



## JEWELLERY IN ANCIENT EGYPT

In ancient Egypt, jewellery was a most important feature of life. Everyone who could afford to do so tried to enliven their appearance with brilliant color in the form of bracelets, necklaces, anklets and earrings. Bracelets and necklaces were worn by both sexes equally and after about 1500 BC both men and women wore earrings. The most common material from which jewellery was made was Egyptian faience (also known as “Egyptian blue” or “glazed frit”). Faience was made from special sand and minerals which were fired until they almost melted into glass. The minerals provided the colour: copper oxides for green and blue, iron oxides and sulphites for browns and reds and lead for yellows. Throughout pharaonic history, blue was the most common colour for faience beads. Poorer citizens would wear strings of blue beads. By the time of Nefertiti, beads in the shapes of green leaves, white petals, blue cornflowers or yellow and white daisies are found. These were strung together in broad semi-circles resembling a collar and mimicking the actual flower collars which were worn by guests at banquets. In 1905 some of these necklaces of plant materials were found in a pit in the Valley of the Kings, still intact after 3,400 years. Perhaps they were worn, along with headbands of flowers, by guests at the funeral feast for Tutankhamun, whose tomb is nearby. Both male and female banqueters would have worn the collars of flowers, or of beads, while usually only women wore the headbands. These collar-necklaces could also be made of gold and semi-precious stones, and with a more geometric pattern

of beads. Fortunately, a few examples of these “broad collars” have survived from many periods of ancient Egyptian history, showing that they were popular from the time of the pyramids until after the time of Ramses the Great, a period of over 2000 years. Some of the very earliest of these necklaces had end pieces in the shapes of falcon’s heads. Some are composed of pieces of coloured glass or stone set into little frames of gold to form images of gods, animals, flowers or hieroglyphs.



972.2.13 *Ancient Egyptian Necklace*  
*Beads: Egyptian paste*  
*St. Mark's Coptic Museum Collection*

Since the ancient Egyptians valued the symbolism of the colours in the jewellery most of all, they were just as likely to use dark blue glass as lapis lazuli. Except in the Middle Kingdom, around 3800 years ago, and the time of Cleopatra and her ancestors, the stones we consider “gems” weren’t popular. Only garnets, amethysts and emeralds of modern gemstones seem to have been utilized. Other stones which were used in jewellery included carnelian, lapis, turquoise, jasper and soft Egyptian alabaster.

Alabaster was used to make certain types of earrings, usually those with a very thick post. These would leave a large opening in the earlobe, and the mask of Tutankhamun clearly shows that men as well as women could wear them. However, earrings for men were not the fashion for all of ancient Egyptian history. Finger rings, on the other hand, were popular with both sexes and were made of metal or even of faience.

Many pieces of ancient jewellery were more than just adornment. They had a protective function or a message to convey. Some of the most intriguing items from ancient Egypt are the necklaces and pendants of the pharaohs and their queens. Everything about them had a symbolic value, from the colours of the materials used to make them, to the images and hieroglyphs incorporated into their design. However, it was not only the highest in the land who wanted the protection offered by the icons incorporated into their jewellery. Even the very poorest would try to acquire an amulet of some kind, usually one which had some special meaning. For example, in the Middle Kingdom, youngsters are sometimes shown wearing a pendant or hair ornament in the shape of a fish. This might have been intended to help them swim or protect them from drowning. When one looks around at the many people wearing ankhs or Horus-eyes, it is obvious that the pull of Egyptian jewellery and its symbolic images is still powerful today.

Dr. Lyn Green, President  
Society for the Study of Egyptian  
Antiquities (Canada)

# MUSEUM LAUNCHES FIRST HERITAGE DAY – 21 February 2011

February 21 is Heritage Day and also Family Day in Ontario. This year the day started with a workshop titled *Ancient Egypt Hieroglyphs for Modern Egyptian Names*. Nineteen members of our congregation and other Canadians participated in a lively interactive and intergenerational workshop led by Gayle Gibson, Egyptologist and Educator at the Royal Ontario Museum. Participants learned a number of signs to be able to write their own names and names of kings and queens. One of the more enterprising participants managed to write “thank you” to Gayle Gibson! Tasty *kahk* and *konafa* baked by Martha’s Kitchen was served during the break. The big treat was however in the afternoon when 10 members of the St. Mark’s Handbell’s Ringers performed an inspiring and educational concert with their instructor and conductor Mr. Nagati Banayoti.



Gayle Gibson. Workshop on: *Ancient Egypt Hieroglyphs for Modern Egyptian Names*.



St. Mark's Handbells Ringers and Conductor & Instructor Nagati Banayotti (fifth from the left).

Handbells are not a Coptic heritage but the story of how this group was created is an example of cross-cultural learning and participation! The first tuned handbells were developed by brothers Robert and William Cor in Aldbourne, Wiltshire, England, between 1696 and 1724. St. Mark's Coptic Museum (SMCM) decided to interview Mr Banayoti to discover how handbells found their way in the Coptic Church.

Handbells are not a Coptic heritage but the story of how this group was created is an example of cross-cultural learning and participation! The first tuned handbells were developed by brothers Robert and William Cor in Aldbourne, Wiltshire, England, between 1696 and 1724. St. Mark's Coptic Museum (SMCM) decided to interview Mr Banayoti to discover how handbells found their way in the Coptic Church.

**SMCM:** Where did you learn to play handbells?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *It all started in Egypt in 1986, when a small group of my friends wanted to play church music but we had no funds. Our leader, Nagi Karam, came up with an idea that cost nothing —whistling into empty bottles! It was an instant success and the St. Mark's Maadi team performed nonstop concerts from 1986 to 1991 when we were finally able to buy our first set of two octave hand bells. We then established the St. Anthony Hand Bells Group. I played with them until I immigrated to Canada with my family in 2003, sadly leaving behind my handbells.*

**SMCM:** And how did you get started in Canada?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *After settling in Toronto, I could not imagine that I could ever spend Christmas without ringing bells! I searched the internet and located Susan Carscadden-Mifsud. She gave the first workshop at St. Mark's Church and very generously gave us the gift of her three octaves handbells. She also connected me with the Ingram Ringers, a very advanced team of ringers, who accepted me on their team. I learned a lot from the Ingram Ringers and was able to improve my ringing from level 2+ to level 4. I continue to attend workshops to learn new techniques and conducting skills.*

**SMCM:** How long did it take you to reach this level?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *10 years and I am still learning!*

**SMCM:** When did you first start a group at St. Mark's Church?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *I wanted to share the joy and happiness that playing bells gives to the ringer. The first team started in 2004. We now have two teams: Beginners (grades 4, 5 & 6) and Advanced (High School level). The youngest member is nine years old but we have also started a team playing baby bells and boom-whackers from JK to Grade 3.*

**SMCM:** What is the selection criterion for accepting a future ringer in St. Mark's group?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *Love of music, willingness to work as a team, committed to hard work, and most important is a willingness to join our talent with our Lord. They practice once a week as a team. There is no individual take-home practice. The emphasis is to work as a team. This is also what inspired me to share this experience in my Church.*

**SMCM:** How long does it take until an individual and the group to be able to perform publicly?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *Again, it depends on how much the group loves bells and how*

*hard they want to work. I have ringers working hard to do solo or duets (ringing 10 to 12 bells), others are satisfied with ringing one position (3 bells) only.*

**SMCM:** Your repertoire is not all religious or Coptic songs/hymns. Is there some music that is more adaptable to handbells or can any genre be played?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *Any music can be played on bells except Arabic music (with ¼ tunes). Most of the Coptic hymns are in Arabic scales.*

**SMCM:** Is there an association of handbells musicians in Canada? What is required to be a member?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *The Ontario Guild of English Handbell Ringers. St Mark's Handbell Ringers, Toronto has been a member since 2004. I wanted to share the joy and happiness that playing bells gives to the ringer. <http://www.ogehr.ca/index.htm>*

**SMCM:** Where does the St. Mark's Handbells Ringers perform?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *Coptic Churches, Hospitals, City of Markham. Our future plan is to give joy by ringing in senior homes, more hospitals, charities, and wherever there is a need to touch people with happiness.*

**SMCM:** Anything else you would like to add?

**NAGATI BANAYOTI:** *I LOVE HANDBELLS!*