

Czech moulded glass in Egyptian revival jewellery

1 – Necklaces and pendants

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Exotic and intriguing and always appealing, 'Egyptian Revival' jewelry is very collectable and noteworthy. Most recently, jewellery with Egyptian motifs rose in popularity when the King Tut exhibit toured several countries between 1972 and 1979 (I'm sure many members will remember visiting it at the British Museum back in 1972, or seeing it advertised on the television and in the press, even if they were young at the time!)

Prior to that, in 1922 the discovery by British archaeologist Howard Carter of the almost intact tomb of Tutankhamun triggered the rage for a wide range of decorative objects including jewellery in the 1920s and 1930's. Even before these events there were waves of Egyptomania – the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the expeditions of Napoleon in the early 19th century brought things Egyptian to wide popular attention.

While these events were notable, perhaps early 20th century movies did more than anything to fuel the flames of Egyptomania. In 1917, Theda Bara rose to her dithery sultriness in the role of Cleopatra wearing a flower bloom bra. She was, perhaps, the first woman to be offered commercially in movies as an object of sexual fantasy. Then in 1932, *The Mummy*, starring Boris Karloff as the Ancient Egyptian priest Imhotep, who is revived and searches for his bride, was released. 1934 brought a new version of *Cleopatra* directed by Cecile B. DeMille

and starring Claudette Colbert as the man-hungry Egyptian queen who lusts after Marc Antony after Julius Caesar's death. Most recently, Elizabeth Taylor played Cleopatra along with Richard Burton and Rex Harrison in the 1963 remake. This time, the glories of color and wide-screen panorama awed audiences again.

My collecting of Egyptian Revival jewellery began with a piece my mother found at an estate sale.

Not knowing what it was, I took it apart and created a new necklace from it. (Fortunately, she saved all the parts and I was able to restore it later.) (Fig 2).

In my collecting I've primarily focused on the moulded glass beads and costume jewellery manufactured in Gablonz, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) in the 1920's and 1930's (which is still fairly affordable) but the jewelry was also made in enamelled metal and stamped and cast metal. Most amazing about this genre is the seemingly endless motifs depicted on these tiny beads, pendants and cabochons which have been made into necklaces, bracelets, pendants, rings, earrings, cuff links and buckles. Some are fairly easy to find while others are quite rare. My favourite place to find these items is, of course, Portobello Road in London!

The glass pieces were mostly made in a limited range of opaque colors – sky blue and dark blue, orange, pea green, black, off-white and occasionally yellow or reddish brown which are suggestive of the colours in Ancient Egyptian jewellery: lapis, carnelian and turquoise accents with gold. Often the impressed features are accented with one of these colors and sometimes with gold. The shapes of the beads and pendants also reflect the Egyptian style – squares, rectangles, pyramids and the like. The tiny scenes created in the glass resemble artistry from tombs of the pharaohs and symbols abound.



The symbolic motifs depicted can be sorted into these categories:

- People/Nobles: Cleopatra wearing the vulture crown (Fig 4), Nefertiti wearing the tall crown, Isis often depicted as a winged goddess (Fig 15), kings wearing the nemes headdress (Figs 1, 14, 18), soldiers (Fig 8), seated pharaohs (Fig 16) and kneeling servants (Fig 11)
- Plants: lotus (Fig 20) and papyrus
- Animals: Scarabs (Fig 5), flies, snakes (cobra, sign of power), birds (vultures, falcons)
- Objects: sphinx (Figs 6 & 12), pyramids (Fig 13), obelisks, mummy coffins (Fig 1), solar discs

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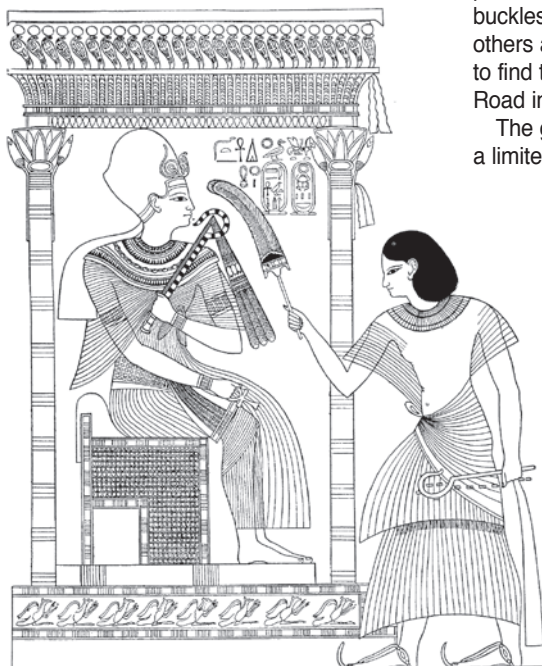


Fig 2 Necklace found by Diane's mother at an estate sale

- Symbols: hieroglyphs (Figs 9 & 16), ankh (Fig 11), Eye of Horus (udjat)

Of the myriad shapes and designs, the piece that surprised me most was the moulded bead in the shape of a fly. Why a fly? I've only seen three of these and wondered why this insect would be a symbol. Research brought the answer – 'The Order of the Golden Fly' was a military award given for valour in battle. The fly is also the hieroglyphic sign of the word 'determinator' and is the symbol for the buzzing sound of a fly (Fig 7).

References

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