include them in beads,

as Beck did in his article,⁶ seems contrary to usage; therefore, it is not followed here.

While due attention will be paid to the technical side so as to ascertain the method used in the manufacture which usually can afford criteria for dating, the aesthetical criticism is deliberately avoided, because it lies beyond the scope of this study.

As to the pictorial representation of beads on ancient monuments, they form a very interesting subject, and ancient monuments, they form a very interesting subject, and are worth a detailed study. It was originally intended to include it in this essay, but due to lack of time, this plan had to be abandoned. This subject will be touched on only to a very limited extent. Since it forms a separate subject distinct from the study of actual specimens of beads, it may be left in the hands of others who may be interested in this subject. Even within the limits thus assigned, the subject still covers a wide field. I cannot treat this subject fully in all its ramifications. I can only try to establish a general framework, which, it is hoped, will be amplified, corrected and eventually superseded by some other later works.

⁶ Beck, *Classification*, p. 1, 39.

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