



Links to the Past

By Patricia M. Williams
Field Museum Press

This necklace indicates the antiquity of bold jewelry designs employing chains. It is made of three Roman gold coins set in circular double gold frames, forming three pendants on an ornamental chain.

WOMEN the world over are in chains—not because they are in bondage, but because they are in fashion. Giorgio di Sant' Angelo, a currently popular New York designer, has made a great success by wrapping his clients in 85-foot lengths of gold chain and recently appeared at the Metropolitan Museum with 34 gold chain necklaces hanging around his neck. There are chains for belts, necklaces, headbands, bracelets and anklets. The *Chicago Tribune* predicts, "1969 should be the year of the big boom for jewelers, catering as they will be to the suddenly insatiable appetite on the part of both men and women for jeweled baubles, bangles, even belts."

Most of the chains and jewels which will satisfy this "insatiable appetite" are inspired by, if not frankly copied from, jewelry of the past. Renaissance belts and necklaces encrusted with jewels, beads of the American Indian, golden Egyptian serpents coiled into bracelets, bell necklaces of India and dangling Moroccan earrings are all heaped on together to create a fantastic, clanking smorgasbord of glitter.

Carlyle once observed, "The first spiritual want of man

is Decoration" and this is reflected in the collections of Field Museum. Primitive man used almost any small objects that could be strung together—berries, seeds, feathers, sea shells, bone, teeth and claws of animals—to create ornaments which were worn for both decoration and magical or religious powers.

The oldest of all records concerning jewelry making are found in Egypt. Egyptian jewelers were practicing their craft thousands of years ago—not in a primitive way, but with the skill and technique born of years of experience. Precious metals and gems were lavished over vases, furniture and chariots, as well as the Egyptians themselves. Everybody—rich and poor, adult and child—owned beads.

Beads have been called the "Adam and Eve of the jewelry family" and have endured in various forms throughout the ages. "The trade routes of early times may be traced by the beads which blazed their trails. And wherever the bead went there too, of necessity, went some wave of influence caused by the intercourse between various countries."¹

Beads appear, too, in the history of early America as

they were used to barter with the Indians. Like other explorers, Marquette and Joliet carried beads with them as gifts for the Indians and Powhattan is known to have sent a chain of pearls to John Smith.

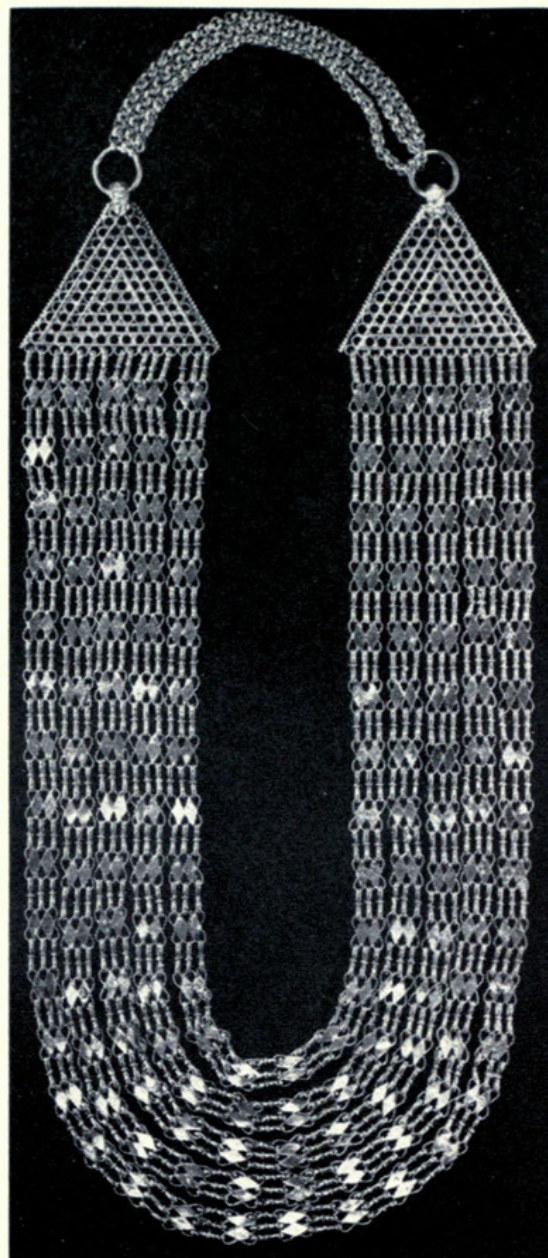
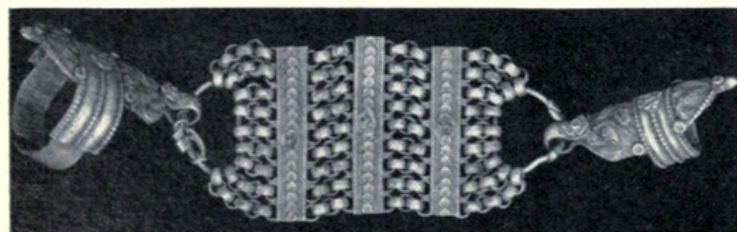
Not only beads, but jewelry of all kinds bedecked the rich Roman lady of fashion. Although the following quote from *5000 Years of Gems and Jewelry* refers to ancient Rome, it could apply to modern man as well.

"It is curious to note how the ancient Roman jewelry reflects the spirit of the times and proclaims, like a blast of trumpets, the arrogant pride of riches. The heavy, opulent necklaces, bracelets, and rings fairly wallow in wealth of gold and suggest that the people who wore them were somewhat larger than life."²

Graeco-Roman rings, golden bracelets and necklaces studded with stones, dating from 1-400 A.D., are on dis-



One of a pair of silver ankle bracelets from Nepal. Fashion designers predict that similar ornaments may be "in" this year. Jewelry inspired by India remains popular—for the daring and sure of foot, an item like that below may be appropriate. It has rings for the big and little toes, joined by an elaborate chain-link band.



This silver chandrahah ("moon necklace") from Nepal would warm the heart of any chain-link aficionado. Designs for much of the jewelry currently in fashion is centuries old.

play in the Museum's fabulous Hall of Gems. A jewelry-lover from any time in history would revel in the treasures displayed in this room. There are Egyptian bracelets, rings and amulets dating back to 1800 B.C., fashioned of the finest gold. Golden Etruscan jewelry of almost unequalled delicacy dates back to 7-500 B.C. and provides sharp contrast to the huge silver pieces from the hill tribes of Algeria displayed in a nearby case. All through the Museum's anthropology exhibits there are indications of man's universal fondness for jewelry, all of which adds confidence to the security of the jeweler's craft. Other crafts may come and go, but as long as there are precious metals, jewels and people to wear them, the jeweler's craft will endure.

^{1, 2} Francis Rogers and Alice Beard, *5000 Years of Gems and Jewelry*. Lippincott Co., New York, 1947. 309 pp.



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