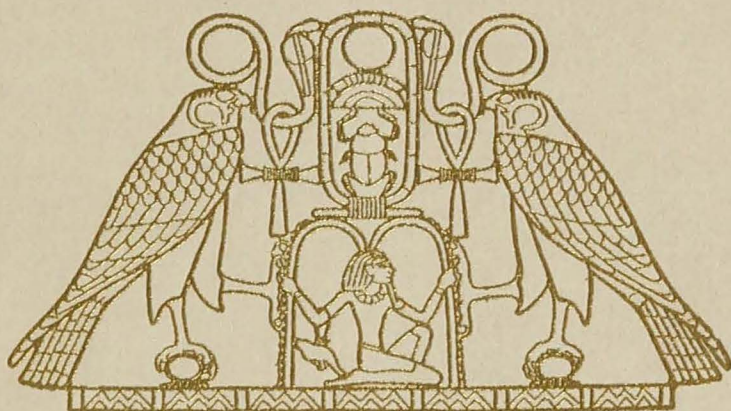


EGYPTIAN JEWELRY



A PICTURE BOOK
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
OF ART

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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN
JEWELRY

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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN JEWELRY

THE instinct for personal adornment is universal, and the practice exists not only in advanced stages of civilization but also among the most primitive races. There is indeed some doubt as to whether clothes or ornaments were the first things to be worn as man emerged from the "state of nature." Moreover, it is not certain whether ornaments had their origin in the vanity of the wearer or in his belief that they were a magical means for averting evil. Whatever the answer to these questions, the instinctive desire for adornment, stimulated as it always is by emulation, has been an important factor in the development of the arts.

In Egypt we find jewelry in the graves of one of the earliest cultures, the Badarian, which dates from before 4000 B.C. As would be expected, the jewelry is simple, almost crude, consisting chiefly of small shells pierced to form beads and strung on a cord. Larger shells are strung with a few beads of colored stone. A girdle is made up of innumerable small beads cut from steatite and covered with a blue glaze, for even in this remote period the Egyptians had discovered the use of vitreous glaze, which made possible the easy imitation of beads cut from semiprecious stones (see fig. 1).

During the millennium between this primitive culture and the beginning of the dynasties, just before 3000 B.C., strings of stone and glazed beads were the most usual items of jewelry, although bangles, made chiefly of shell, were also worn, and the use of metals for ornaments was beginning. In the early dynasties gold became fairly common. An example of its use is the hollow bracelet found in the tomb of King Kha'-sekhemwy of the II Dynasty at Abydos (see fig. 1). At this time the invention of faience brought a new development to the jeweler's art. It made brightly colored beads and other ornaments easy to produce; for, instead of having to cut them out of stone, the craftsman molded them

in a plastic substance made chiefly of crushed quartz and then coated them with the same vitreous glaze that had been used earlier on solid stone.

During the Old Kingdom (2800-2270 B.C.) jewelry made of such beads, both semiprecious stone and faience, was extremely common, to judge by the representations in the tombs. Although comparatively little has survived, the type has been preserved in the funerary equipment of the Middle Kingdom (2050-1788 B.C.). Through long use certain articles acquired an amuletic value and became necessary items in the provision for the dead. The most important of these were the broad collar and bracelets and anklets made up of bands of tubular beads (see fig. 2).

The jewelry actually worn in the XI Dynasty (about 2050 B.C.) is represented in the Museum's collections by a set of strings of beads belonging to a lady named Muyet (fig. 3). They range from a collar of thin gold ring-beads to more elaborate, multiple-stranded necklaces made up of beads of various shapes, including amulets such as the Eye of Horus. Some of the smaller beads are made of glass, a material invented in this period but rarely used until the later dynasties.

It was in the XII Dynasty (2000-1788 B.C.) that the art of the Egyptian jeweler reached its highest point. Rarely in any civilization have a fine feeling for design, restrained sense of color, and perfection of workmanship combined to produce articles so well suited to personal adornment. The pectoral given by Se'n-Wosret II to his daughter, the Princess Sit Hat-Hor Yūnet, is an exquisite composition (see figs. 4 and 5). Here tiny pieces of turquoise, carnelian, lapis lazuli, and garnet have been inlaid in cloisons to make a design consisting of two falcons, symbols of the god Horus, which face each other across the cartouche of the king, supported on a figure representing eternity. Not content with decorating only one side, the jeweler engraved details on the solid gold of the reverse side. The pectoral was suspended on a string of drop-shaped beads which repeat the color of the pendant.

In the Museum's collection are other pieces from the jewel casket of this princess (see figs. 4-7)—necklaces, bracelets and

anklets, scarabs and other amulets, and girdles whose hollow units enclose pellets to make them tinkle with each movement of the wearer.

The XVIII Dynasty was a period of great wealth, and in it we find a more extravagant use of gold. The palace of Thutmose III (1501-1447 B.C.) must have presented a gorgeous picture, to judge by the jewelry belonging to three ladies of his court. A headdress which completely covered the long wig is made up of gold scales inlaid with colored stone and glass; a broad collar of gold, bracelets of plain gold and others inlaid with semiprecious stones and faience, a variety of amulets, and rings set with scarabs bearing the king's name represent the richness of personal adornment of this period (figs. 8-11).

Seal rings, which had invariably been in the form of scarabs, began to be made in solid metal during the New Kingdom (1580-945 B.C.). Those shown in figure 12 illustrate the different shapes which were then in fashion and the manner in which the devices were cut.

Two inlays from armlets are fine examples of the art of the XVIII Dynasty lapidary (fig. 13). One, cut in carnelian, shows in relief two princesses presenting "a hundred thousand years" to Amen-hotpe III (1411-1375 B.C.) and Queen Teye. In the other a winged sphinx holds before him the cartouche of this king.

The XVIII Dynasty jeweler did not confine himself to gold and precious stones as materials. Broad collars, for example, were made up of hundreds of elements of faience of different colors (see fig. 14). The composition is reminiscent of the traditional broad collar of the Old and Middle Kingdoms but is derived more directly from ornaments of the same shape, fashioned out of actual flowers, fruits, and leaves, which were presented to guests to wear at banquets and other festivities.

The *menyet* was a form of necklace in which a metal counterpoise balanced many strands of faience beads (see fig. 15). It could either be worn about the neck or carried in the hand and waved about, thus adding color in motion to religious dances and processions.

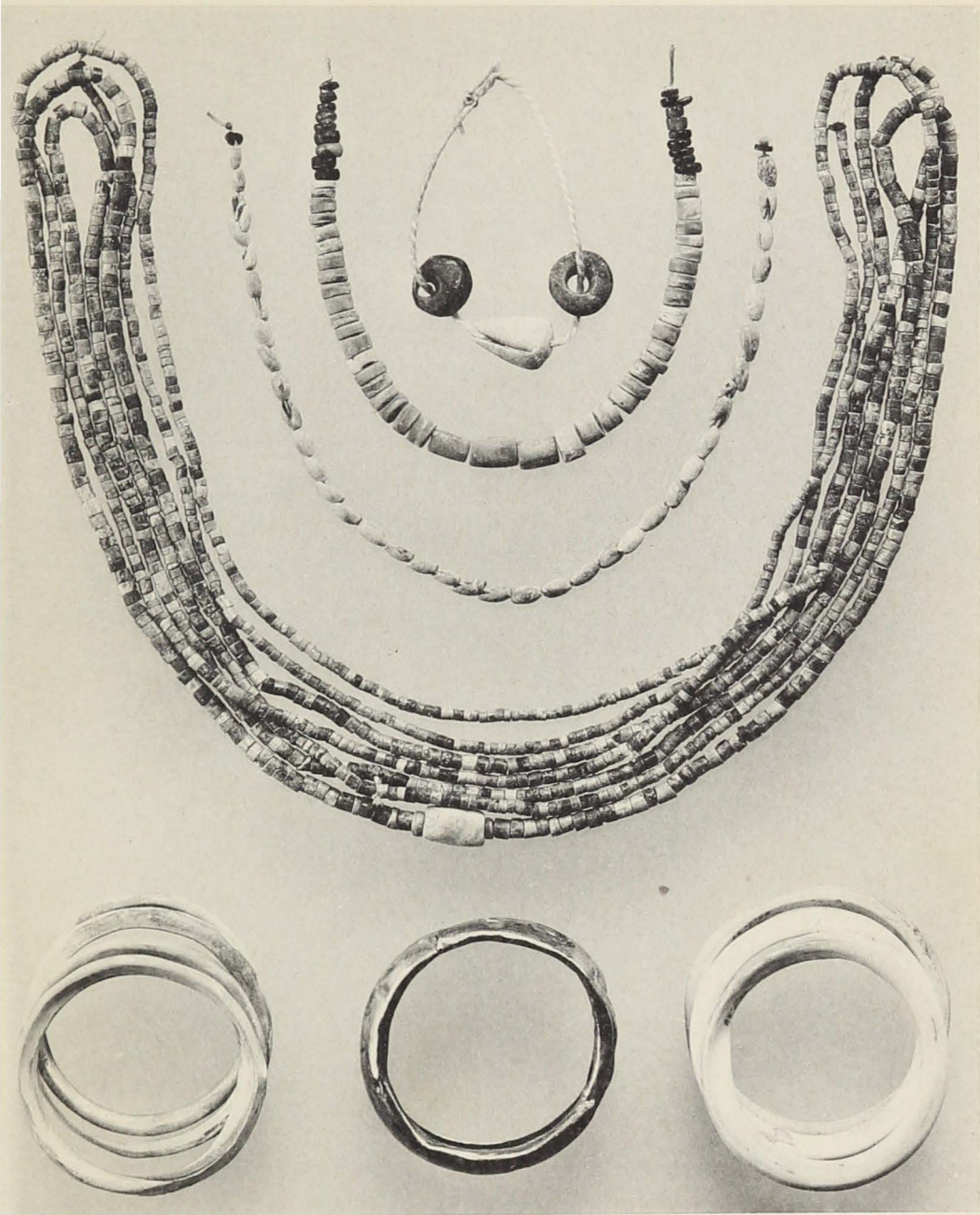
In the Late Dynastic and Graeco-Roman periods (945 B.C.-A.D. 300) granulation and filigree, which had hitherto been employed sparingly, came into lavish use in the decoration of gold jewelry. These techniques, frequently combined, were especially favored for small pieces such as earrings (see fig. 16), which were much more often worn in this period than previously.

The conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great brought three centuries of Greek rule to Egypt (332-30 B.C.). Although the customs of the common people changed but little, those of the wealthy were affected by the ruling class, as may be seen in the jewelry which they wore. The Greek style is evident in a parure consisting of two bracelets, a necklace, and a girdle (fig. 17). All are made of braided gold chains connecting medallions set with semiprecious stones, except one which contains a coin of Ptolemy III (247-222 B.C.).

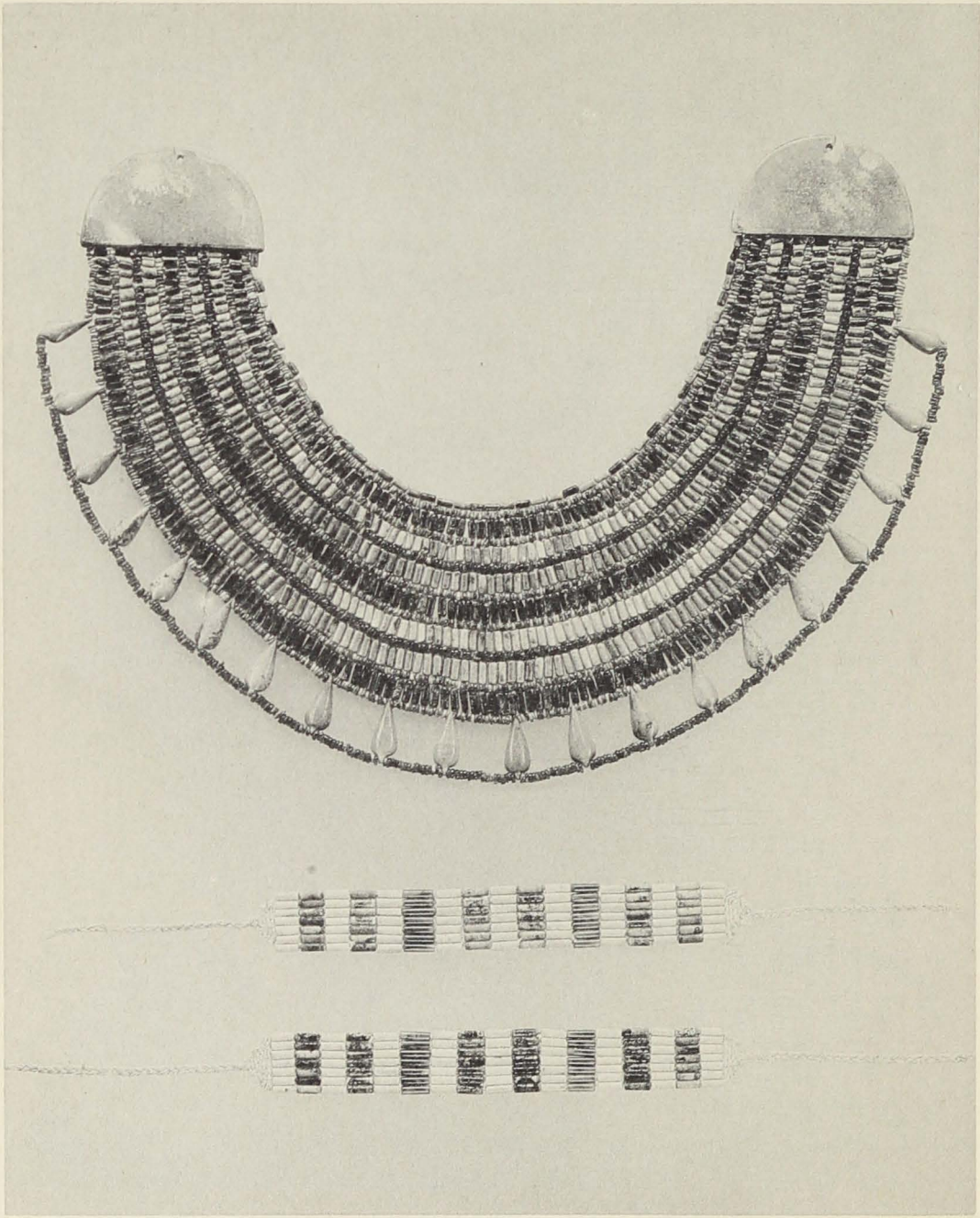
The wealth of the period is reflected in a massive gold bracelet (fig. 18, below), but the charm of delicate workmanship is equally evident in the earrings made of loops of twisted gold strands ending in animal and human heads (fig. 18, above) and in the complicated design of a bracelet in which the two serpents of Isis and Osiris flank figures of the Greek goddesses Aphrodite and Tyche (see fig. 19).

A magnificent necklace whose five medallions contain coins of the imperial Roman family is representative of the jewelry worn in Egypt during the Roman domination (fig. 20). More than four thousand years separate this sumptuous ornament from the humble bead necklace of the primitive Egyptian. During this long stretch of time many changes affected the jeweler's art. New materials, both natural metals and stones and artificial faience and glass, came to be used, and through evolution and through foreign influences the style changed completely. Without knowledge of the jewelry of intervening periods, no one would guess that jewelers of the same land made both the simple bead necklace and the elaborate gold collar. But in all Egyptian jewelry, workmanship and design reveal the skill and tastes of an artistic people.

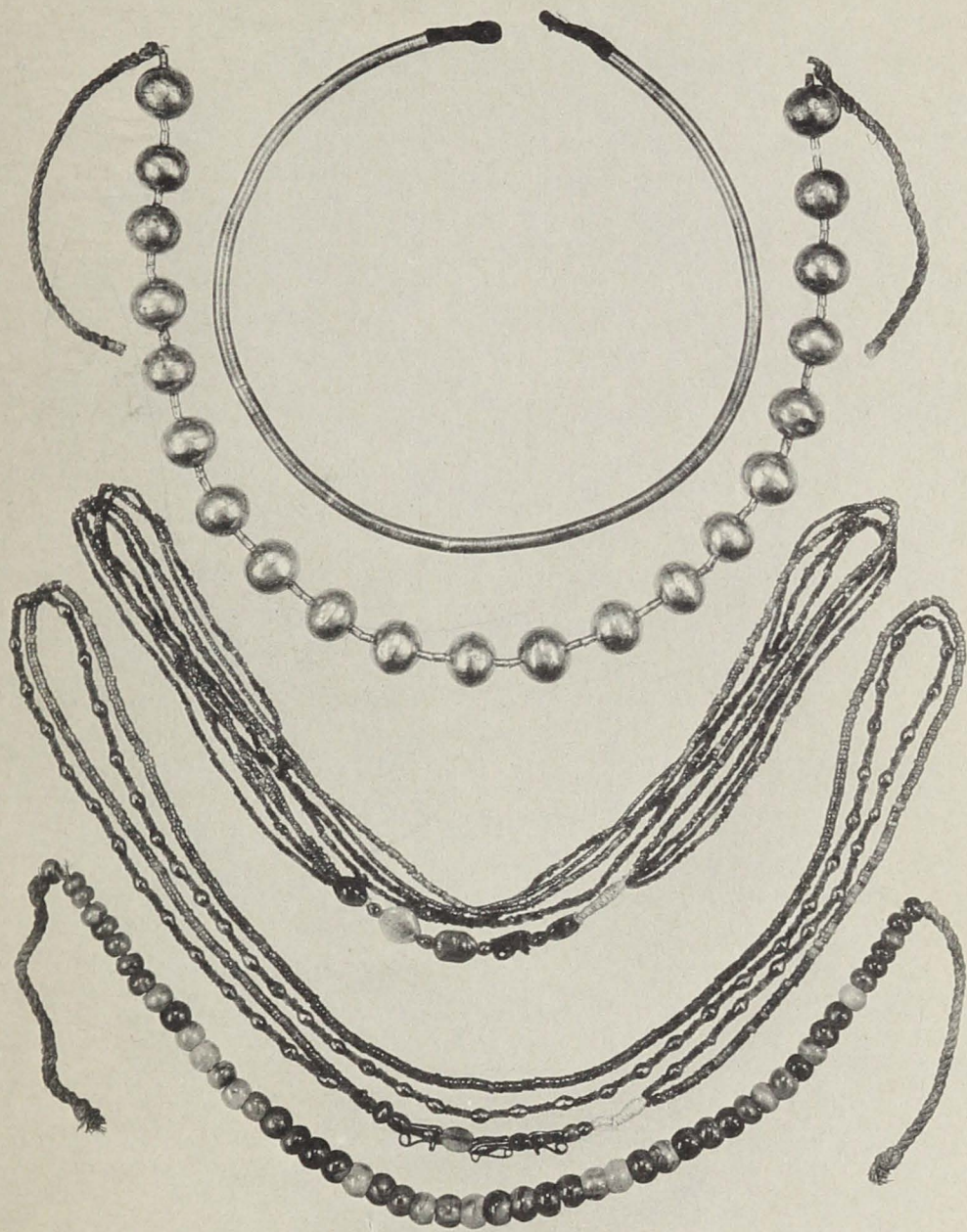
AMBROSE LANSING.



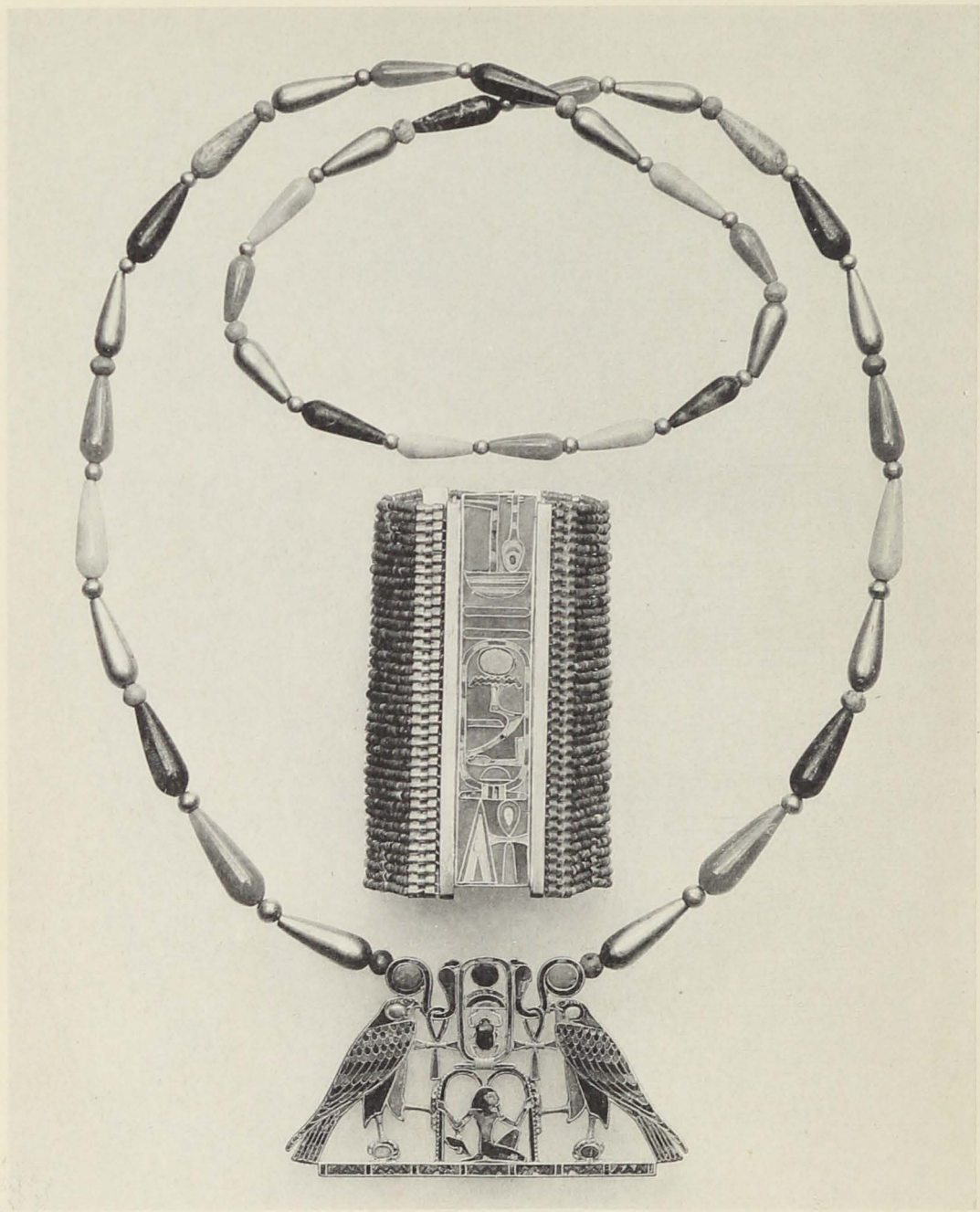
I. Strings of shell and stone beads, Badarian period (before 4000 B.C.). Shell bracelets, Predynastic period (about 3500 B.C.). Hollow gold bracelet of Kha⁴-sekhemwy, II Dynasty (about 2800 B.C.). Scale 1:2.



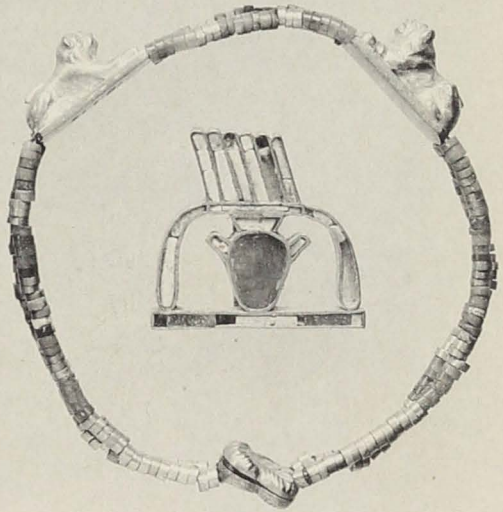
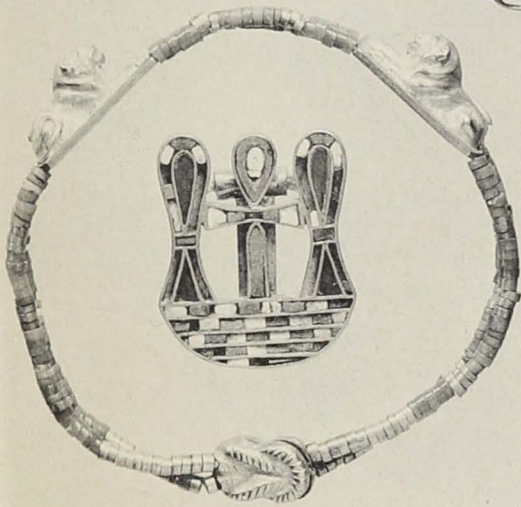
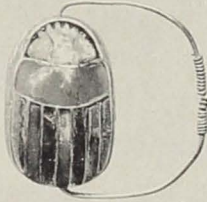
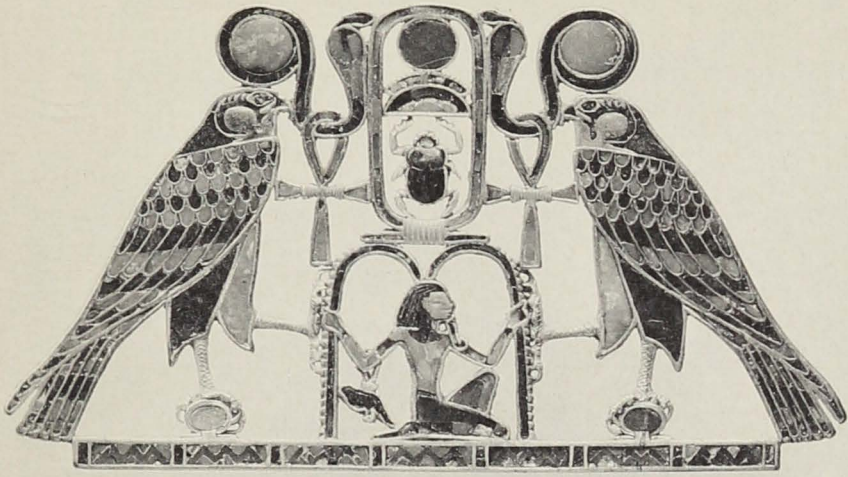
2. Broad collar of faience and anklets of faience and carnelian, funerary jewelry of the XII Dynasty (2000-1788 B.C.). Jewelry similar to this was worn during the Old Kingdom (2780-2242 B.C.). Scale 1:4.



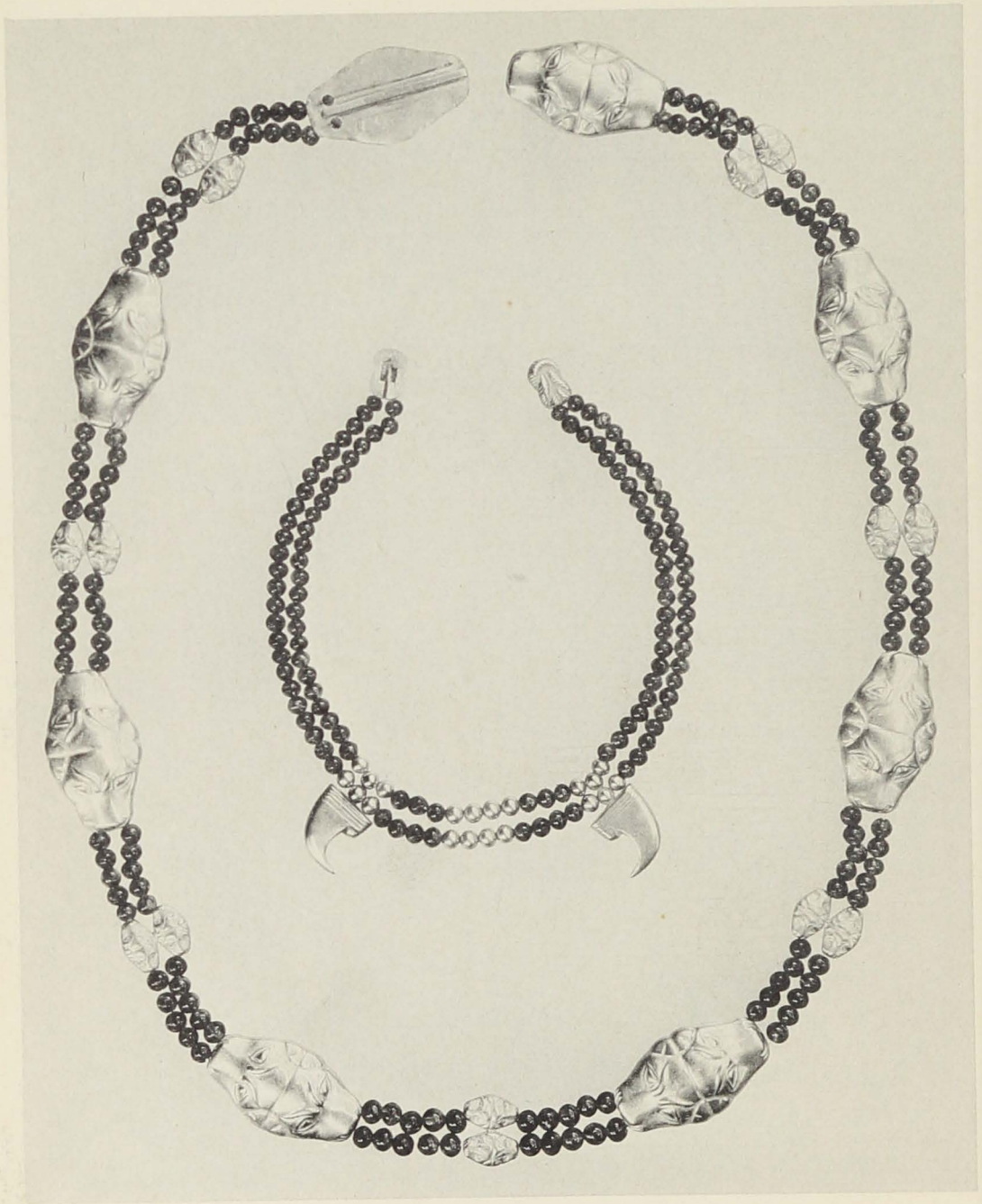
3. Group of jewelry belonging to a lady of the XI Dynasty (about 2050 B.C.). Gold, silver, semiprecious stones, paste, and glass. Scale 2:5.



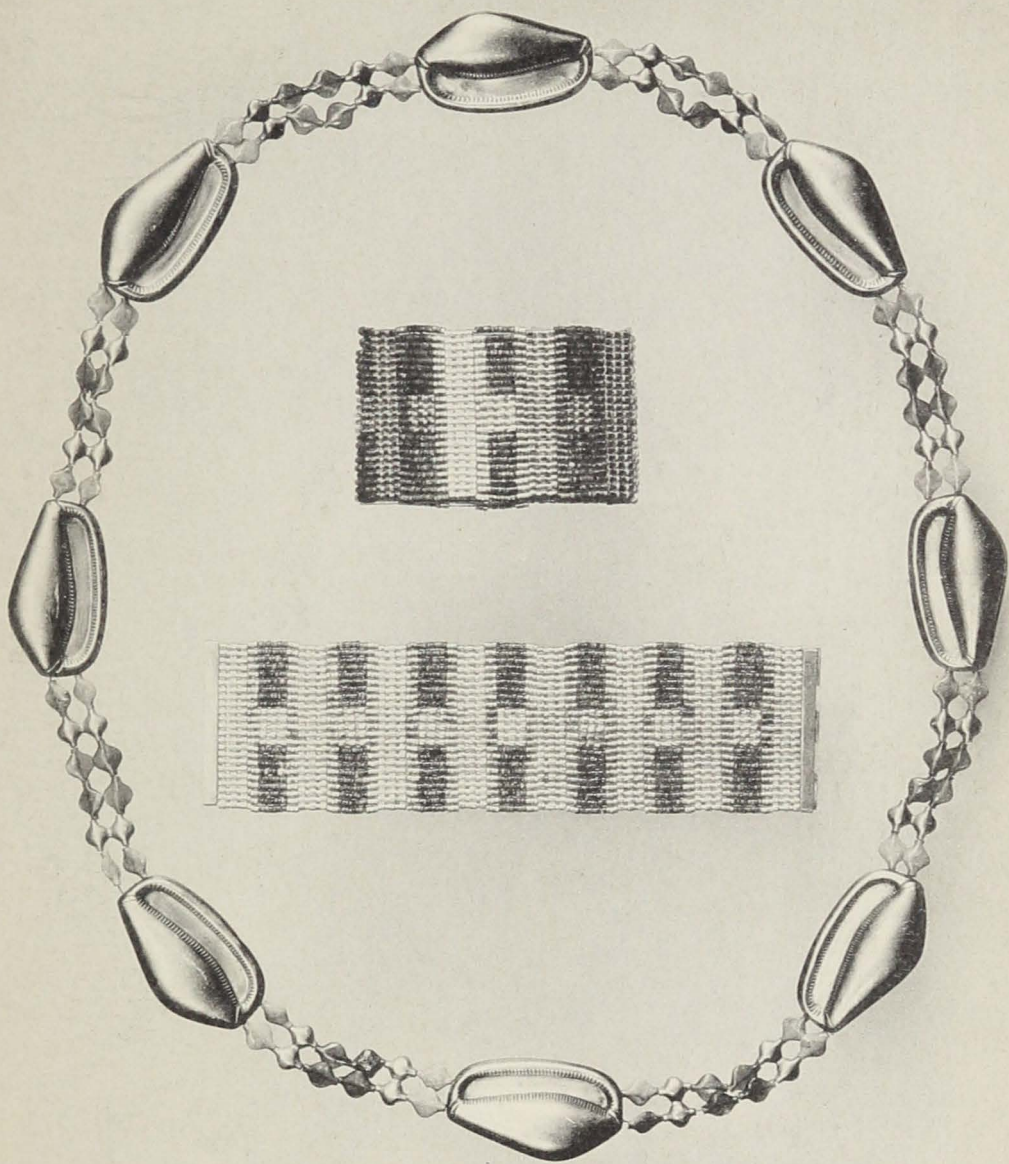
4. Bracelet and necklace with pectoral belonging to Sit Ḥat-Ḥor Yūnet, daughter of Se'n-Wosret II (1906-1887 B.C.). Gold, semiprecious stones, and paste. Scale 1:2.



5. Jewelry of Sit Ḥat-Ḥor Yūnet. Pectoral of gold and semiprecious stones, scarabs of lapis lazuli and inlaid gold, bracelets and pendants of gold and semiprecious stones. Full scale.



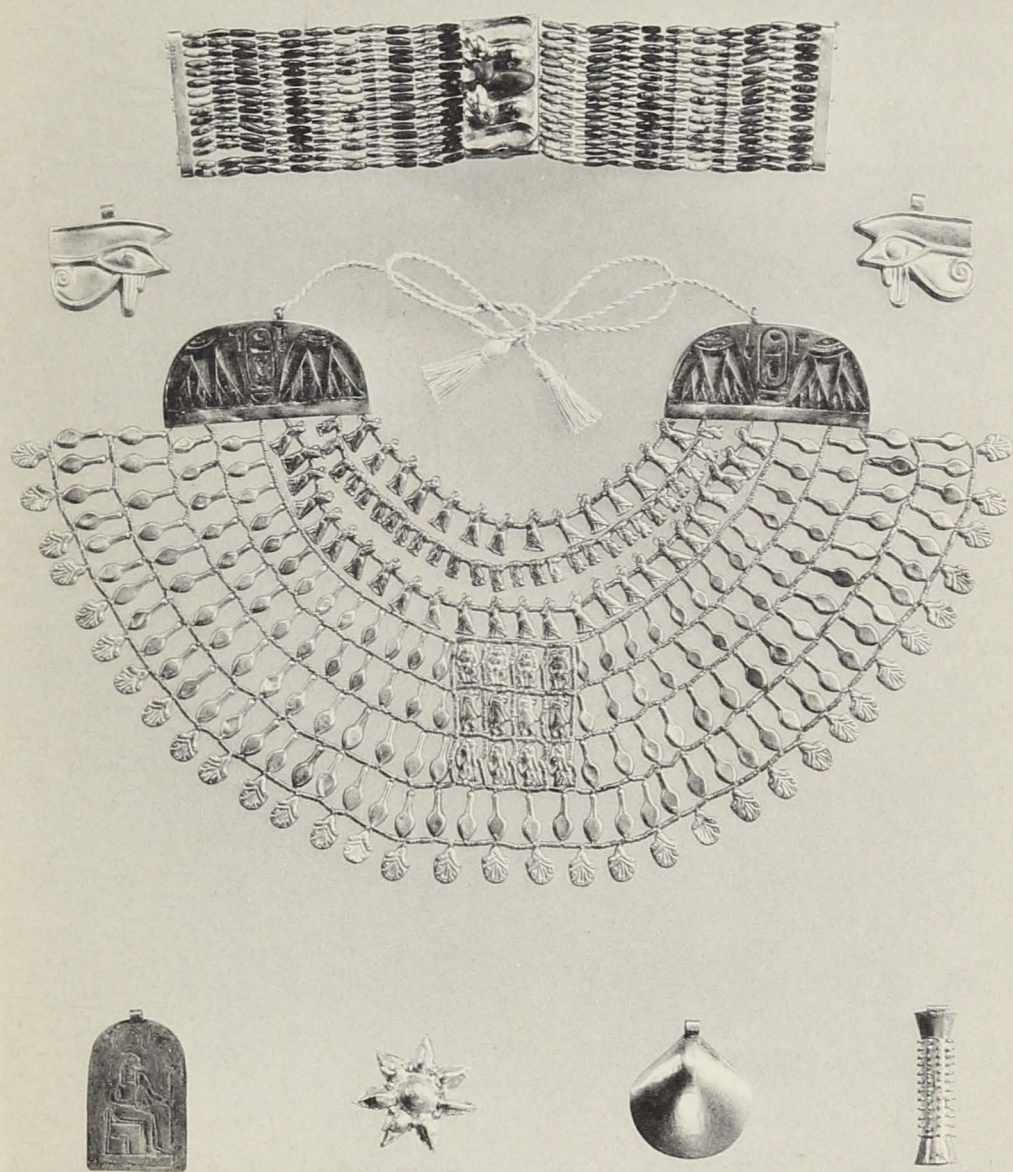
6. Jewelry of Sit Ḥat-Ḥor Yūnet. Girdle and necklace of gold and amethyst. Scale 1:3.



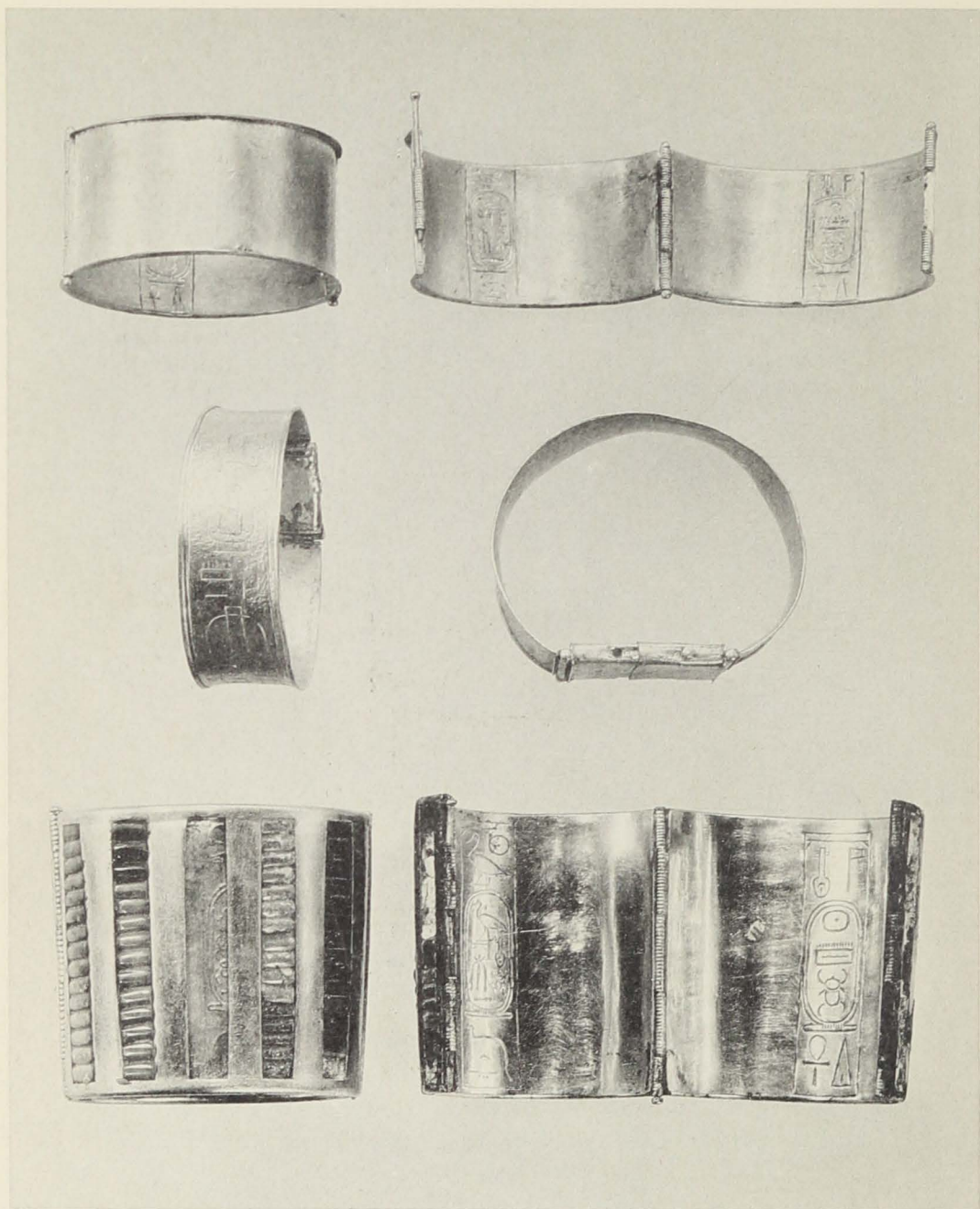
7. Jewelry of Sit Ḥat-Ḥor Yūnet. Girdle and anklets of gold and semi-precious stones. Scale about 1:3.



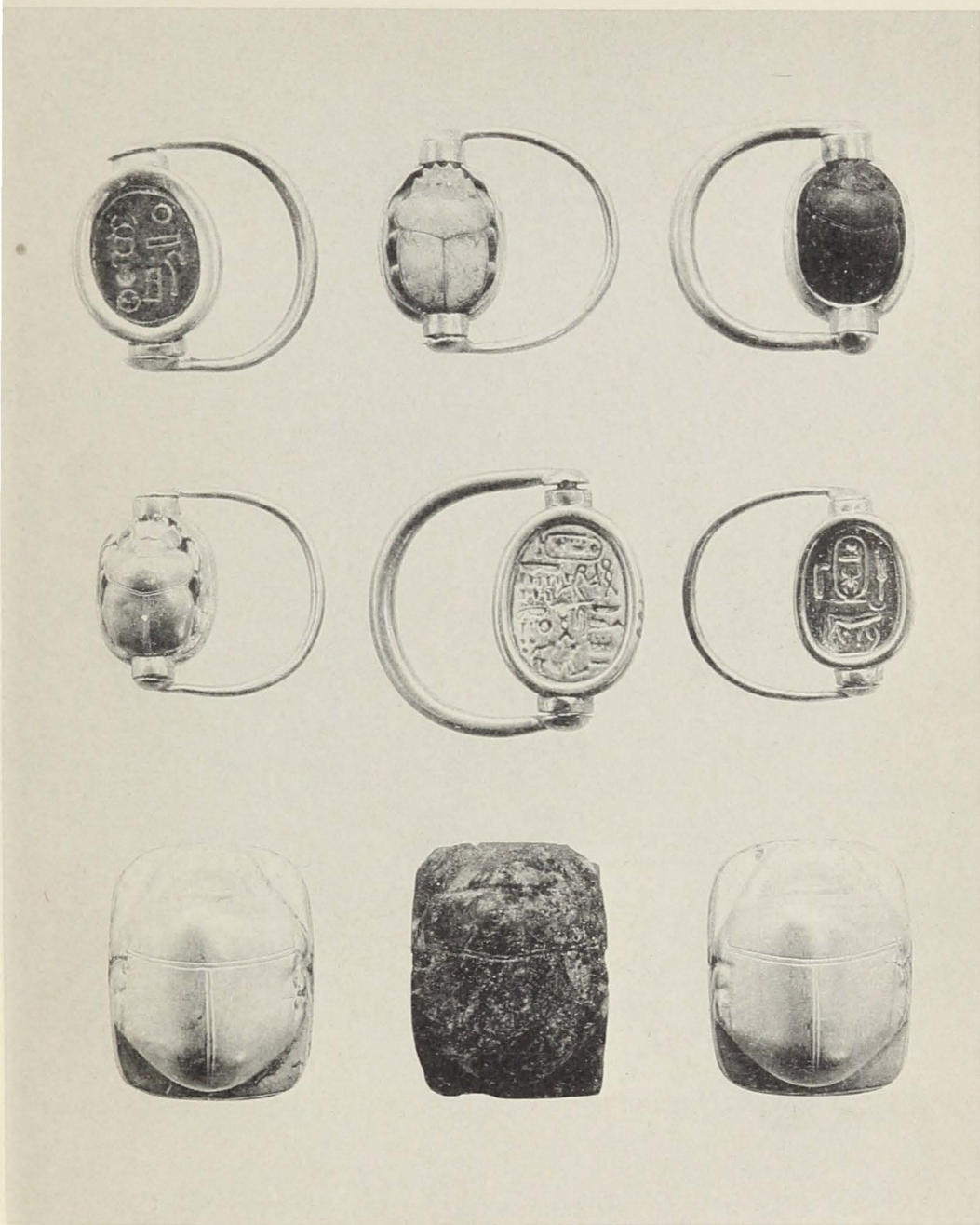
8. Headdress of a court lady of the reign of Thut-mose III (1501-1447 B.C.). Gold, inlaid with carnelian and glass. Scale 1:3.



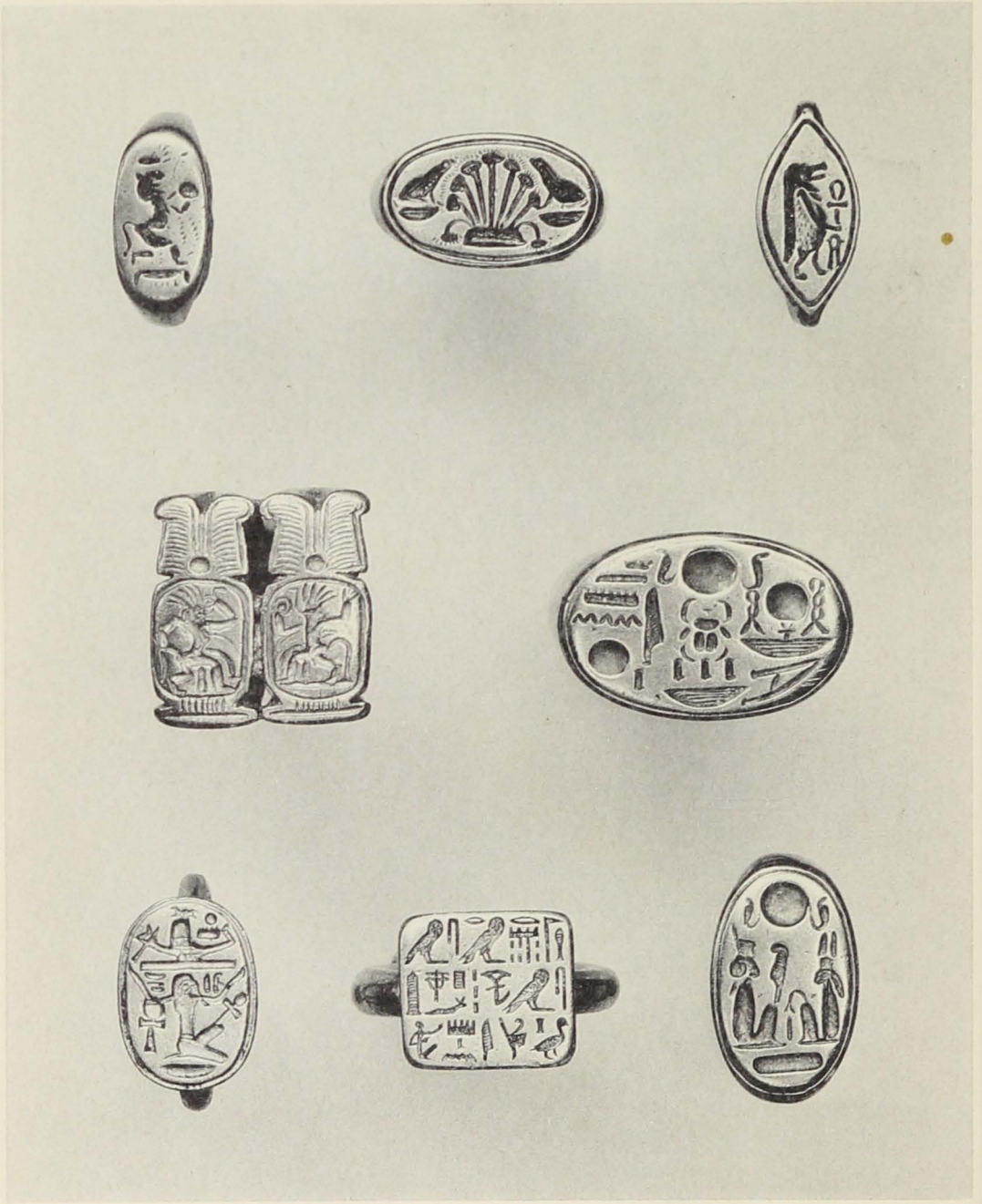
9. Jewelry of a court lady of the reign of Thut-mose III (1501-1447 B.C.). Gold, semiprecious stones, and glass inlay. Scale about 1:4.



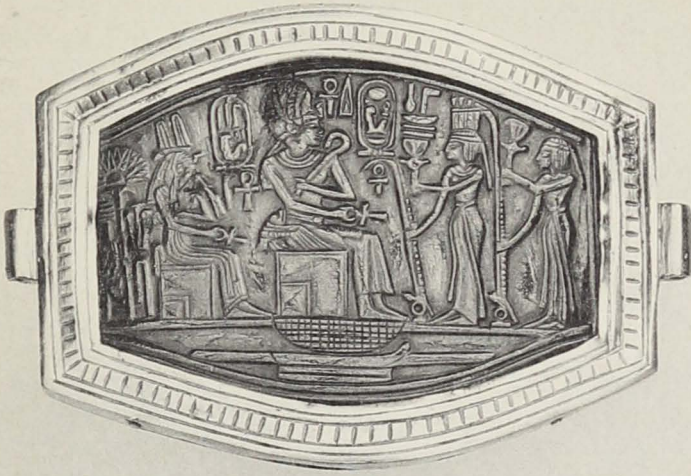
10. Bracelets bearing the names of Thut-mose III and Queen Hat-shepsut (1501-1447 B.C.). Gold, one inlaid with carnelian, green felspar, and paste. Scale about 1:2.



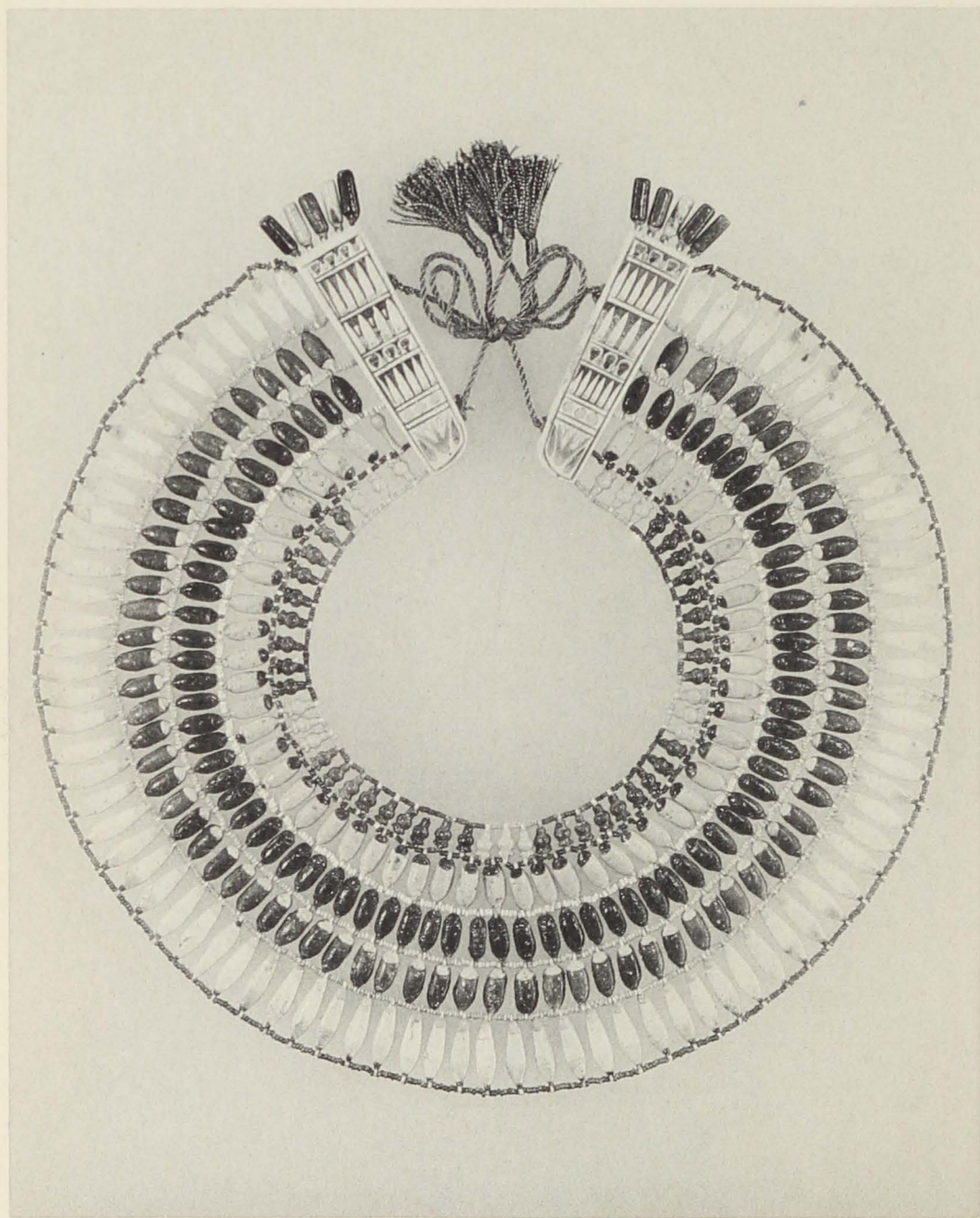
11. Scarab rings and funerary scarabs of the XVIII Dynasty. The rings bear the name of Thut-mose III (1501-1447 B.C.). Gold, lapis lazuli, and glazed steatite. Full scale.



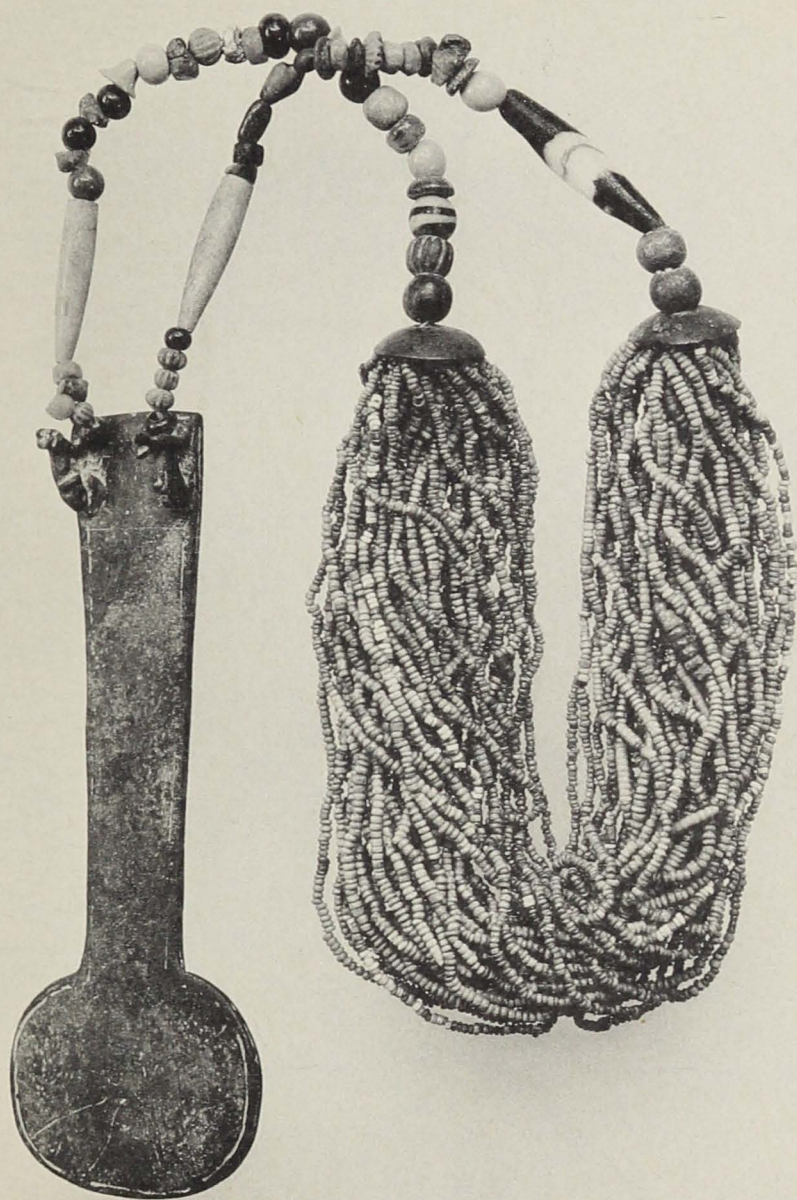
12. Gold seal rings of the New Kingdom and Late Dynastic period (1580-332 B.C.). Full scale.



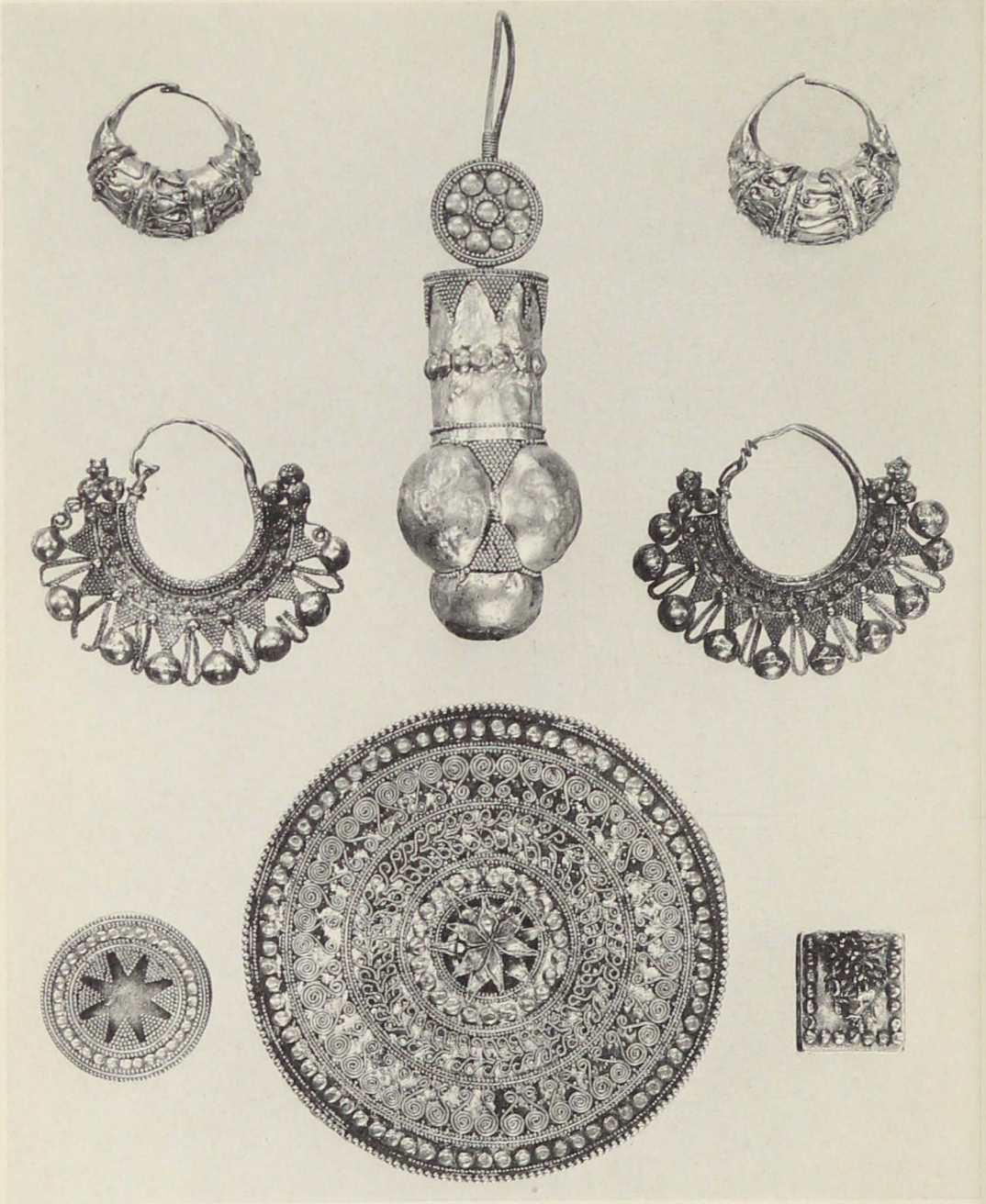
13. Carnelian inlays from armlets, reign of Amen-hotpe III (1411-1375 B.C.): Full scale.



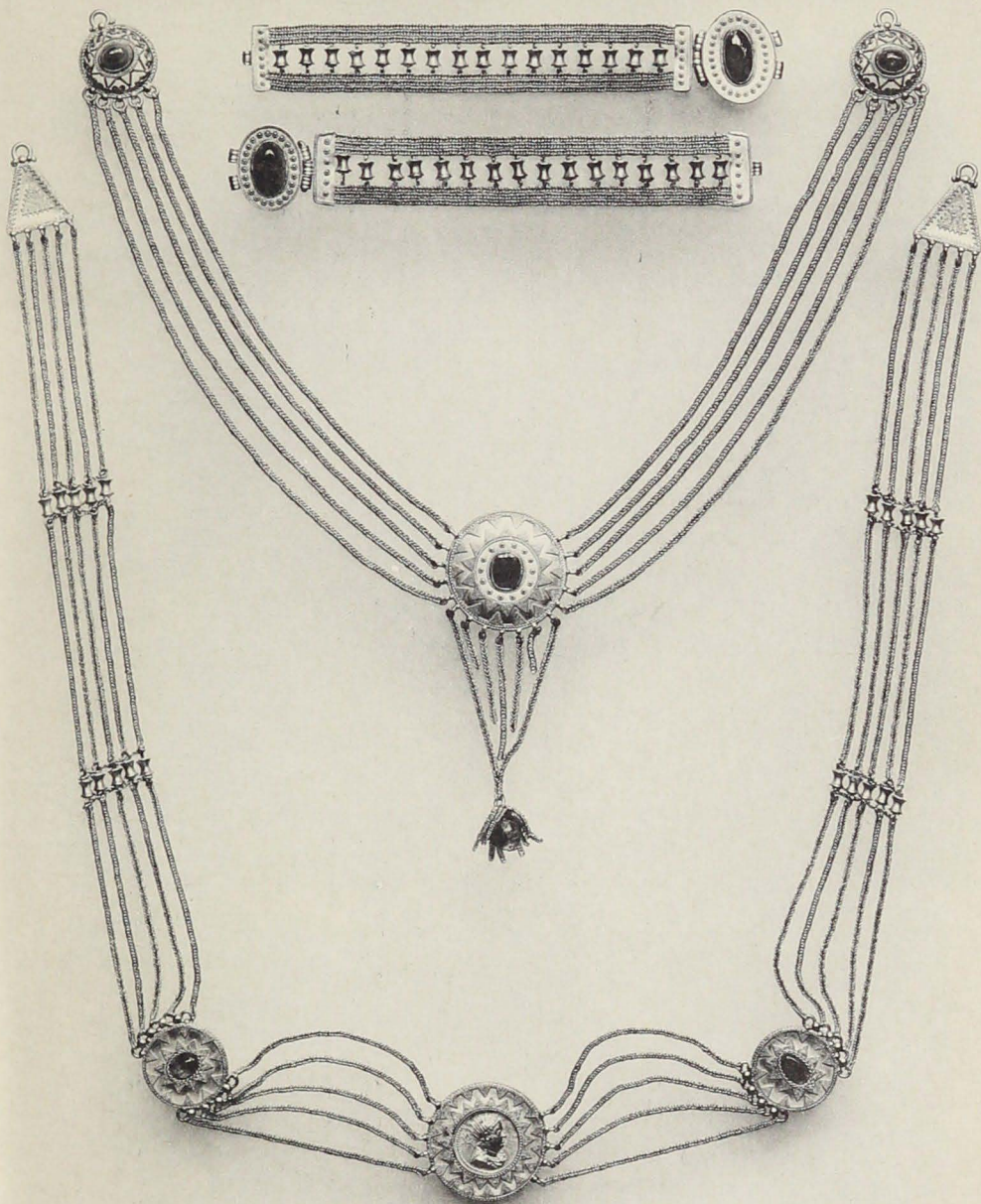
14. Broad collar of faience, late XVIII Dynasty (about 1411-1320 B.C.).
Scale about 1:3.



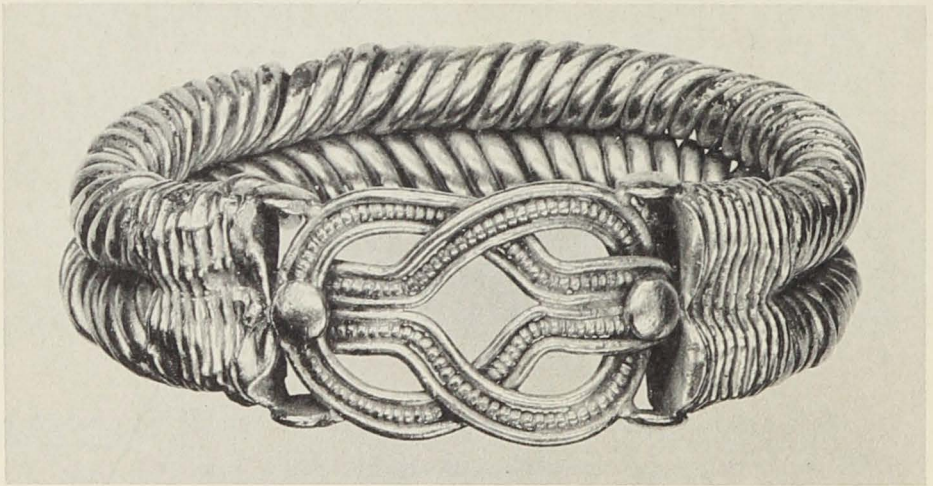
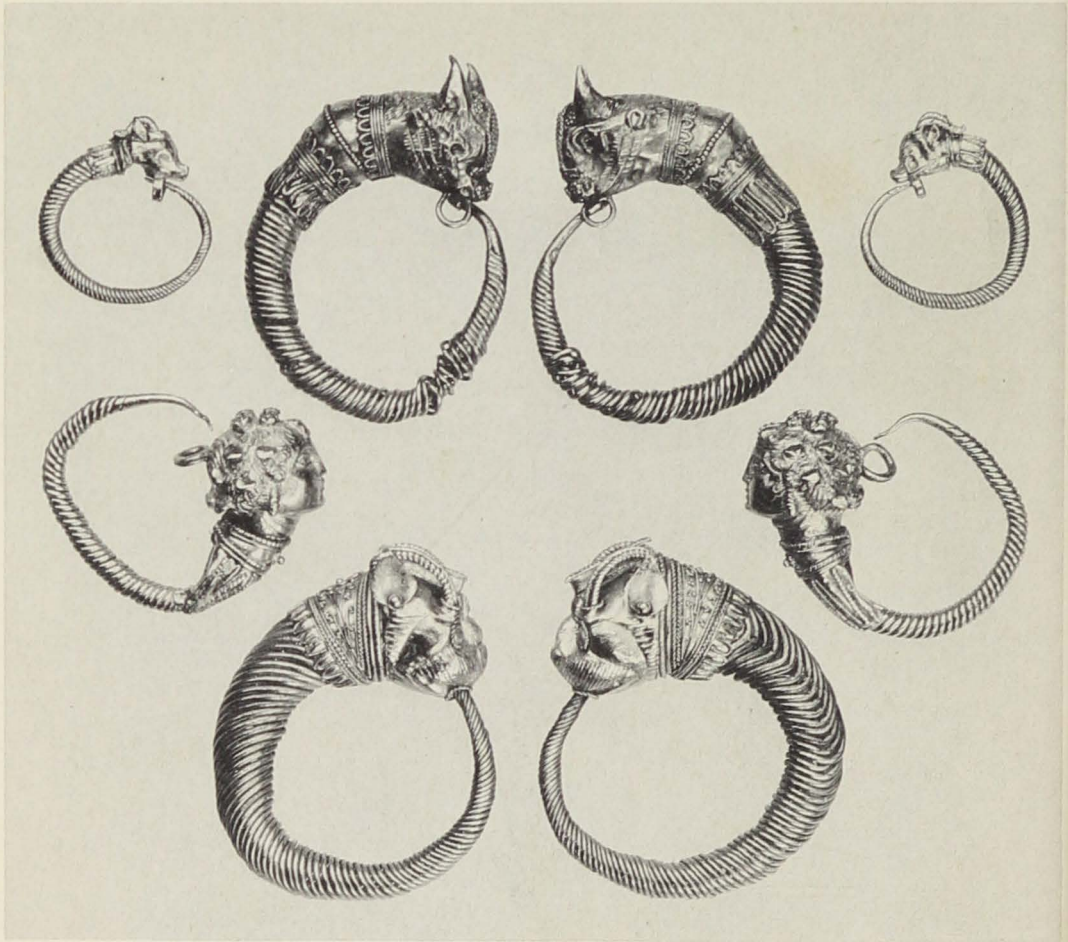
15. *Menyet*, reign of Amen-hotpe III (1411-1375 B.C.). Faience, glass, and bronze. Scale 1:2.



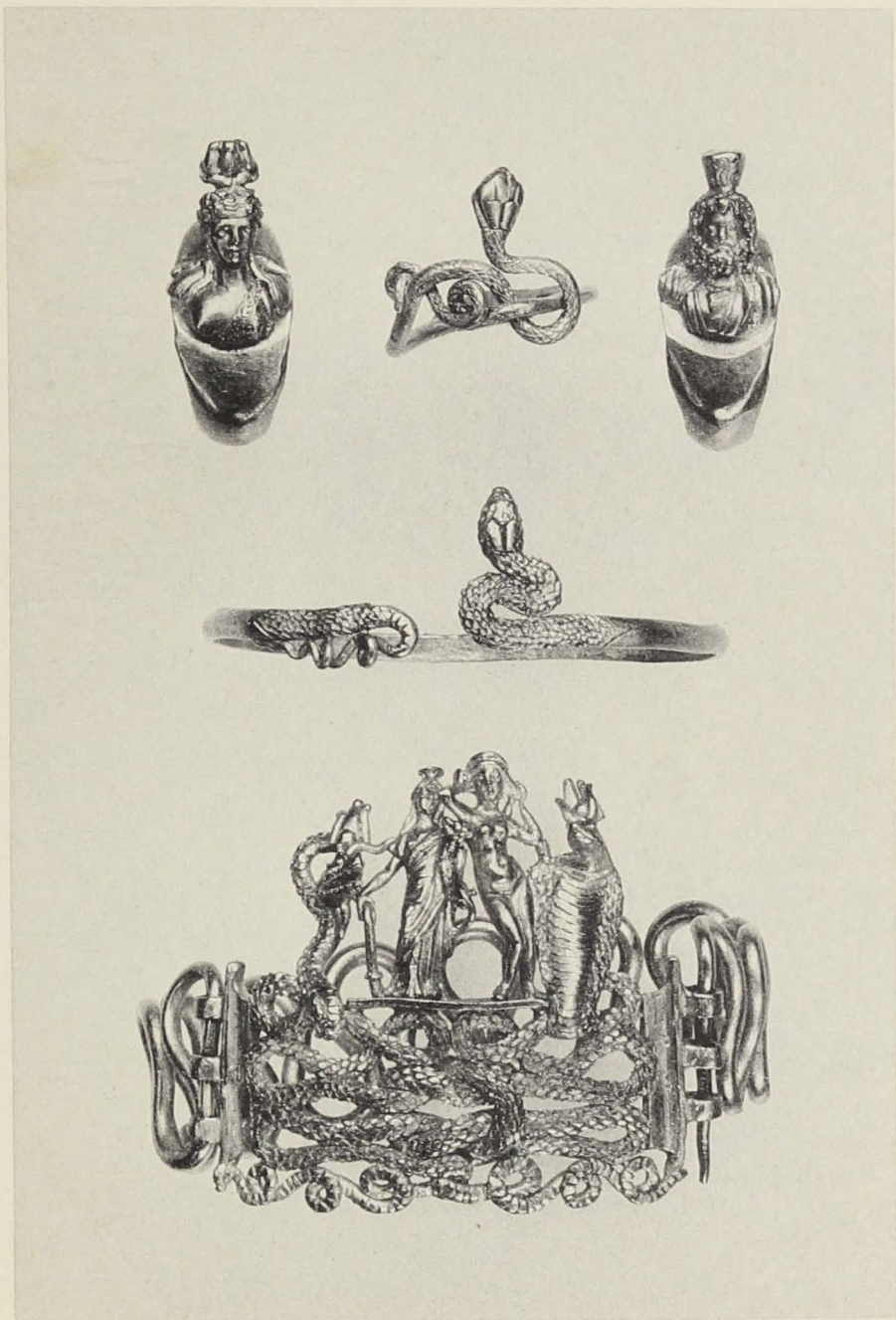
16. Gold earrings and other ornaments in granular and filigree technique, Graeco-Roman period (about 300 B.C.-A.D. 300). Full scale.



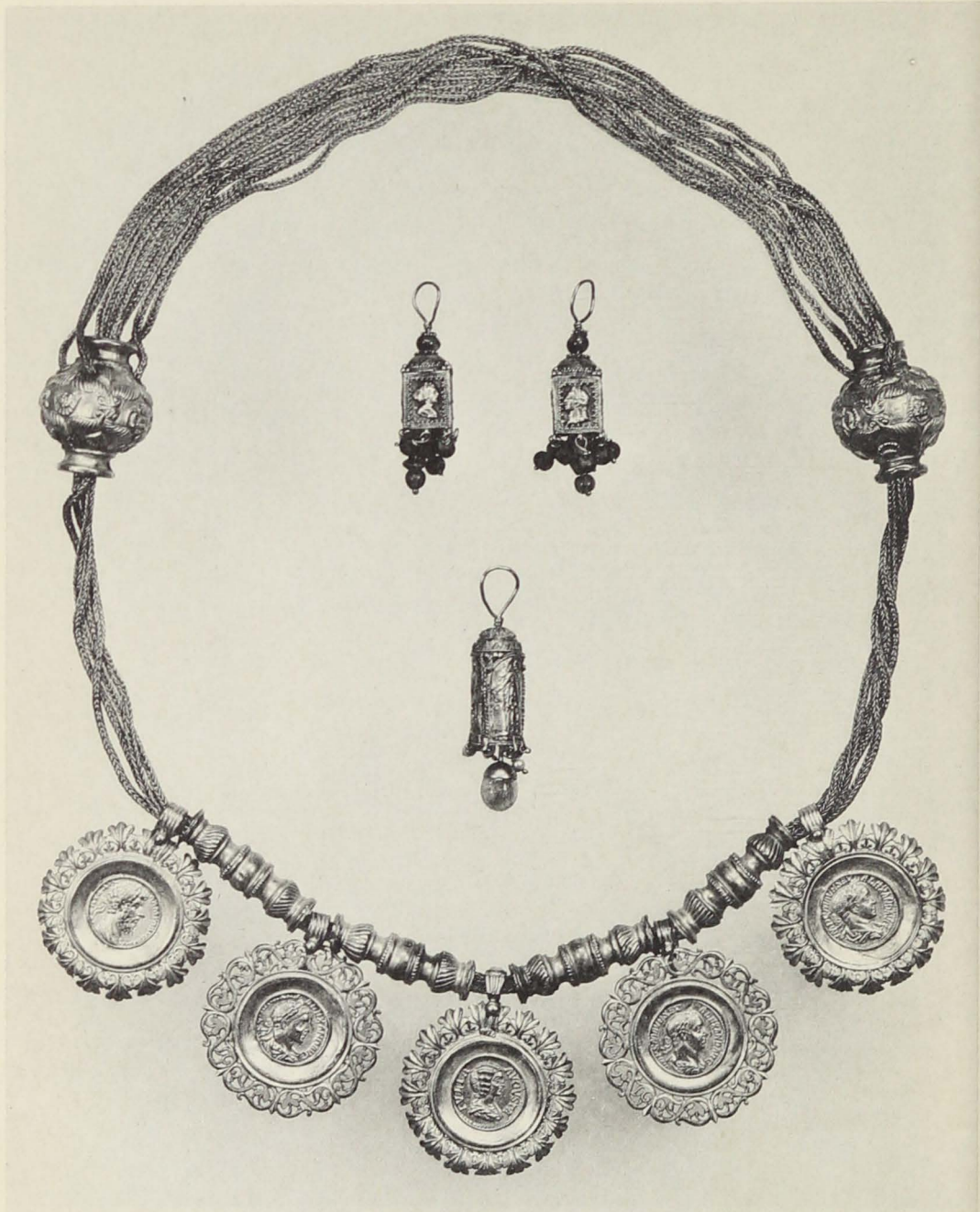
17. Bracelets, necklace, and girdle, reign of Ptolemy III (247-222 B.C.).
Gold with inlays of semiprecious stones. Scale 1:4.



18. Gold earrings and bracelet, Ptolemaic period (332-30 B.C.).
Full scale.



19. Gold rings and bracelets, Graeco-Roman period (about 300 B.C.-A.D. 300). Full scale.



20. Gold necklace with coins of members of the imperial Roman family (about A.D. 255). Earrings of the Graeco-Roman period (about 300 B.C.-A.D. 300). Gold, pearls, emerald matrix, and faience. Scale 1:2.

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