



Brown glazed ram amulet and green glazed bull amulet, late dynastic period. £120.



Late period amulets. Builders set square, Shu, Crown of Upper Egypt, Stylised Tuaret, Stone Udjat eye. £35 to £65.



Top and base of steatite scarab with horse and groom, New Kingdom. £85.



A group of late period amulets. Bes £75. Djed pillar £95. Triad of Isis, Osiris and Nephthys. £250.



Steatite scarabs. (a) Scroll pattern, 1600BC. (b) Cartouches of Tuthmoses III, New Kingdom. £75 each.



Glazed heart amulet, stone two fingers amulet, steatite papyrus sceptre amulet, late period - Ptolemaic periods. £95 and £55.



Left: Large glazed amulet of Anubis, c600BC. £95.

Collecting Ancient Egyptian Antiquities. Part II - the lower end of the market

by Vincent McCarthy

The Ancient Egyptians continue to fascinate us and the artefacts they left behind are still eagerly studied. At the British Museum the Egyptian rooms are arguably the most crowded with visitors at any time of day. I would guess that 'Ginger', the mummified pre dynastic man has been photographed more often than Posh and Becks!

Egyptian antiquities have been collected since Roman times and in particular over the past two centuries when the Grand Tour became fashionable. Many of the larger and scarcer items could only be afforded by the nobility and are still quite expensive today; but in these pages I will describe a range of small items, many of which cost less than £100 each.

Scarabs are amongst the most common and recognisable objects from ancient Egypt. They are designed to represent the scarab or dung beetle which appears after the Nile flooding and represents new life. They can be made of almost any material but are mostly of stone or glazed material. The underside is usually carved with an inscription praising a deity or asking for protection from danger or evil. They were mostly made for the living as they are generally found amongst houses in the villages and at first appear to have had mostly amuletic uses. In time they begin to appear mounted in signet rings and were used as seals to mark an owners property.

In later times scarabs begin to appear in burials along with other amulets. A large dark green or black stone scarab often inscribed with a verse from the 'Book of the Dead' is

placed on the chest of the mummy. This is of crucial importance as it helps to ensure the heart of the deceased is not found wanting when it is weighed by Anubis before entering the Field of Reeds.

Large heart scarabs can be bought for around £300 with inscription and about half of this if the base is plain. Smaller scarabs with delicately inscribed names or mottos are readily available from £50 to £75.

The ancient Egyptians placed great faith in the magical properties of charms and amulets in life and in death. During mummification dozens of amulets were wrapped in the bandages. Amulets offered them protection against life's woes and appear in a wide range of forms and materials. Amongst the earliest were the wedjat which derives from the Horus legend and represents the eye of a hawk, a symbol of strength and wholeness and the djed pillar variously seen as a tree or the spine of Osiris, a symbol of stability.

From the later Dynastic period amulets really proliferate in numbers and types. They are mostly made of stone or faience, a composition material with a glazed surface most commonly of a blue or green colour, but occasionally cream or yellow. The collector will find a fascinating world of little gods and goddesses or animals no more than an inch or so tall. The deities offer their protection and the animals their characteristic strengths.

Amongst the ladies we find Isis, either singly or seated feeding the baby Harpocrates (the infant Horus) and Nephthys her sister. More unusual is Maat the goddess of truth or



Group of late dynastic amulets, Ptah, Thoth and Tuaret. £50 to £100.



Black stone head rest, glazed girdle of Isis, blue glazed Hapy amulet, late period-Ptolemaic. £65 to £95.

Hathor goddess of love and music depicted with the horns of a cow. Male deities are more numerous and include Ptah, Shu depicted kneeling and supporting the heavens and Min the fertility god with erect phallus.

Several deities are anthropomorphic having the heads of birds or animals. Amongst the most important are Horus depicted as a male with the head of a hawk and Khnum the creator god with the horned head of a ram. Thoth was the scribe of the gods and appears with the long beak of an ibis whilst Bastet is a woman with the head of a cat and was worshipped at Bubastis.

Animals in natural form are also popular. The great Sow is the mother goddess depicted suckling her young; the ram of Amun and the sacred bull of Apis are popular and of course the cat, familiar of Bastet and in life a very popular domestic pet. A fairly common animal is Tuaret seen as a pregnant hippopotamus, the protector of women during pregnancy, and Bes the ugly and fierce little dwarf which scared off evil spirits during the actual birth. Body parts are also fairly common, particularly small legs, arms and hand presumably as added insurance should the real parts be lost or damaged during mummification or burial. Heart-shaped amulets are also found wrapped amongst the bandages; and an important item is the stone amulet in the form of two fingers, usually found near the incision and thought to represent the fingers of the embalmer.

During the Saite period (7thC BC) Egyptian art saw a revival in style after years of decline. Amulets of this period can be masterpieces of miniature statuary. Finely modelled with superb detail and with a fine pale green glaze they are much sought after by collectors. As we approach the Ptolemaic and Roman periods amulets once again become very run of the mill things, often made in profile and of sketchy form. Indeed it can be difficult to recognise one character from another without some experience.

Collectors can expect to pay between £100 to £150 for the better quality pieces, but quite decent amulets can still be bought for around £75 whilst later mass-produced items can usually be found for £25 to £45 each.

Amulets were also made in bronze, presumably for wearing during everyday life as they always have loops or rings for suspension, say from a belt or necklace. Many of the popular deities appear in human or animal form and usually only an inch or two in height. Prices vary depending on style and condition but should be around £150 to £300 each.

From the New Kingdom onwards faience beads were made in a wonderful blue colour and these were widely used in burials. They were strung together to form neck ornaments or face masks and even made up into nets to lay over the torso of the mummy. Restrung necklaces of beads can be bought for £40 or so and can be worn by careful wearers. The larger masks and nets are more intricate and difficult to find. Good examples can cost £300 or more.

A few other personal things turn up in burials such as cosmetic items or jewellery. However in the burials of the less well off the jewelry was often made especially for the purpose and is not really wearable in everyday life. Occasional pieces of thin gold ornament or rings do turn up at prices from £100 to £250 depending on attractiveness. The ancient Egyptians lived life to the full and expected to continue into the after-life just as long as they were careful to do the correct preparations and recite the appropriate spells. The wealth of burial goods they left behind certainly help us in our collecting today.



Grey stone amulet of two feathers, late period. £45.



Bead face mask for laying over the face of the mummy, late period. £250.



Blue faience offering cup, Ramesside period. £495.



Large cream glazed Udjat eye amulet, late period. £125.



Green glazed amulets of Nephtys and Anubis, late period. Circa £100 each.



Green glazed openwork eye amulet, late period. £120.



Large green glazed eye amulet, late period. £95.



Large dark green stone heart scarab, late period. £195.



Scarab with swan and feather, New Kingdom. £85.



Blue glazed scarab with inscription, late period. £70.



Green stone eye amulet, late dynastic Ptolemaic period. £55.



Carved brown stone heart amulet, late period. £75.



Green glazed amulet of Ptah as a naked dwarf. £60.



Bronze amulet of Harpocrates, Ptolemaic period. £195.