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Tomb D303 at Abydos

James Romano: Egyptologists use two different standards to determine a person's social status. When we look at a tomb, we try to determine how many different kinds of materials are reflected in the objects that are discovered. This tomb contains objects in gold, objects in silver, objects in an alloy called electrum. We have objects in faience, in bone or ivory. We have a large number of materials.

We also try to determine how hard it is to obtain some of that material. Both the amethyst and the carnelian you see for the necklaces were very, very rare indeed, and of course gold was by its very nature a precious substance. It does give you an idea of the kinds of objects an individual of what we would call the upper middle class—a white-collar executive of the Middle Kingdom—would have had.

This tomb owner, a fellow by the name of Sa-Onuris, had a taste for the exotic. One of the strangest statues in all of our galleries is here—on the far right of the case. She's an acrobat, executing this very graceful back bend. What she's doing in his tomb, I don't know. But clearly, he wanted to take an acrobat with him for eternity.

For more information about these objects, be sure to visit www.brooklynmuseum.org