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Divine Culture Reflected by the Miniature Broad Collar

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Final Research Paper

In the ancient world, jewelry was a highly effective way for individuals to link themselves to the divine; through their form, material, symbols and ornaments, the identity of the personages who donned them could change: they could allow someone to invoke, stand in for, represent or connect to or merge with a deity, even assume a state of divinity.¹

The broad collar is the most notable form of ancient Egyptian jewelry due to it being the indispensable ornament for the gods, royalty and the elite to be properly attired. Such individuals are therefore portrayed wearing the collar in formal settings, as well as depicted in tombs—virtually, all jewelry from ancient Egypt has been found in funerary contexts—and temples.² The strong association of broad collars with the divine is illustrated by the fact that the Gods are consistently shown wearing them throughout ancient Egyptian history.

This research paper will be focusing on a miniature broad collar currently on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, dated around the early Ptolemaic Period, at 332 – 246 B.C. After Egypt—then part of the Persian Empire—was conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C., its culture—the language, religion, art and customs³—continued to flourish for many centuries, for not only was he regarded as a liberator, but he was also pronounced son of Amun at the Oracle of the Siwa Oasis.⁴ With ancient Egyptian culture still prominent in the early Ptolemaic period, and with no external interference to the culture of Egypt or the creation of the miniature broad collar—were it to truly be made during the Ptolemaic

¹ Holcomb, 2018, 65.

² Holcomb, 71.

³ O'Connor, 33, 1990.

⁴ Bosworth, 1998, 71-74.

period—this paper aims to discuss how a divine image of the Gods was created through the miniature broad collar, as well as the depiction of power seen through its material culture.

Description of the Object

The broad collar is semi-circular, belonging to the “broad collar” family. The entire collar is plated or made out of gold, with a total of six bands of stones and decorations, leading up to a lotus flower that leads to the hooks of the collar’s necklace. The materials identified in the entire broad collar is gold, turquoise, lapis lazuli and carnelian,⁵ the measurements being 8.6 centimeters in height and 10.3 centimeters in width. As the size measures out to be fairly small, it is currently assumed that it is for the purpose of adorning a statuette of a deity.

Starting from the outermost band are a series of droplet beads, its outline forged with gold or soldered sheets, the inside of the droplets filled with turquoise; lapis lazuli was used to fill in the triangular gaps between each teardrop.

The next band are a series of lotus flowers also lined in gold, bearing a similar design to the lotus flower at the end of the bands. Each flower has five petals, its outer filled with lapis lazuli and the inner petals with turquoise. They are alternated with a golden lotus bud. The space between all of the lotuses are filled with carnelian.

The third band is composed of gold-lined turquoise rosettes, which also has a golden center. Lapis lazuli was used to fill in the gaps between the rosettes.

The fourth row is composed of gold-lined papyri, filled with turquoise and lapis lazuli; there is no definitive pattern as to where these two are placed within the papyrus. They also alternate with a small golden bud, and the gaps are filled with carnelian.

⁵ Hill, 2008, 165-166.

The fifth row is composed of turquoise triangles lined with gold. Between the gaps of the large triangles are two smaller lapis lazuli triangles fitted in the center that forms a rhombus, separated by a band of turquoise. The gaps at the base are filled with turquoise.

The sixth and final row is composed of gold-lined, turquoise lilies with a gold base, alternating with a golden lily bud. The gaps are filled with alternating lapis lazuli and carnelians.

On each side of the collar, the top is finished with inlaid lapis and turquoise block borders, separate by golden borders, leading to the large lotus flower, filled with lapis lazuli, turquoise and carnelian. Short chains with single loops that interlock with double loops at the top of the lotuses close the collar, a bent gold pin securing the juncture.⁶

The Collar's Purpose and Significance

To understand the material culture of any object, the second step after a detailed description is to compare it to its family of objects. In this case, it would be collars, in specific, the broad collar family. Broad collars were known to be used for jewelry, adorning pharaohs and gods, but were also well known to be used during funerary contexts. In chapter 158 of the Book of the Dead, the text reads:

“THE CHAPTER OF A COLLAR OF GOLD which shall be placed at the neck of the deceased.”⁷ The collar came into use as a funerary amulet because of the Book of the Dead, the original object supposedly giving the mummy the power to free himself from the wrappings at the time of resurrection; however others have argued later that it was for throat protection against accidents.⁸

Petrie offers his commentary by explaining that the collar would be to dress the living in contrast to the dead, as, in the context of the Book of the Dead, the collar is a tool for

⁶ Hill, 2008.

⁷ Budge, 1960, 525.

⁸ Hoews, 1975, 35.

revival.⁹ He defines a broad collar as an amulet of property, entirely derived from funeral offerings, and thus, peculiar to Egypt.

At the same time, depictions of pharaohs presenting broad collars or wearing them were common in Ptolemaic temples, and that those also show a semicircular collar with a long chain at the back; however the difficulty of determining where broad collars were truly used on statuettes lies in when the collars were placed around statuettes' necks, the long chains and lack of counterpoises—*menkhet*, a counterweight to the heavy front piece—would have left them hanging low across the torsos.¹⁰ But, the intricate hinging suggests that they were intended to be placed around an object.

Despite the odds, the design of the miniature collar is a pattern familiar in earlier periods, and that collars of this kind were at one time made with real flowers and having been used as jewelry for at least a millennium prior to the texts, with numerous illustrations of royalty during the Middle Kingdom wearing the collar. Furthermore, its cloisonné techniques and jeweled inlays is as fine as the best work of the Middle Kingdom. However, the braided wire chain with hook is characteristic of the Ptolemaic period.¹¹

Other than for pharaohs or as jewelry for the dead, Aldred supports the Met's argument, in which the miniature broad collar was used on a statue, by stating that "The gods, too, had their jewelry, for every shrine sheltered the statue of gods which had to have a change of raiment, including jewelry and especially collars, as part of the daily ritual of service."¹²

Seen from its relevance within burial culture, and how burial culture—pharaohs especially—ties in with religious culture, especially the heavy depictions of gods and goddesses wearing broad collars, the collar itself is a symbol of divine image and is often

⁹ Petrie, 1914, 20.

¹⁰ Hill, 2008.

¹¹ Clark, 1951, 110.

¹² Aldred, 1971, 14.

associated with the divine. This would justify previous conclusions on it being an ornament for its size, for cult statues were the representations of divinity.

Cult Statue Culture

To further our understanding on the miniature collar, we must look into the context of which it was being used. Following given assumptions that it was used to adorn a statuette, this section aims to discover the purpose and importance of cult statues. Within the culture of cult statues, miniature jewelry (such as the miniature broad collar) and other metal fittings serve as a reminder and act as the traces for ritual activity or performances that existed.

Identified by Claude Traunecker, he believed that there were two main categories for statuettes' purpose: "manifest" and "latent" cult.¹³ Manifest cult statues are the images of the principal resident divinity of a temple, while Latent cult statues are specifically those kept in discrete places, acting as a presence to generate a "power reservoir" to support the temple. In a sentence, statuettes of gods accord with the actual statuary employed within the temple that they belonged in. It can be confirmed that a statue's purpose was to serve as a cult focus, their value depending on the material that they were made out of, as well as determining the prosperity of the temples they belonged in.

Other than the amount of work put into the production of divine images, its maintenance and service presented as their sense of religious responsibility towards their deities, and to continue their existence. The statues were treated as if they were alive, for they were the spirit or manifestations of the deities.¹⁴ They were taken from their shrines each day and washed, dressed in clean clothes, adorned with previous ornaments and incense; given offerings of food and drinks, then returned to their shrines. During festivals, statues are also known to be carried up to the temple roof—most fully recorded in the Ptolemaic Period—to

¹³ Hill, 2008, 153-156.

¹⁴ Wilkinson, 1994, 43-45.

be united with the rising sun, and for them to replenish their powers through the ceremony. Interestingly however, most rituals were described by the Egyptians as 'mysteries', for they were generally conducted in private, creating a general atmosphere of secrecy.

Being the embodiment of the gods themselves, the cult statues were taken care of greatly, with caution and care. The statue is the divine image in itself, and for a miniature broad collar to be used on a statuette would mean that the broad collar had so much detail and effort put into it, it was deemed fitting for a god to adorn, to be their amulet and protection.

Symbol Culture

Four plants or symbols are visible within the broad necklace: lotus, papyrus, rosette and lily. These plants weren't just chosen at random; they all have underlying meanings that makes them sacred plants that creates a connection with divine images.

Rosettes were not common throughout Ancient Egypt, for it was believed to be of near Eastern, Mesopotamian origin. However, the rosette was believed to represent "life" or fertility, within both cultural contexts. In Mesopotamian culture specifically, the rosette was also thought to have reflected solar ideas, underlying the "eye" symbols;¹⁵ the sun and the eye plays a large role in ancient Egyptian religion, making the rosette a suitable symbol to represent divine power.

Lotuses were indigenous to Egypt that have two species—the white lotus and the blue lotus—depicted with pointed buds and narrow petals. The more preferred sacred blue lotus, which also contains an exotic scent, was seen on the broad collar. Because lotuses close at night to sink underwater and open and rise at dawn, it became a symbol of the sun, creation and rebirth.¹⁶ Within Egyptian myth, the lotus was the first to rise from the primeval waters. The orientation of the flowers also bears meaning, whereas the inverted flower like that on

¹⁵ Goff, 1963, 160.

¹⁶ Wilkinson, 1992, 121.

the broad collar makes it a purely decorative element. The sun being the symbol of Ra, a very prominent Egyptian God, as well as the concept of rebirth is extremely common throughout burial and religious culture.

For the papyrus that stands tall throughout the Delta, it became a natural symbol of life force and vitality, its hieroglyphic counterparts representing youth and joy,¹⁷ embedded within its green color. The papyrus was also identified with several deities, with goddesses carrying papyrus stems that bear symbolic powers of the moon. In the context of art, the plant was a symbol of the world which had arisen from the primeval waters, representing new creation.¹⁸

Lilies¹⁹ are native to and representative of Upper Egypt. While not much is known about the plant's representation by itself, when tied with the papyrus—representative of Lower Egypt—around an air tube that represents the lungs, this symbolized the historical unification of Upper and Lower Egypt by the combined powers of the Gods Horus and Set, often found on the thrones of rulers.²⁰

Each of these plants, with the rosette being an exception, makes a connection with life and rebirth, an extremely common concept within Egyptian religion. Additionally, many of them have solar properties or are in relation to the sun god, Ra, further making ties with Egyptian religion and creating a divine image.

Construction Culture

To make any kind of object, one must start with the construction phase, in which different chosen techniques can tell tales of the significance and importance of objects.

¹⁷ Wilkinson, 1992.

¹⁸ Lurker, 1980, 95.

¹⁹ It must be noted that there is great controversy on the lily flower, for it is often confused with water lilies, yet at the same time it cannot be identified with the actual “Lily” family. See Pischikova, 1994, 70.

²⁰ Owusu, 1998, 165.

The jewelers originated from the goldsmiths, their techniques having been handed down through generations. It would then be those who specialized in decorative arts who moved to working on jewels in particular. The goldsmiths' (and metalsmiths) particular tasks include casting, chasing and soldering, with gold beating being one of their crucial steps to create the necessary items. To create specific engravements, it was suggested that hard materials such as obsidian was used to chip away the gold, for iron or steel was not present in early Egypt. Stamping molds were also a method for craftsmen to create specific shapes.

The Hood Papyrus describes a list of craftsmen, mentioning minor specialists among the workers:²¹ There were the *nuby* (goldsmiths), the *neshdy* (workers of precious stone, or lapidary), *baba* (faience maker) and finally, *setro*, who appear to be a maker of necklaces. He would use the products of the *iru weshbet* (bead-maker), whose products could have come from any of the specialists' guilds, depending on the material demanded for assembly. There have been reliefs displaying all the jewelers shown working within one atelier, for close supervision was necessary for workers using precious metals, making sure no amount was missing to ensure the golden gifts were all in one piece, as well as the fact that the metal supplies were ultimately reserved for the Gods. The tools used by jewelers were described as "the simplest and most primitive". Their furnace was a pottery bowl upon a stand filled with glowing charcoal, with a clay-nozzle blowpipe.²² Despite this primitive instrument, it was absolutely possible to raise the temperature high enough to make metals malleable for crafting, and for the craftsman who wouldn't have a perfect control of the fire, his achievements were astonishing.

The Met has identified that the miniature broad collar specifically used cloisonné, an ancient technique very commonly used in ancient Egyptian jewelry. Strips of metal were bent

²¹ Aldred, 1971, 65-66.

²² Aldred, 1971, 67.

to shape, placed on edge and soldered to base plates to form cells or cloisons²³, which makes up the majority of the “beading” on the collar. Because the wielding of precious stone beads had to be done by more expert lapidaries and more care had to be taken, this makes cloisonné jewelry the chief glory of Egyptian decorative art. To make the process easier, it was most likely the case that they use chipped-off stone pieces from beadmaking to make the inlays, cemented with resin mixed with a calcareous filler, such as limestone.

With cloisonné being one of Egyptian jewel making’s most pinnacle techniques, being one of the most difficult and time consuming, as well as requiring the *par excellence* of the craftsmen to perform this task of crafting jewelry for the divine, the effort put into the creation of the broad collar itself is sufficient to display its affinity with the divine.

Material and Color Culture

It is known that Egyptians do not create art for the purpose of art and enjoyment, and that everything has a deeper meaning behind it; the same applies for the chosen materials. Precious metals and stones were known to bear significance in terms of their color and what they represent in Egyptian religion, and through colors, creating a divine image.

Gold was regarded as a divine and imperishable substance, its un-tarnishing nature providing a metaphor of eternal life, its brightness an image of the brilliance of the sun.²⁴ The sun god, Ra, was sometimes referred to as “the mountain of gold”, defining the metal’s solar significance; all of Ra’s god-descendants were said to bear gold flesh as well, making this precious metal certainly symbolic. Hathor—often called “The Golden One”—was also strongly associated with gold, believed to be its personification. The afterlife body of the Egyptian was also thought to be a divine being with shining golden skin, possibly explaining

²³ Aldred, 113, 116.

²⁴ Wilkinson, 1994, 83-84.

the reason for gilded masks or coffins. Gold not only symbolized the golden bodies of the gods, but perhaps also magically conferring eternal survival through its imperishable nature.

Lapis Lazuli was symbolic of the heavens and the primeval flood because of its blue ground color and star-like golden speckles.²⁵ Its “heaven” symbolism is often seen in its use for solar or heaven associated objects, notably the scarab beetle. The hair and beards of the gods were said to be of this substance, and thus the stone utilized in the construction of divine images. One of the most prominent Gods, Amun, who was depicted with blue skin, was called “lord of lapis lazuli”. Therefore, the stone ultimately represents life and rebirth.

There is no specific text describing the significance behind carnelian as a material, but as all precious stones in Egypt were used for their colors, the symbol that carnelian represents could be determined from the meaning behind its color, red. Red was associated with fire and blood, hence life and regeneration. While it could be associated with negative emotions, it would not befit the context of the broad collar. Red was also used to represent the normal skin tone of the Egyptian male, possibly signifying the fierce nature of the radiant sun.²⁶

Turquoise is known to be associated with Hathor, ‘mistress of Turquoise’, whose temple in the area of western Sinai, a major turquoise mine.²⁷ Like carnelian, not many texts go into depth about turquoise as a material, but its other symbolisms can be deduced from its color. The color green has been a symbol of growth and life, a potent sign of resurrection—being the opposite from red of evil—in which explains the Pyramid Texts²⁸ that says “O you who stride out... strewing turquoise of the stars, if you are green, then the king will be green, as a living rush is green.” A similar theme is seen in Chapter 77 of the Book of the Dead, stating the dead desires to become a falcon “whose wings are of green stone”.

²⁵ Wilkinson, 1994, 101.

²⁶ Wilkinson, 106-107.

²⁷ Baines, 2007, 276.

²⁸ Wilkinson, 1994, 108. See Pyramid Text, spell 567.

The fact that all precious stones require a lot of effort to obtain, whether it is by mining or travelling to faraway countries for trading further increases the worth of the necklace. In addition, each material is associated with the divine, with meanings such as life, regeneration, prosperity, heaven, brilliance and rebirth. With each of these stones and their colors having close ties with the divine, an image is certainly depicted.

Conclusion

This miniature broad collar is most characteristic of the Egyptian religion cult culture. Without the obstruction of foreign cultural interference, the creation of the miniature broad collar is sound within the Ptolemaic period. Hence, the broad collar's purpose as a decorative, jewelry, amulet or funerary object can continue to live on, serving its purpose for rebirth and resurrection. With such a divine object comes a divine statuette for it to be placed on, in which the festivals, rituals and care put into all statues that embodies a part or the soul of the gods they represent further emphasizing the importance of the statues, as well as the divine jewels that adorn them. The flowers on the collar weren't chosen at random either, for each flower has ties with the sun, the moon, the divine or regeneration, all prominent themes within Egyptian religion, as well as hinting at the power of the Gods through the lily and papyrus' role of unification. On the other hand, the construction of the miniature collar is yet another culture within itself, displaying the jewel-making and craftsmen culture of ancient Egypt, how many specialized guilds create one part of an item and combine them together for a final product; the specific techniques applied for the miniature collar only shows how much detail and time was spent on creating such an advanced level item. Finally, the precious stones used on the collar were not chosen at random: each of them was chosen in order to represent different aspects of the divine: prosperity, life, the sun, as well as being heavenly bodies.

Through its original purpose and significance as jewelry or an amulet, the object in which it was to be used on, the specific symbols chosen to appear on the collar, the chosen technique to create this collar, as well as the expensive precious metals and stones used as its materials, the miniature broad collar sufficiently creates a divine image of the Gods, all of which depict the power of the gods and the importance of the statue that it adorned.



*Image 1: Miniature Broad Collar, subject of this research paper;
Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

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