



String of amulets

Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil CCM 348.004

Object type: various amulets

Material: Egyptian faience

Period: middle kingdom – Ptolemaic period

Provenance: Egypt

Dimensions:

Eyes of Horus: 14mmx 8mmx 4mm; 16mmx 11mmx 5mm; 19mm diameter x 4mm; 9mm diameter x 4mm.

Horus head: 16mmx 12mmx 11mm.

Goddess: 21mmx 12mmx 14mm.

Scarab: 24mmx 14mmx 7mm.

Beads: 4mmx 6mmx 4mm; 3mmx 7mmx 2mm; 10mmx 6mmx 4mm; 18mmx 3mm.

Object analysis by Kaylee Myatt.

An assortment of amulets strung together within a collection by modern cotton thread; all made of Egyptian faience in varying forms of damage. Consisting of 11 amulets in total there are various versions of 4 groups of faience amulets that have been collected, these are 4 different Wedjat/Udjat eyes, 2 deities, 4 beads and a scarab fragment. These amulets have yet to be geolocated by material composition analysis to find where they were possibly made, and unfortunately getting an accurate date for these items is difficult as the period recording in Ancient Egypt is different to as it is today, and therefore only estimated guesses can be applicable at this time. These faience objects are all various shades of blue, which shows the variance in location across Egypt due to the composition of minerals which form the colour. One amulet is more distinct than the others due to the difference in finish when it was made; the scarab fragment has been coated by a glaze, either before or after the firing stage, giving it a shinier effect. These amulets are also different by which purpose they pose during life and afterlife, whereas these would all be found within tombs in a similar way.

These amulets have significant purpose in funerary practices as they have all been found in similar forms within tombs across Egypt. Objects made of faience have been found in several tombs, from lower class to the highest (royal); found across lower strata of society and during funerary context being deliberately chosen by the higher levels of society¹. During the wrapping of the deceased amulets similar to these have been placed on top of and within the wrapping due to their differing purposes to be used by the deceased on the journey into the afterlife.

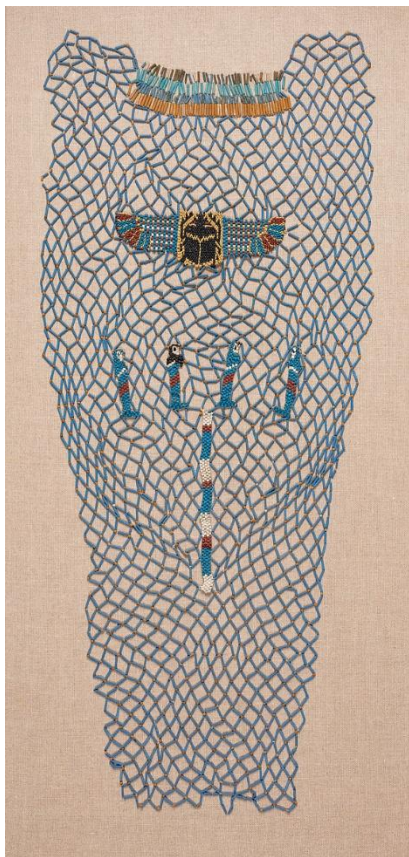


Figure 1 - bead net wrapping in the Met Museum.

The scarab was placed above the heart of the deceased, inscribed with prayers, as a sign of protection during the weighing ceremony and to promise rebirth into the afterlife. The scarab, particularly the dung beetle, was revered in Ancient Egyptian culture for their unique reproductive behaviour; the female rolls a ball of dung, laying her eggs inside, is interpreted as a metaphor for the sun god Ra/Re pushing the sun across the sky. This act symbolises the cyclical nature of life, death and rebirth into the afterlife, making the scarab a representation of the eternal cycle of existence². The scarab fragment in this collection has been broken off between the scarab head and the prothorax; it could be suggested that the edges of this break are smooth and were originally the holes in which wings were attached to form a similar appearance to the winged scarab in figure 1.

Alongside the winged scarab, the four sons of Horus are typically found placed below, these amulets are sewn into a bead net wrapping that is laid on top of the linen wrappings of the deceased. Beads such as the ones within this collection were used as funerary ornaments for burial and can be found in differing forms. These beads can be found in wearable forms, like the net wrapping in figure 1, as clothing worn in life or found within the closest wrappings to the body of the deceased as necklaces, anklets and bracelets to take into the afterlife.

¹ Miniaci, Garcia, Quirke, Stauder, 2018

² Britannica.

In a similar fashion the two deity fragments, thought to be the falcon head of Horus on top of a papyrus column and the seated goddess Isis with or without holding child Horus; have funerary symbolism in a religious context, as thought to be the most preached to gods, as part of the holy triad. The goddess Isis, the source of life who presides over birth and death, was prayed to by all for her healing and to see them through into the afterlife³. The god Horus would have been found during life and in tombs to be taken into the afterlife as protection (the same symbolism as the eyes of Horus) and to be used during the journey into the afterlife to ensure passage to the Field of Reeds (or the 'Field of Offerings'⁴). The deity heads in this collection have these holes that allow them to be strung together on a string, it is unknown if this was an original feature or whether the collector did this as a form of ease to hold these amulets all together. Similar amulets have been found with hole created when it was made before they were fired, indicating the intended possibility of being hung or worn; this could be either during everyday life or reserved for use in burial and the afterlife.

The story behind the eye of Horus tells all about how the symbolism behind this ideology came to be, and why these Wedjat/Udjat eyes were so profound across Ancient Egypt and why so many Egyptians possessed one. Some of these amulets have been found with intended holes to be thread so they can be worn as a form of jewellery or hung inside a home, as they are considered a form of protection to ward off evil spirits of the wearer. The ones without the means to be worn were found placed inside the wrappings of the deceased when prepared for burial and were similarly placed above the heart like the scarab, to keep their heart true and give good health and rebirth on the journey into the afterlife.

The ideology of the eye of Horus stems from the story of the battle between the god Set and the god Horus for the throne, and during this conflict between them Set injured Horus and separated him into pieces to be scattered among Egypt. Within this battle the god Set stole the left eye of Horus, and it was later restored by the god Thoth which allowed Horus to ascend to the throne and create the idea of the eye of Horus as a symbol of protection for the citizens of Ancient Egypt⁵. The name Wedjat (Wd3t) derives from the goddess Wedjat of protection⁶ which means the 'one that is sound'⁷ and is believed to grant the wearer the goddesses protection. The Wedjat eye represents the healed eye of Horus, a human and falcon eye which symbolises rebirth and protection against harm and evil spirits both on earth and in the afterlife⁸. This story is said to have been first recorded in the old kingdom (roughly 2686-2182 BCE), and this fits the timeline of which the first eyes of Horus are thought to have been first created whether being originally made of faience or other materials.

This string of amulets are from different locations and time period of Egypt and all appear to be different visually, they do however form similar functions in funerary contexts as they all have symbolism to the deceased and the life cycle, rebirth and the journey into the afterlife. Having these amulets buried with your person seems to be one of the most important parts of death as the Ancient Egyptians believed that their mortal life mirrored what they would be rewarded with in the afterlife and their wish to live a good and honest life will have been protected with these symbols to ensure eternal happiness in the Field of Reeds.

³ Nicholson, 1994.

⁴ Encyclopaedia, 2016.

⁵ Zinn, 2025.

⁶ World history edu, 2021.

⁷ Met museum.

⁸ Hajar, 2008.

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- Katharina Zinn, told in class, 2025.

Pictures

- String of amulet pictures on first page, taken by author 09/2025.
- Figure 1, taken from the Met Museum website, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/550800>, accessed 10/2025.