

Sacrificial Status and Prestige Burials: Negotiating Life, Death, and Identity Through Personal Adornment at Early Bronze Age I Başur Höyük, Turkey

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Başur Höyük in southeast Turkey lies at a critical crossroads linking Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Caucasia. The site was excavated as part of the Ilisu Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant (HEPP) project rescue excavations. During the Early Bronze Age I (3100–2900 BCE), a cemetery was created in an area previously occupied by an Uruk settlement. A stone cist grave and accompanying outer area contained several burials. Bodies interred outside the main stone chamber are thought to be the victims of human sacrifice as part of a retainer burial practice previously documented at Arslantepe and Ur. The grave contexts host an assemblage of personal ornaments that were deposited with those interred both inside and outside the stone chamber. This article considers the more than 30,000 recovered beads in light of social context, material procurement, use and value, technology, and relative differences in status of the occupants of the grave. The data are used to identify both how different identities were structured by the Early Bronze Age I residents of Başur Höyük and how the location of the site at a meeting point of trade routes and regional powers influenced material culture and social behavior in the region.¹

INTRODUCTION

Başur Höyük in southeast Turkey is a mound settlement measuring 250 x 150 m with a 15 m depth of cultural deposits (fig. 1). It was excavated from 2007 to 2019 within the scope of the rescue excavations of the Ilisu Dam Project under the scientific guidance of Haluk Sağlamtimur. The earliest recorded artifacts are ceramics of the 7th millennium BCE; the stratified deposits date between the Early Chalcolithic and the Medieval periods. A Late Uruk settlement that occupied the south part of the mound was abandoned toward the end of the 4th millennium BCE, following which the area was used for burials at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age. Eighteen Early Bronze (EB) I graves were found during the rescue excavation, although this does not represent the full extent of the cemetery. No settlement of the Early

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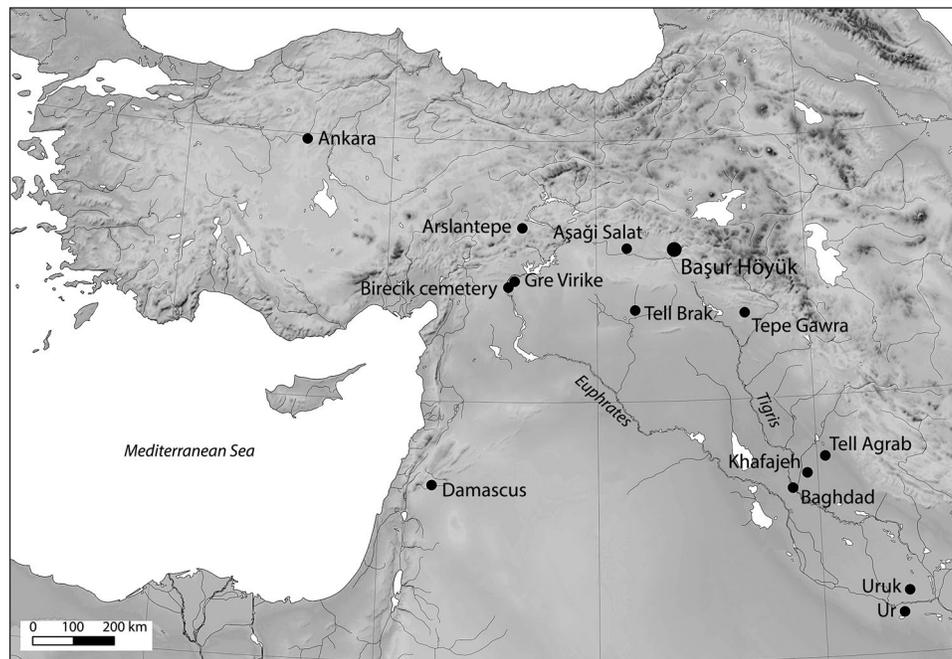


FIG. 1. Map showing the location of Başur Höyük, other sites mentioned in the text, and other major locations for reference.

Bronze Age has been excavated, but it is likely that this was located on the northern portion of the mound.

The cemetery consists of stone cist graves and earth graves containing varying numbers of bodies, and, in some cases, apparently symbolic graves with no human remains. Outside some of the cist graves, additional bodies were interred near the stone grave lining, apparently at the same time as the main interment. Overall, the graves contained unusually rich assemblages of artifacts, although there was considerable variation in the number and variety of materials among the graves. The large quantities of ceramics show characteristics of the Nineveh 5 tradition, the Euphrates regional tradition, and types associated with Transcaucasia. Large amounts of metal artifacts, notably including weapons and ritual items, are extraordinary for this period. Long (60–70 cm) metal pins seem to have been used to hold together the burial shrouds. Cylinder seals show links to Mesopotamian practices, and a complete set of high-quality stone game pieces deposited in one grave hints at the complexity of the social life enjoyed by the community.²

² See Sağlamtımur 2017 for detailed discussion of the cemetery and grave goods; Sağlamtımur et al. 2019 for details of the metal grave goods.

The Early Bronze Age burials (fig. 2) include one that consists of a stone-lined cist chamber containing the primary interments (context 15) and, outside the cist, a group of individuals placed in a small adjoining area (context 17). The outer area was covered by the capstone of the cist and was apparently intended for retainers—individuals, often sacrificed, accompanying the primary interment. The retainers and those buried in the main chamber were interred as part of a single act of group burial.³ In the main chamber were the remains of two children, both about 12 years old, possibly a boy and girl. The eight individuals buried to accompany the occupants of the cist were probably a mixed-sex group (probably five males and three females), all of whom were also young, from age 12 to late adolescence or early adulthood.⁴ Accompanying these individuals, who were buried in a single episode, was an unprecedented quantity of grave goods including pottery, many copper alloy weapons and other metal items, seals, and tens of thousands of beads. The grave goods were not restricted to the inner cist but were also buried with the retainer group.

³ Hassett and Sağlamtımur 2018, 643.

⁴ Hassett et al. 2019, 74.



FIG. 2. Plan of Başur Höyük excavations with Early Bronze Age cemetery contexts numbered, and detail of context 15, the cist grave, and context 17, the area outside the cist.

The artifacts most closely associated with the buried individuals are the beads, many of which were worn on their bodies at the time of interment. The quantity of beads placed in the burial represents an enormous investment of production time, specialized knowledge, and a diverse network of procurement stretching hundreds of kilometers from the site. A simple count of the beads shows that there are more per individual for those who were buried outside the main cist than for those who were inside it, but closer inspection of the types of ornaments and their distribution tells a very different story about the material value, variety of form, control of resources, and status of the individual items that were deposited. This raises questions about how the value and identity of both ornaments and individuals were determined, whether beads (and items made from and decorated with beads) were markers of status, and whether knowledge of and control over the landscape were displayed through these artifacts.

Başur Höyük lies at an important crossroads of Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus on an offshoot of the Tigris River (see fig. 1). The location was therefore unusually well connected to the communities and trade of those different regions and undoubtedly contributed to the rich variety of artifacts that were deposited in the EB I burials. The scale of the

deposition and the style of the burials have drawn comparisons with those at Arslantepe⁵ and the later Royal Cemetery at Ur,⁶ both of which sites have examples of retainer burials apparently involving human sacrifice and extravagant depositions of artifacts with the burials. Some parallels can also be drawn with the contemporary kurgans of the Novosvobodnaya tradition of the northern Caucasus, which share similarly rich artifactual assemblages that may indicate important individuals in the landscape but in which there is no confirmed evidence for the sacrifice of retainers.⁷ While it is now clear that the retainer burial at Başur is comparable in some respects to examples at other sites, the social significance of the burials and the structuring of relationships among the deceased remain to be explained.

In the fourth millennium BCE, centralized control and administration of resources had been established at some sites in southeastern Turkey, including the well-documented example of Arslantepe. In the second

⁵ Frangipane et al. 2001.

⁶ Pollock 1991, 2007; Gansell 2007; Vidale 2011; Batihan 2014; Hassett and Sağlamlı 2018.

⁷ Palumbi 2012, 57.

half of the millennium, significant influence of the south Mesopotamian Uruk culture on the material culture of these communities indicates consistent and fairly intense contact with communities farther to the south.⁸ Although the expansion of Uruk influence is well documented, it is manifested to different degrees at different sites; at Başur Höyük, although there was Uruk influence, evidence does not suggest the site was an Uruk colony.⁹ The period came to an end with widespread collapse of the established systems, in some cases involving abandonment, destruction, and burning of settlements that was followed by ephemeral settlement, probably by itinerant pastoralists. The archaeological evidence for this post-collapse period has not yet provided conclusive information about the new power structures, although changing sets of cultural influences are recorded.¹⁰ The period of the EB I Başur Höyük burials (3100–2900 BCE) falls after the Uruk collapse, during this time of relative political and social uncertainty.¹¹ At Arslantepe, a cist burial of great wealth appears to have been heavily influenced by the traditions of the Kura-Araxes culture and perhaps the burials of the northern Caucasus.¹² The location of Başur Höyük exposed it to cultural influences from several different directions. We have used the characteristics of the beads from retainer burial contexts 15 and 17 at Başur Höyük as a vehicle to explore individual and group identities, the differentiation of those inside and outside the main burial chamber, and the expression of links to the wider world at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and the Caucasus.

RETAINER BURIALS

Arslantepe and Ur

The similar retainer burials at the sites of Arslantepe (contemporary in date) and Ur (about 500 years later) have examples of materially rich contexts of multiple burials within a single grave that include one or more primary burials and the burials of sacrificial victims whose various statuses were indicated by differences in grave goods.

At Arslantepe, the beginning of the third millennium BCE was very unsettled, with apparent recurrent occupations by different groups and discontinuity with the highly developed, centralized society that had occupied the site during the preceding period.¹³ The presence at Arslantepe of an adult male in a stone-lined burial (known as the “Royal” tomb¹⁴), dating to this period and materially rich particularly in metal objects, was therefore surprising. The grave was closed with large stones, and the bodies of two adolescents, probably a male and female, were placed on top with the bodies of two young females lying at their feet. These four individuals are thought to have been killed deliberately, probably in an act of sacrifice.¹⁵ The objects of material culture associated with the individuals inside and outside the burial chamber indicate that there were both similarities and differences in the ways they were treated and that not all the individuals outside were treated in the same manner. The male buried in the cist was accompanied by weapons and tools, metal vessels, and ornaments for hair, clothes, and body made of metals and stone. Large jars of Arslantepe VI A type suitable for storage were placed at the foot of the burial, and a group of smaller Anatolian Red-Black Burnished Ware vessels suitable for food presentation and consumption, possibly intended for the afterlife, was placed separately.¹⁶ The two adolescents on top of the cover slabs had hair jewelry and garment pins as well as diadems and ceramic vessels. The vessels were of the same types as those in the cist, but the forms and arrangement were different; all were jars, and those placed closest to the bodies were the Arslantepe VI A vessels while those around the perimeter of the grave were Transcaucasian Red-Black Burnished Ware. The final two individuals had no accompanying artifacts.¹⁷ Among the Arslantepe tomb artifacts are items demonstrating links with both Mesopotamia and Transcaucasia and representing a palimpsest of old and new relationships among the material cultures of different regions.

The differences in the way the supposed sacrificial victims were treated after death give the impression that the male interred in the chamber and the two

⁸ Frangipane 2014, 170.

⁹ Sağlamtimur and Kalkan 2015, 63.

¹⁰ Frangipane 2014, 171–73.

¹¹ See Greenberg and Palumbi 2012 for a broad overview of interregional relationships.

¹² Frangipane et al. 2001, 121; Frangipane 2006, 190.

¹³ Frangipane et al. 2001, 106.

¹⁴ Frangipane et al. 2001, 105.

¹⁵ Frangipane et al. 2001, 105.

¹⁶ Frangipane et al. 2001, 109.

¹⁷ Frangipane et al. 2001, 109–12.

individuals placed on the cover slabs shared some material cultural practices, including the use of certain metal items as ornaments for the body, hair, and clothes, as well as some of the ceramic artifacts. This might indicate shared status in life, genetic or social ties, or status attributed after death as part of ritual practice. The artifacts with which the buried individuals were accompanied show not only possible differences of status but also possible differences in ethnic or cultural identity.¹⁸

The later Royal Tombs at Ur,¹⁹ 16 in number, included the interment of individuals, some of whom met with violence at or around time of death, who were apparently sacrificed to accompany the primary burials.²⁰ These tombs are exceptional in almost every sense. The retainer burials were accompanied by significant quantities of deposited material culture, and the number of retainers seems to relate to the importance of the main occupant of each tomb. It is important to note that lesser graves, without retainers, in the same cemetery also contained significant quantities of objects deposited with the interred.²¹ In the Royal Tombs, the number of retainers varies between five and 75, and their presence is interpreted by Pollock as relating to the social status of the primary decedent and the type and level of public office the decedent had held.²² Pollock has used Sumerian texts to infer the purpose of some aspects of burial practices.²³ Ceramic, stone, or metal containers are linked to the need for sustenance in the afterlife, and clothing, thought to have been an indication of power, therefore would also be required in the afterlife. Both vessels and items such as garment pins and traces of textile would thus be expected in the graves of those with higher social status or official standing within the community.

The famously extravagant ornamentation in the Royal Tombs of Ur,²⁴ which has been strongly associated with the designation of social roles,²⁵ shows clear

patterns of grouped sets of ornaments that, at least to some extent, were codified designations of status. Other items could be added on an individual basis.²⁶ The definition of gender within this system varies. In some cases, specific ornament types are strongly associated with one gender; for example, vegetal wreaths are associated with females and a type of composite headband of beads (known as “brims”) with males. In other cases, artifacts other than the ornaments themselves, such as daggers and axes, are necessary to identify the attributed gender and, even then, there is lack of strict categorization, with overlaps between genders. The status of the accompanying—and in many cases presumably sacrificial—burials is unclear both in relation to the main occupant of the tomb and within wider society. However, the evidence that some types of ornament were restricted to attendants and never seen with the primary burials indicates a designation specific to those individuals.²⁷

Physical proximity of bodies within the tomb may have some bearing on how relationships can be interpreted. At both Arslantepe and Ur, the degrees of proximity between the interred individuals might carry meaning. In the former case, material culture and grouping of bodies suggest classification of status; in the latter, “personal attendants”²⁸ might have had an especially close proximity to the primary interment. Gansell²⁹ has concluded that identity was expressed through the codified sets of ornaments in the Ur cemetery, although this did not preclude more nuanced expressions of multiple roles or identities through overlapping and extended ornament groupings. The personal ornaments of the individuals at Ur may have constituted a complex and readable language of status. Gansell points out that it is possible that sacrificial victims were substitutes for still-living members of the community,³⁰ so there is no guarantee that those buried actually served the wealthy or important deceased during their lifetimes but may instead have been symbolic of those who did.

In both of these examples, identity, power, and status were constructed through items of material culture in the burial contexts, although it is not clear

¹⁸ Frangipane et al. 2001, 119.

¹⁹ Thought to belong to the kings and queens of Ur, although the subject of some debate; Baadsgaard et al. 2011, 28.

²⁰ For a discussion of various interpretations of these events, see Recht 2010; Baadsgaard et al. 2011; McMahan et al. 2011; Croucher 2016.

²¹ Pollock 1991, 175.

²² Pollock 1991, 175–77.

²³ Pollock 1991, 180.

²⁴ Maxwell-Hyslop 1960.

²⁵ Dickson 2006, 123.

²⁶ Gansell 2007, 31.

²⁷ Gansell 2007.

²⁸ Gansell 2007, 42.

²⁹ Gansell 2007, 43; see also Roßberger 2015.

³⁰ Gansell 2007, 43.

what ceremonies and decision-making processes were associated with the resulting deposits preserved in the archaeological record. Was it, then, also the case that unusually large quantities of personal ornaments and garment adornments equated with exaggerated expressions of power linked to status? The cist graves of Başur Höyük, and specifically contexts 15 and 17, offer an ideal example with which to test constructed expressions of identity through the material culture of personal ornamentation in the EB I.

Başur Höyük: Contexts 15 and 17

At Başur Höyük, some of the graves contain exceptionally rich assemblages of grave goods.³¹ Among these, the beads are important not only because of their material richness and variety but also because of the nature and number of the individuals with whom they were buried and the arrangement of these individuals within the tomb context.

In a single episode of burial at Başur Höyük, two young individuals were interred, children of about 12 years old (\pm six months), in a stone cist (see fig. 2, context 15). Outside the cist and separated by a flat stone from the inner burials, at least eight more individuals were buried (context 17). The skeletal material is not well preserved, and it has only been determined that two of these external burials were the victims of a violent death on the basis of trauma visible on the bones, including a penetrating wound to the skull of one individual; further injuries may have occurred to soft tissues.³² All eight individuals are thought to be possible examples of human sacrifice based on the extraordinary number of simultaneous deaths and the absence of evidence for a community-level crisis that might have caused them, in addition to the evidence of similar events at Arslantepe.³³ In what may have been a separate event at some time shortly after the cist and accompanying outer area were closed, a hole was opened immediately to the south of the stone cist, and further interments were made with accompanying items of material culture similar to those in the main burial. Preliminary assessment of these burials (context 18, excavated in 2019, not shown in fig. 2) is ongoing, but they appear to represent a separate episode

of activity and are not included in the present consideration of contexts 15 and 17.

Even within this already outstanding cemetery, the stone chamber of context 15 is exceptionally rich in grave goods. It contained 19 ceramic jars and bowls placed around the inner periphery of the cist, more than 100 spears of copper alloy piled in groups, and large numbers of various other metal artifacts, including animal-shaped ritual objects, spoons, seals, and long pins, many of these items wrapped in remarkably well-preserved textile.³⁴ This is an extraordinary amount of metal for a grave of this date. The cist might be interpreted, therefore, as the burial of at least one person, and possibly two, with high social standing in the EB I community of Başur Höyük. The role and status of the accompanying retainers is less easy to determine. Although they were accompanied by grave goods, the variety is much more restricted. Metal was limited to clothing pins, and 22 ceramic vessels might have been associated with ritual feasting. They were also accompanied by many beads. As in the cases of both Arslantepe and Ur, they could be blood relations, captives taken during raids on other communities, or attendants, servants, or slaves of the deceased. Ongoing anthropological analyses aim to shed further light on this subject.³⁵

The relative wealth, in metal pins and personal ornaments,³⁶ of the burials in context 17 raises questions about the position of these individuals and their relationship to the occupants of the cist. Among the many grave goods with which the individuals inside and outside the cist were interred are quantities of beads, extraordinary for this period, made from a variety of different materials. All the individuals, both inside and outside, are remarkably young; it seems unlikely that they could have accumulated such personal wealth, including so many beads, before their deaths. Their young age might rather suggest that they had status based on kinship or social ties attributed by the community in which they lived. The apparently extreme investment in all types of grave goods raises questions about the economic and social value of the materials, beliefs relating to the afterlife, and the

³¹ Sağlamtımur 2013, 2017; Sağlamtımur and Ozan 2014; Sağlamtımur and Massimino 2015; Sağlamtımur et al. 2019.

³² Hassett and Sağlamtımur 2018, 651.

³³ Hassett and Sağlamtımur 2018, 647–49.

³⁴ Sağlamtımur et al. 2019, 205–8.

³⁵ Analyses being carried out by Brenna Hassett, University College London.

³⁶ Hassett and Sağlamtımur 2018, 648.

kinds of material culture available to those organizing the burials.

As items closely associated with personal use and kept close to the human body, beads offer an ideal lens through which to look at the construction and display of identities within these graves as well as the ability of the community to access and control material wealth. Although beads were a common component of Early Bronze Age burial assemblages, they have rarely been published in sufficient detail to assess the relative treatment of individuals at a site or regional level. The data presented below offer approaches toward the structuring, or “choreography,”³⁷ of role and status through the deposition of ornaments in such a complex set of burial contexts.

PERSONAL ORNAMENTS IN BAŞUR HÖYÜK’S RETAINER BURIAL

The cist chamber (context 15) held a total of 6,592 beads, averaging 3,296 for each occupant. The number of individual beads in context 17 totals 24,157, an average of 3,020 per person. These simple figures, although useful in terms of considering the investment in mass-produced ornaments, belie the fact that most of the beads were part of complex composite items and were not evenly distributed among the buried individuals.

Contexts 15 and 17 were excavated under the conditions of a rescue excavation. As a result, the excavation was limited by some parameters that are worth noting. Speed of excavation was a priority, so the aim was to produce maximum output within limited conditions. This means that contextual recording was limited by the time available and heavily reliant on rapidly created photographic records. In the limited time afforded for post-excavation study before artifacts were relinquished to the museum, the large number of some types of mass-produced beads in the cemetery (often in the tens of thousands) made it necessary to carry out random sampling for measurement and detailed observation to create average size ranges and assess the degree of standardization in production.³⁸ During each excavation season, some of the beads were assigned to the local museum at Batman as inventory artifacts for accession to the permanent collection and therefore

have not been studied directly, although they were preliminarily recorded and counted, giving enough information to compare them with other similar examples.

The beads of contexts 15 and 17 mostly conform to a relatively restricted typology that is reflective of the mass production of many of the items. Stone was the most common raw material, and the disc bead is the most common form in the assemblage (75.6% in context 15, 94.5% in context 17). Disc beads vary in method of manufacture and in details of form. Those made from hard minerals, such as rock crystal (figs. 3, bottom right; 4), were chipped into shape and had relatively rough, wide hourglass-shaped perforations that resulted from the difficulty of working the material. Sometimes extra time was invested to grind or abrade the surface until the chipping scars were obliterated. However, little effort was usually expended on surface finish. Softer stones often had neater, straight-sided and flat-ended shapes along with straighter perforations without hourglass beveling.

Barrel forms are longer than discs and have convex sides and a flat area at each end; cylinders are similar but with straight sides (these two shapes shown in fig. 5, top left). Occasionally, these beads appear in a flattened form with a lenticular profile. Spherical or subspherical beads have no flat areas adjacent to the perforation. Lozenge beads are lenticular-profiled rhomboids (see fig. 5, top right). Teardrop forms are globular at one end, narrow at the other, and are perforated through the narrow end (see fig. 5, bottom left). Compared with disc beads, these forms take more effort to produce, as they require longer perforations and more surface finishing. Each of these types appears in different materials, although in much lower numbers than disc beads.

Beads in the Cist Chamber, Context 15

Bead materials and counts of beads and unfinished beads found in contexts 15 and 17 are presented in table 1. Evidence for the procurement of raw materials used in bead manufacture comes from the inclusion in the cist chamber of several lumps of partially worked rock crystal (max. size 4 cm), some obsidian flakes, and a lump of obsidian with ground edges. Given the location of Başur Höyük, we suggest that the obsidian came from eastern Anatolian sources, either Van or Bingöl. The location of the rock crystal source is not yet known, although it could be relatively local to the site. The presence of these pieces indicates that the

³⁷ Gansell 2007, 43.

³⁸ Typologies are based loosely on the schemes created by Beck 1928; see also Beck 1931.

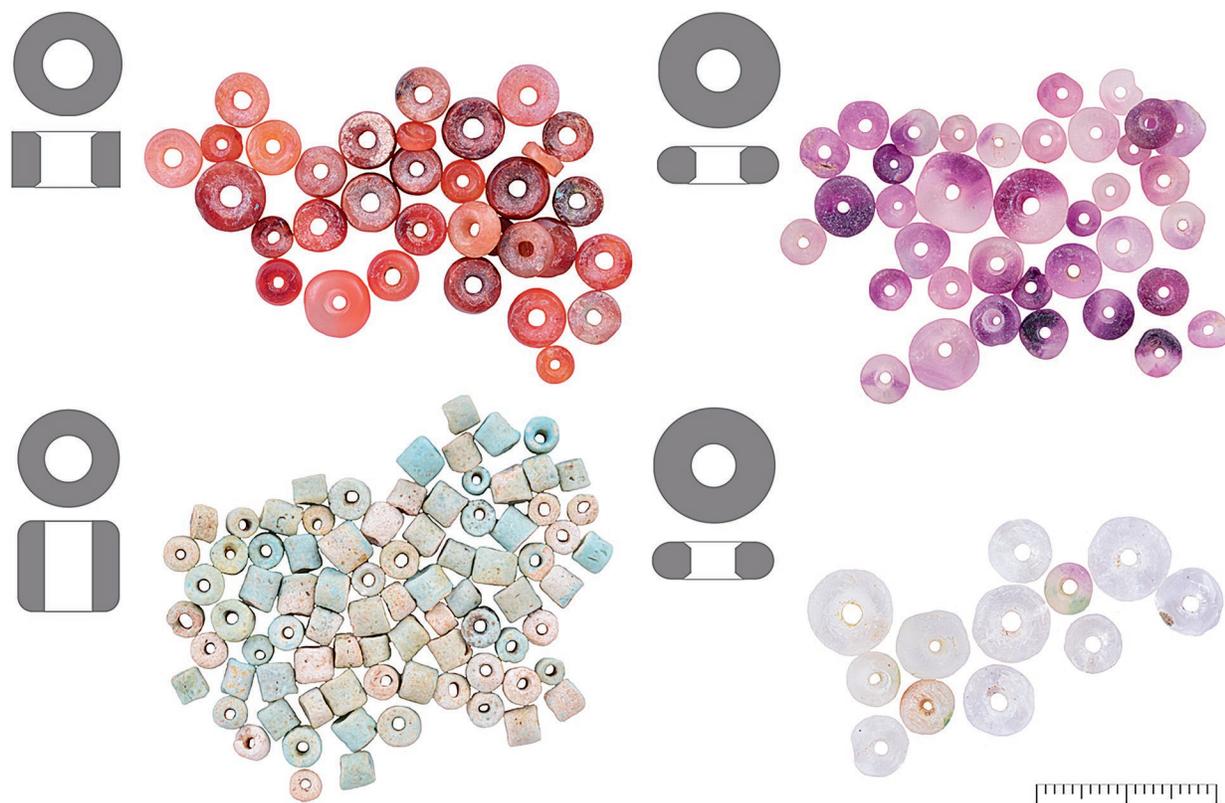


FIG. 3. Disc beads from context 15 at Başur Höyük, with schematic diagrams of their respective forms: *top left*, carnelian; *top right*, amethyst; *bottom left*, faience; *bottom right*, rock crystal (full scale = 2 cm).

community was not just procuring ready-made beads but instead had some relationship with, or control of, the working of at least some raw materials.

Most of the bead assemblage in context 15 consists of hard quartz minerals—rock crystal, amethyst, and carnelian—worked with various degrees of precision. These beads share some characteristics of form and technology. By far the most numerous beads are those of rock crystal, which is clear quartz that fractures conchoidally and can be shaped using the same skill set involved in stone knapping for tool production. Disc beads dominate the rock crystal assemblage and indeed are the most numerous of the whole bead assemblage (see fig. 3, bottom right). They have specific characteristics of manufacturing technique, form, and finish that differentiate them from discs of other materials, including those with similar hardness and fracture properties. Perforations were achieved by gouging and grinding; the resulting holes are uneven in shape. Unperforated, unfinished examples show that much of the shaping took place before perforation. The surfaces of these beads were left rough; they



FIG. 4. Rock crystal disc beads from context 15 at Başur Höyük (full scale = 4 cm).

were possibly subjected to tumbling, which removed the sharpest of the edges while still leaving a very uneven surface finish (see fig. 4). The uneven finish could serve two purposes, the first being to ensure they were highly reflective, sparkling in the light, and the



FIG. 5. Examples of beads from context 15 at Başur Höyük: *top left*, carnelian, barrel and cylinder forms; *top right*, milk opal and carnelian lozenge forms; *bottom left*, rock crystal, teardrop form (full scale = 4 cm).

second to reduce manufacturing time by eliminating individual grinding from the production process. The contrast to the effort that was expended on some of the other bead types made from the same material suggests that the second option is a likely explanation in contexts of mass production. One group of teardrop-shaped beads had all signs of knapping or chipping thoroughly ground away until their shapes resembled the asymmetrical, organic, elongated globular form of deer canine teeth (see fig. 5, bottom left). Such skeuomorphism and imitation of the deer canine form is recorded since the Neolithic in Anatolia.³⁹ Those of a second group of the same form were left in their reflective, rough-surfaced condition.

In contrast to the roughly finished rock crystal beads, purple amethyst was mostly used to make high-quality disc beads with straight or curved sides and a smooth matte (unpolished) surface finish (see fig. 3, top right). Single examples of a teardrop, barrel, and beveled barrel made of amethyst indicate that there

were amethyst beads of other forms and finishes, although these were not common.

The beads referred to here under the umbrella term “carnelian” are a varied mixture of the bright orange form of chalcedony generally known by that name and browner or less purely colored examples that might come under the heading of sard or agate, respectively. Regardless of color, each of these is another form of quartz having similar physical properties to both rock crystal and amethyst. Most of the carnelian beads in context 15 (see fig. 3, top left) are discs that are noticeably better made, more symmetrical, and more neatly finished than those of amethyst and rock crystal. The carnelian beads in forms other than discs indicate that this differentiation in quality relates to the material, as the standard of finish is very high in all of these beads.

The different types of carnelian beads show signs of the processes employed in production. Chipping was followed by grinding and then polishing to leave a shiny, smooth surface that occasionally still retained evidence of chipping scars. There are notable differences in perforation technique and quality, varying between significantly beveled bidirectional piercing

³⁹ As discussed in Baysal 2019, 101, 130.

TABLE 1. Materials and object counts for the bead assemblages of contexts 15 and 17.

Material	Context 15	Context 17
	Beads	
Talc, steatite, enstatite	1,869	24,082
Rock crystal	3,251	59
Carnelian	149	–
Amethyst	42	11
Galena	2	–
Milk opal	5	–
Serpentinite	3	3
Limestone	2	1
Marble	1	–
Obsidian	6	–
Igneous rock (unidentified)	–	1
Metal	88	–
Faience	830	–
Marine shell	344	–
Total	6,592	24,157
	Other	
Various (bead fragments)	equal to several hundred artifacts	–
Rock crystal (unfinished beads)	>100	–
Obsidian (raw material)	5 pieces	–
Rock crystal (raw material)	3 pieces	–

(hourglass in profile with wide, rough bevels sloping inward toward the hole) and completely straight, polished perforations with no scarring around the openings. These production differences and the distinction in the color of the material may indicate that the materials came from different sources and different places of manufacture. The two examples of teardrop forms in carnelian bear a strong resemblance to deer canines in both their profile and the flat areas around perforations. Use wear in the form of grooves and thinning around the perforations of both examples of this type indicate prolonged wear through stringing or suspension (fig. 6, bottom left). A bead in the shape of a single axe head is of exceptional quality in the fine detailing of the shape and its polished surface finish. The cylinder beads (see fig. 5, top left) show strong resemblance to the forms and technologies used in cylinder seal manufacture and might be regarded as

part of the same industry. A recycled lozenge bead (see fig. 5, top right, left one in the group) began life as a well-made, symmetrical, polished, lenticular-profiled lozenge form and was then reshaped, given a somewhat asymmetrical waist that was roughly ground and polished, and shortened at one end, possibly to disguise the effects of accidental breakage or chipping of the bead's corners.

Many of the beads from context 15 were found as part of a single example of a composite black-and-white ornament made from talc or steatite⁴⁰ in which

⁴⁰ Preliminary results of X-ray diffraction (XRD) analyses carried out on samples from Başur Höyük beads by Gonca Dardeniz, Istanbul University, show that they do not contain the impurities associated with steatite, although it is possible that, if present in very small quantities, they were not detected. The re-



FIG. 6. Examples of grooves caused by long-term use in the perforations of beads from context 15 at Başur Höyük: *top left*, serpentine; *top right and bottom left*, carnelian; *bottom right*, galena.

a lozenge pattern is framed by spacer bars and accompanied by hundreds of disc beads. The typology and significance of the components of this type of composite artifact are explained in detail below in relation to context 17, where more examples of the same type were found.

Despite the presence of pieces of obsidian raw material in context 15 (fig. 7, right), this is one of the least common bead materials in the assemblage. The rarity of obsidian beads cannot be attributed to the difficulty of working this material, as it is less hard than other minerals that were more widely used (obsidian is Mohs 5–5.5; rock crystal, carnelian, and amethyst [quartz] are Mohs 7). The diversity of the obsidian types that were present, as well as the wear on the beads, suggests that they might have been available only in small numbers and used for long periods. While some of the bead types—disc, globular, and lenticular forms—are common in multiple materials, the form of two pendants, which are truncated sections of blades, is distinctive

(see fig. 7, top left). The process of grinding blade sections to produce perforated ornaments is known from the Late Neolithic.⁴¹ The perforated pendant has a scratched area of scarring between its two holes that represents an unsuccessful attempt at a central perforation on the ground blade ridge that was followed by the successful perforations of the areas to each side (see fig. 7, bottom left). The degree of beveling around both sides of the perforations is probably the result of difficulty in drilling, likely because of an insufficiently narrow or fast drill.

Several large beads of milk opal, a semitransparent white form of the mineraloid opal (see fig. 5, top right, middle of group), show significant signs of wear. Broken corners were smoothed, and chipping around the perforations was rounded off. One example (see fig. 5, top right, top one in the group) was subject to more extreme transformation: starting as a lozenge, it then had two large corner areas removed to form an uneven hexagon that was abraded smooth. It was then further

sults are therefore currently characterized as talc/steatite, pending further analysis.

⁴¹ Mallowan and Rose 1935; Belcher 2011; Healey 2013; Healey and Campbell 2014.



FIG. 7. Obsidian and rock crystal from context 15 at Başur Höyük: *top left*, obsidian pendants made from blade sections; *inset bottom left*, detail of the reverse side of the pendant above; *right*, lumps of obsidian and rock crystal raw material (full scale = 4 cm).

broken, losing its original symmetry although still retaining a functional perforation, and resmoothed for continued use.

The small number of stone beads made from the least common materials includes a white marble cylinder, very neatly made, and some limestone beads in poor condition. There are two beads of galena that, given the presence of the various metals at the site, was undoubtedly already a known material. One is very worn from being strung (see fig. 6, bottom right), although the softness of the mineral (Mohs 2.5) means that wear could accrue quickly compared with other materials. Two beads of serpentinite are among the very few green-colored items in the assemblage.

Early faience is well represented in this grave, mostly by mass-produced short cylinders (see fig. 3, bottom left) that vary in color from white to intense shades of blue. In some cases, the beads had clearly stuck together during manufacture. Several other faience beads are globular in shape, with barrel and bevel versions of similar form. Analyses of the chemical composition and the manufacturing technique are ongoing and will be published separately.

Metal artifacts are a major component of the burial assemblage in context 15 at Başur Höyük, and this is reflected also among the beads, which include a variety of forms in different metals. Although elemental analyses have not yet been completed, color and corrosion show a combination of silver and copper alloys (fig. 8). The forms encompass various production techniques. Rolled sheet metal was used to create tubes, wire was coiled to make spirals, and heavier barrels and ridged tubes were made from solid metal. Pieces of wire still in the perforations (see fig. 8, bottom left) provide clues about the use of metal to suspend or attach items to one another or to clothing, although the exact use of these items is unclear from the context.

Although most beads in this cist grave are highly modified products, the presence of several types of marine shells suggests that the modification of raw materials was not the only factor to impart desirability. The shells comprise about 5% of the bead assemblage (fragmentary examples make an exact figure impossible) and are made up of three different shapes and sizes, each with a different visual impact (fig. 9). The level of working varies from none, in the case of some of the dentalia (tusk shells) which have natural holes,



FIG. 8. Metal beads from context 15 at Başur Höyük: *top row*, silver alloys; *bottom row*, copper alloys, one with intact string (at left) (full scale = 3 cm).

to cutting or abrasion in other examples. The whorls of the *Conus* shells were either removed or already missing when the shells were gathered on the shoreline; in the case of *Engina mendicaria*, most were in a similar condition to the *Conus* shells, while in three examples the body had been ground to create a perforation. An extraordinary case of thread preserved in one example shows that an *Engina mendicaria* shell was either threaded or sewn with three strands of S-twist two-ply yarn that may have been used as a cord for purposes of strength (see fig. 9, top row, second from left). Based on analyses carried out on preserved thread associated with other artifacts from the burials, we can conclude that this cord was made from flax.

Context 15 is characterized by a contrast between the mass-produced beads and the low-quantity, high-quality beads that often exhibit unique forms. There is an extensive range of materials, which attests both to the external connections of the community and probably to the wealth of those who were able to obtain them. The implications of these findings are considered in their wider context below.

Beads in the Outer Area, Context 17

Although there are far more beads in context 17, the variety in form and material is very limited and is associated almost entirely with black-and-white composite beadwork panels that we encountered in a single example in context 15 (see table 1). The beads of this

context display little variety in color and texture and much less diversity in visual impact than their counterparts inside the stone cist.

The dark-and-light patterned composite pieces (usually black and white but sometimes with dark red or purple talc components) were made up of central panels of black and white lozenges framed by spacer beads and long strands of hundreds of disc beads of the same materials (figs. 10, 11). These forms were standardized and produced specifically for this type of combination, with perforations that allow only specific patterns of stringing (fig. 12). The material, both black and white, is always talc or steatite, which are different types of magnesium silicate. Analyses to identify the precise composition and possible source are in progress.⁴² The greater fragility of the white talc makes it unsuitable for use as spacers, hence long forms with multiple perforations are always made from dark-colored pieces. Based on the recovered components, we estimate that there are at least 10 sets of the black-and-white composite items, assuming that there was always a central checkered panel framed by spacers and discs. The actual number is impossible to ascertain as there may have been variations in composition that are not always clear from the context. If we assume that each of the 10 sets had equal quantities of discs, there was an average of 2,276 accompanying beads per framed lozenge set.

These beads are not well finished. All have signs of the abrasion that was used in their shaping, and it seems that production was fast and intended for visual impact from a distance rather than for products of high quality. Given the numbers that were produced, this makes sense in terms of the investment of time. Although the set of forms was standardized, there are differences of scale (fig. 13 shows two composite sets of different sizes). The manufacturing process of individual components was fast, as the talc and steatite are very soft (Mohs 1), making drilling and shaping relatively easy. If we estimate a conservative average production time of 15 minutes per bead (including procurement, shaping, and drilling), then the lozenge-patterned beads deposited in context 17 represent at least 6,000 hours of work, or an average of 600 hours of work per putative set.

The beads show varying degrees of wear, but we are confident that at least some of them had been

⁴²Supra n. 40.



FIG. 9. Marine shells from context 15 at Başur Höyük: *top left*, three examples of *Engina mendicaria*; *top right*, two examples of *Antalis* spp. (dentalia); *bottom*, *Conus* spp. (full scale = 4 cm).

extensively used before deposition, the wear around the perforations of some of the spacer beads being the key indication (fig. 14, left). Others appear to be completely fresh and may even have been unused at the time of deposition (see fig. 14, top right).

These black and white beads dominate the ornamentation of the individuals in context 17 to such an extent that they form 99.7% of the context's bead assemblage. The remaining 0.3% comprises various forms, some of which we already encountered in context 15, such as the rock crystal and amethyst discs. A small number of unusual forms might be long-term personal possessions of the deceased, as they do not seem to belong to composite items of jewelry and show considerable wear around the perforations and on their outer surfaces. It is possible that they were used as decorative tassels in conjunction with gar-

ment pins, as also appears to be the case in context 15, or that they were some other kind of personal amulet or charm separate from the more standardized shared ornamentation practices.

Material Choice, Procurement, Manufacture, and Use

It is not yet possible to identify the sources for each of the multiple materials used in the ornament assemblages of contexts 15 and 17. However, based on a combination of material characteristics and comparable examples from other locations, we can say with certainty that some came from considerable distances. Marine shells were procured from the Red Sea (*Engina mendicaria*, *Conus* spp., assorted dentalia), the Persian Gulf (*Engina mendicaria*, *Conus* spp., assorted dentalia), or the Mediterranean (*Conus* spp., assorted dentalia) and provide a baseline for the potential extent



FIG. 10. Composite ornament in situ in context 17 at Başur Höyük. The central panel is made from black and white lozenge-shaped talc or steatite beads framed by dark-colored steatite spacer bars and steatite disc beads.



FIG. 11. Detail of another composite ornament, in situ, also in context 17 at Başur Höyük.

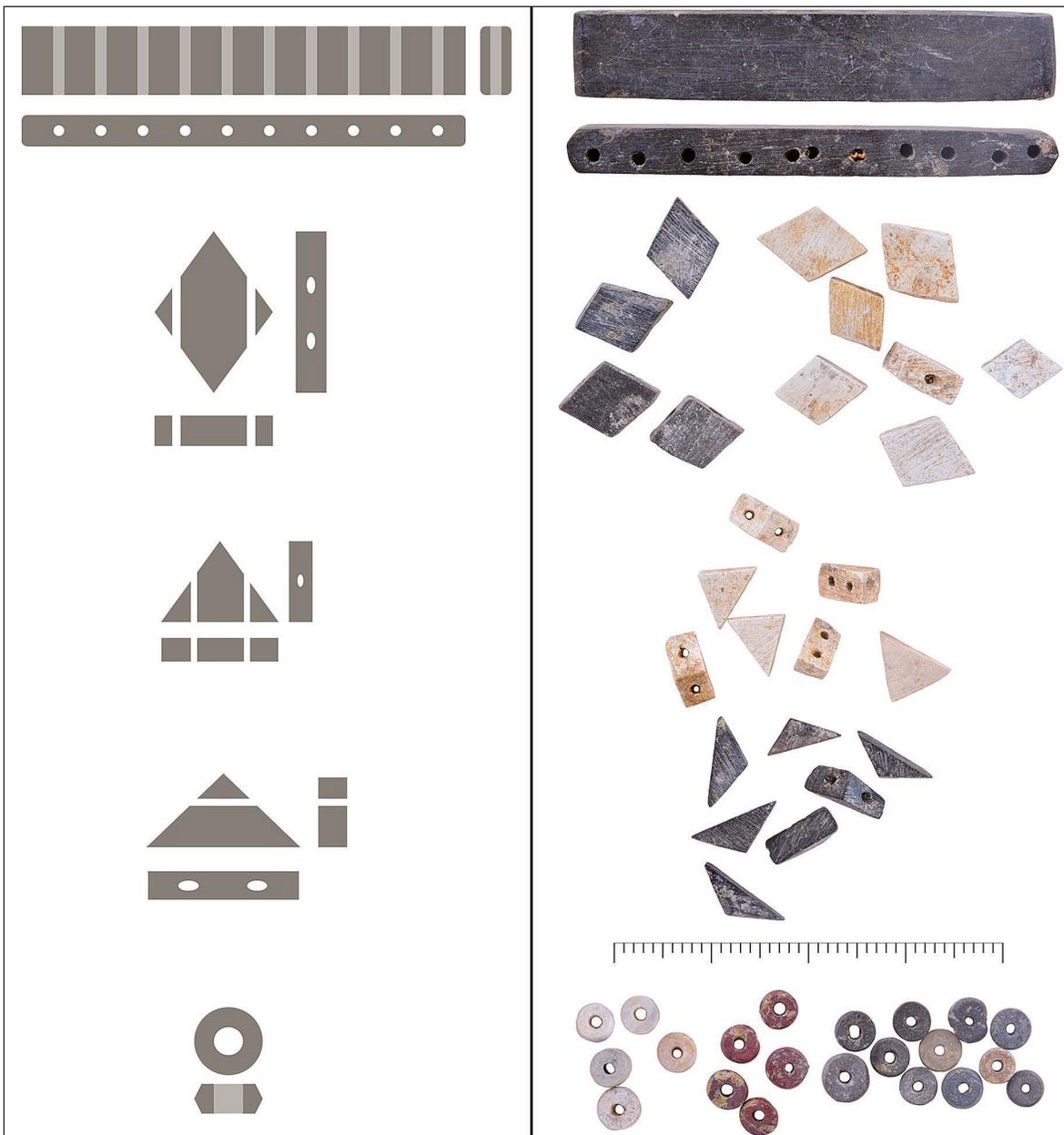


FIG. 12. Standardized pieces used in the composite ornaments with panels of lozenge-shaped beads framed by long spacers and disc beads: *left*, schematic diagram of the pieces; *right*, photographs of sample beads (full scale = 4 cm).

of other material-related interactions. The source of obsidian, which was used infrequently for ornaments but also appeared as partially worked raw material, lies to the north of Başur in the Van area of eastern Turkey. Analyses of other materials are ongoing.

There are several types of mass-produced beads in the assemblage, and these are made of materials requiring varying levels of skill to work. Undoubtedly the easiest and fastest material to shape and drill was the soft black and white talc. The intended purpose

of these components for large composite items meant that little care was taken in surface finishing; deep and shallow grooves caused by abrasion during their shaping are visible on all these beads (see fig. 14, top right).

In contrast, some instances of mass production occurred with high volumes of difficult-to-work materials. These include the hard minerals of the assemblage, particularly amethyst and rock crystal, for which efficient working techniques seem to have been developed based on existing skills used in the production of

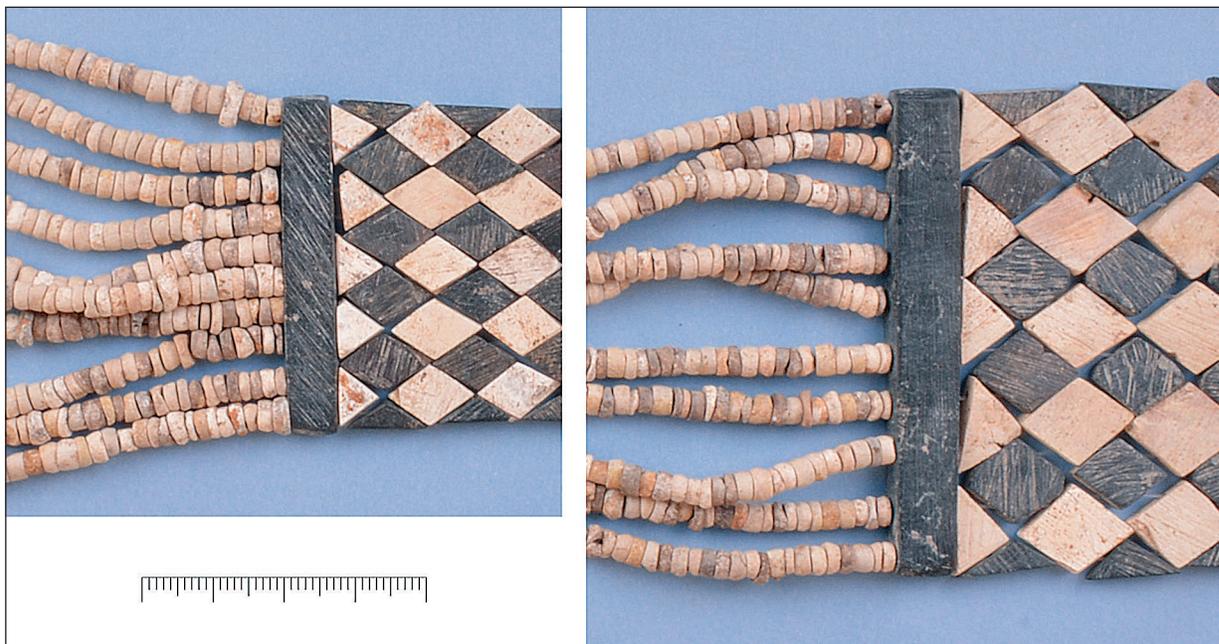


FIG. 13. Two composite ornaments of different sizes from context 17 at Başur Höyük; both have lozenge-pattern panels framed by spacer bars and disc beads (full scale = 4 cm).

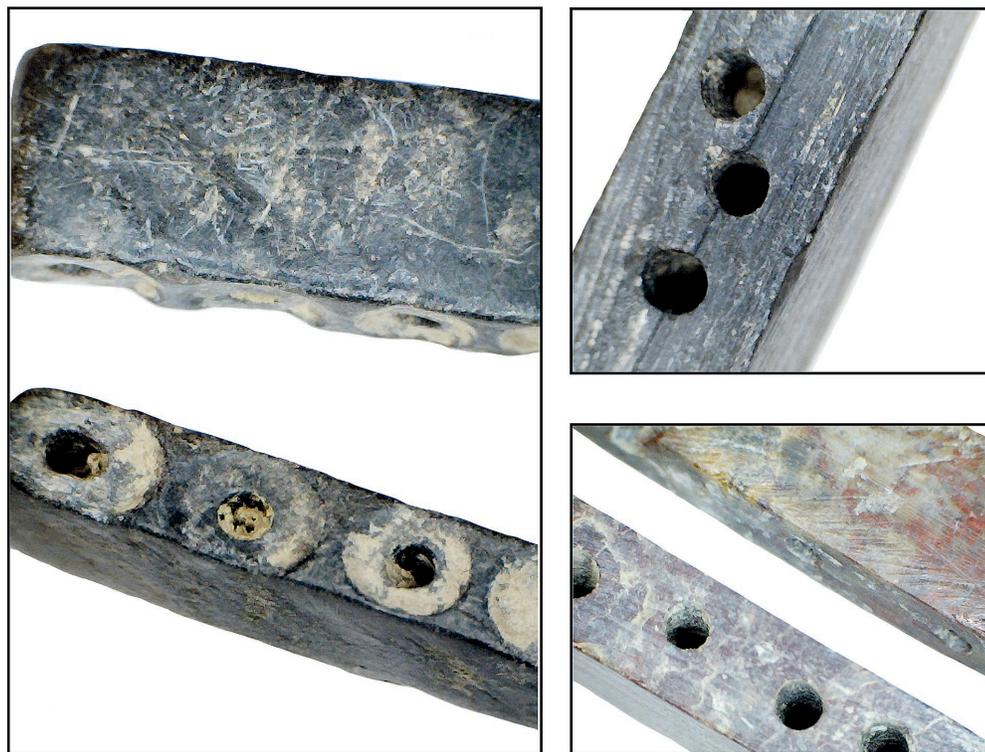


FIG. 14. Spacer bars from context 17 at Başur Höyük: *left*, detail of wear on a spacer bar; *top right*, spacer bar with fresh but uneven perforations; *bottom right*, two spacer bars with surface abrasion.

stone tools by means of conchoidal fracture.⁴³ A similar set of skills was applicable to rock crystal, amethyst, and carnelian. At present, we cannot say where this production took place. The lumps of semiworked rock crystal in context 15 indicate that such skills may have been within the purview of the Başur Höyük inhabitants. If the estimate of manufacturing time given above for the talc lozenge beads is extended to the complete assemblage from contexts 15 and 17, then a very conservative total of 7,700 working hours can be suggested. Realistically, given the distant sources and the difficulty of working some of the materials, the overall working time is likely to have been much greater.

The materials used in the mass production of some bead forms were also used for other, less numerous types, as is attested by the number of examples of unique or rarely occurring forms that were found along with the prolific types. In some cases, it is notable that more effort or finesse was applied to this second group of artifacts. For example, surfaces were ground to produce smooth and even shapes, while the surfaces of the mass-produced beads were left roughly chipped. This implies either that different craftspeople were producing items of different quality or that there was a deliberate and consistent differentiation of quality within the same workshop. The difference in manufacturing time should have rendered the finely finished products more valuable in economic terms or, alternatively, may have been associated with differences in intended use.

Overall, the quartz minerals (amethyst, rock crystal, carnelian) show distinct traits in form and finish that evidence their manufacture at different locations, by different groups of specialists, or to different standards of quality. The presence of both raw and semiworked rock crystal in context 15 makes it likely that the processing of this material was under the control either of those who were interred in context 15 or 17 or, more likely given the young ages of the deceased, the inhabitants of Başur Höyük more generally. We can hypothesize that the amethyst and carnelian objects were imported to the site already worked. Some of the rock crystal artifacts may also have arrived from elsewhere, particularly considering the variety of working techniques. The shared formal traits among the

objects of different materials might also be a result of wider trends or fashions of the period; if so, the manufacture of similar objects could have been carried out in different locations that responded to wider regional or interregional cultural and stylistic demands.

The beads did not all share similar histories. While it is impossible to know the ages of the items at the time of burial either absolutely or relatively, we can say with certainty that they had experienced different levels of use before they were deposited. Inspection of wear from stringing reveals that some of the long black bars had been substantially worn around their perforations by their abutting disc beads, while others remained fresh (see fig. 14). Beads of the harder materials in less common (not mass-produced) forms were more likely to have been subjected to considerable wear (see fig. 6) that in some cases may have continued for many years or even decades.

If we assume an average of 0.5 g per bead (there is, of course, much variation within the assemblage), then the total weight of the deposited beads is more than 3 kg for cist context 15 and more than 12 kg for the outer burials of context 17. This is a considerable weight to be worn at one time on a human body, even if divided equally among the number of people interred. However, such quantities, either unworked or as finished products, could easily be transported through trade networks or by individual travelers. Indeed, this portability is one of the likely reasons for the extreme mobility of items of ornamentation. While many of the beads were interred either on or very close to the bodies of the dead, others were less closely associated, perhaps an indication that they were not all intended to be worn simultaneously. Certainly, not all the beads were attached to the bodies or their clothing at the time of burial, and it is even possible that some were scattered into the cist grave as it was being filled and sealed.

Numerical comparisons of the different types of bead are misleading if their likely modes of use are not taken into account. While the faience beads in these contexts seem numerous, they could have arrived at the site as a single composite artifact, for example a necklace, that represented a single transaction. Similarly, the black-and-white composite panel ornaments appear to have been standardized sets that would probably not have been regarded in terms of their individual components. Below, we consider how we can think about the individuals inside and those outside the stone cist based on their respective accompanying bead assemblages.

⁴³ For details of lapidary techniques in archaeological contexts, see Gwinnett and Gorelick 1981; Kenoyer et al. 1991, 1994; Vanzetti and Vidale 1994; Groman-Yaroslavski and Bar-Yosef Mayer 2015; Ludvik et al. 2015.

Differentiation Between Contexts 15 and 17

There are obvious differences in material, number, and form between the ornaments inside and those outside the stone cist. The further definition of the differences relies heavily on how we understand the contexts and the reasons for deposition. The available contextual evidence, although not always as detailed as would be desired because of the nature of the rescue excavation, gives numerous clues about the use of some ornaments. The black-and-white composite panel ornaments are mostly associated with the outside individuals and equate, as far as we can calculate, with at least one set (encompassing one panel of black and white lozenge beads framed with spacer bars and a variable number of accompanying disc beads) per person. They are in positions that indicate probable use as, or on, clothing, either as panels on the front of the body or as belts around the waist, rather than as separate items of jewelry, although without the associated textiles it is not possible to be sure. They thereby take on the character of something like a uniform when we consider that each person outside the cist shared this distinctive piece of eye-catching material culture.

The presence of a single set of these black and white beads within the cist (context 15) suggests that one of the two individuals inside the grave also possessed the same attribute as the outside group. This leaves a single individual from the complete burial group without a set of these beads and might lead us to consider a difference of status, at least in death, for that individual when compared with the others. Does this imply that the second of the two individuals in the main chamber was also an attendant whose presence was prompted by the death of a single person? Does the personal ornamentation show that one death precipitated the deaths of all the others within a short period of time? We can hypothesize that all those with the black-and-white composite panels had some similarity of status or role within the group. Therefore, the individual without this ornament might be regarded differently. In conjunction with the construction of a large stone cist grave for the primary interment, and assuming that the two individuals in the cist did not die by coincidence at the same time, but rather that one death was orchestrated as a result of the other, we can surmise that the burial was probably focused on the one primary interment. We can also say with certainty that visual cues structured around the use of beads were an important means of communicating aspects of identity between the individuals in this group and the wider

community, particularly as it is the community that structured the items deposited in the grave. We cannot say, however, whether the two individuals of cist context 15 shared other aspects of status apart from the difference indicated by only one of the pair being accompanied by a black-and-white composite panel.

The remaining beads may corroborate the theory that the visual communication achieved through the display of ornaments related to status differentiation. The investment in material procurement and manufacture, the degree of use before deposition (assuming that the items used for the longest time were the most highly valued), and the variety of form and color all indicate greater wealth associated with context 15, the main burial. While the black and white beads almost certainly share a single source, the other beads likely came from several different locations and therefore document the degree of connectedness of at least one individual in the burial and possibly of the whole community. Perhaps the black-and-white composite panel belonged to the secondary individual of context 15, and the remaining beads of multiple materials and types were all associated with the primary interment, who might then be regarded as central to the structuring of the assemblage.

Several specifics of the bead assemblage are worth thinking about, both in terms of the investment of power and time and the visual communication of social status the products would convey. The capacity to either procure or make the products indicate that the primary interment in context 15, or some or all of the group in the grave, had a level of ability (or attributed ability) to manipulate, own, or control these materials. Rather than finding a distinction between the inside and outside spaces of this burial, we see as more likely a difference of status between those with black-and-white composite panels and the individual without this ornament, a difference that is not necessarily defined by place of interment. What remains to be answered is whether the second (non-primary) individual in cist context 15 had been attributed a separate, third, status that allowed access to the chamber of the tomb to which those in context 17 were not entitled. We do not have enough contextual precision relating to ornament deposition to determine whether this person occupied a different and possibly middle position between the outside and the inside. There remain questions about the construction and display of the various relationships.

EXPRESSIONS OF PERSONAL STATUS IN THE EB I

Parallels for the complex ornamentation practices seen in Başur Höyük's contexts 15 and 17 must be sought from a wide regional context, as the immediate vicinity offers no comparable contemporary evidence. When compared with other Early Bronze Age cemeteries, some basic factors for comparison can be singled out. Most important for the current discussion is that while straight copper alloy garment pins of varying lengths—either plain or with various types of decorative elaboration, some used specifically to dress the dead and others probably also used in everyday life—seem to have been almost ubiquitous grave goods across age, status, and geography, the inclusion of more than a few beads in a grave is, itself, a distinguishing feature. The site of Gre Virike, in the Urfa province of southeast Turkey, demonstrates the wide diversity of grave types and individuals, including very young babies, with whom pins were deposited.⁴⁴ In contrast, because beads appear in such small numbers, usually only one or two per grave, and are predominantly associated with children,⁴⁵ the motivating factor might have been the apotropaic or medicinal powers associated with beads rather than a display of wealth.

Wygnańska and Bar-Yosef Mayer's general characterization of the EB I beads of the Tigris and Middle Euphrates regions holds broadly true for Başur Höyük,⁴⁶ with carnelian, rock crystal, and gypsum (talc) being recorded along with early frit or faience as key materials. They characterize the bead forms as simple, which agrees with the Başur Höyük evidence. The technologies behind faience, including the processing and firing of talc or steatite, were already well established by this period. Although evidence for production areas in the EB I is not clear, local variations of production processes have been identified in later Bronze Age contexts.⁴⁷ Wygnańska and Bar-Yosef Mayer note the widespread use of marine shells of the same species as identified at Başur Höyük, some of which they believe to have derived from the Indo-Pacific region and to have arrived through the Persian Gulf.⁴⁸ While the beads at Başur Höyük are overwhelmingly manufac-

tured items, a significant number of shells, procured either from the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf, was deposited along with the stone and metal objects in context 15. The place of these simple, natural beads in a value system that seems largely to have been based on a combination of highly processed materials or on assembling beads into large composite ornaments with the aim of producing striking aesthetic effects requires consideration. Marine shell beads represent one of the longest traditions of ornamentation; their use started in the Palaeolithic period and continues to the present day. In the earliest periods, shell beads formed the dominant material of personal ornamentation,⁴⁹ but, as the materials used in ornamentation became more diverse, the role of shells gradually changed and, by the Bronze Age, they were often associated with rituals. Both written and archaeological sources indicate that apotropaic and healing properties were probably associated with certain shells when used in combination with other materials and actions or rituals during the second and first millennia BCE.⁵⁰ In the present day in Turkey and the Near East, shells are still employed in apotropaic rituals against the evil eye, usually involving the hanging of protective decorative items within houses.

The marine shells found at Başur Höyük were probably procured through the trade routes that brought other materials, perhaps including carnelian, to the region. The motivation for obtaining marine shells might have involved a combination of exoticism, the prestige of long-distance procurement, symbolism relating to the (very distant) sea, and their supposed magical, healing, or apotropaic properties. It is possible that shells expressed a combination of status and protection that differed from the system of added value expressed in highly worked products of eye-catching, colorful materials that had come to dominate ornament assemblages of this period.⁵¹ Other materials have also been interpreted as of symbolic importance; for example, Ökse suggests that the red color of the small number of agate stone beads at Gre Virike, similar to some of those at Başur Höyük, may have represented life-giving blood or a force against evil spirits.⁵²

Another rescue excavation in the region of the Bircik Euphrates Dam in southeast Turkey provides

⁴⁴ See Ökse 2006, 1–4.

⁴⁵ Ökse 2006, 26.

⁴⁶ Wygnańska and Bar-Yosef Mayer 2018.

⁴⁷ Bouquillon et al. 1995; Bar-Yosef Mayer et al. 2004; Pickard and Schoop 2013; Dardeniz 2014.

⁴⁸ Wygnańska and Bar-Yosef Mayer 2018, 290; see also, e.g., Golani 2010.

⁴⁹ Bar-Yosef Mayer 2005.

⁵⁰ Dunham 1993.

⁵¹ As described by Wygnańska and Bar-Yosef Mayer 2018.

⁵² Ökse 2006, 28.

geographically close parallels for contexts 15 and 17 at Başur Höyük. The Birecik site has stone-lined cist graves from the beginning of the third millennium BCE. According to the excavators, beads found there were “mainly of frit and talcstone, and mostly were found near the head and the body of the deceased. This indicates that the deceased most probably were buried wearing necklaces or similar ornaments.”⁵³ The positioning of metal pins in proximity to the beads led the excavators to suggest that “some pins were used together with strings of beads.”⁵⁴ Marine shells are mentioned,⁵⁵ although the species and the mode of use are not clear. The excavators refer to “great numbers” of beads and describe very fragile, blue-colored “frit” and blue- and maroon-colored “talcstone” discs that are said to form the majority of the assemblage. There are lesser numbers of “talcstone” beads that, based on an illustration,⁵⁶ are similar to the black and white discs, triangles, and lozenges with which we are familiar at Başur Höyük. The cemetery at Aşağı Salat, dated to the Uruk–EB I transition, shows some similarity in bead deposition, although there is less diversity in materials, with only talc and rock crystal reported. The beads were recovered from the head and chest area of the buried individuals, and the excavators believe they were used in necklaces.⁵⁷ There is no indication at Aşağı Salat of the same prolific use as at Başur Höyük.

More black and white lozenge-shaped beads very similar to those at Başur Höyük are reported from the site of Tell Agrab in the Diyala region of Iraq; these are recorded as Early Dynastic and therefore broadly equivalent in date to the Başur examples. Some were found in a hoard in a “large buried pot” and, according to the excavators, constitute several different necklace groupings.⁵⁸ From the same site is recorded a composite piece using what appear to be talc spacer beads with four perforations in combination with well-made carnelian short barrel beads and small globular gold beads also similar to those at Başur.⁵⁹ In neighboring Lorestan, burials in the Early Bronze Age cave site of Kunji

are reported to have contained significant numbers of beads described as “bone, chlorite, and limestone”;⁶⁰ the photograph of these beads⁶¹ indicates that they are the same lozenge, triangle, spacer, and disc combinations that we report here and are likely the same talc material seen elsewhere. From Tell Brak there are two examples of spacer beads, one with 10 holes and the other with five, reported to date in the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods⁶² and therefore chronologically congruent with Başur. We may conjecture that accompanying beads of other forms, particularly the small discs, were not reported.

One of the earliest descriptions of black and white lozenge-pattern beads records a grave at Tepe Gawra dated to the Late Uruk (Late Chalcolithic) and provides information about their use that strongly supports our hypothesis that the composite ornaments at Başur Höyük were attached to textile or used to augment clothing.⁶³

In one tomb attributed to Stratum IX (no. G36-34), five groups of beads were found at the head, neck, wrists and waist of the skeleton, and it was discovered that the beads occurring at the waist had been sewn to cloth in alternating black and white columns in a herringbone pattern. Traces of the cloth, with the beads still in the position described, were preserved, and undoubtedly were part of a girdle or similar article of clothing. The width of this girdle may be estimated at approximately 8.5 cm: apparently only the front of it had been decorated with beads, for no beads were found where the garment passed around the sides and back of the skeleton. Beads were found in great numbers at the wrists, arms, waist, and knees of the occupant of the richly furnished Tomb 102. A bead decorated girdle was also probably worn by this individual, as indicated by the occurrence of beads at his waist, but their arrangement in this instance is uncertain.

Tobler’s description of the degree to which the bodies were ornamented at “head, neck, wrists, and waist” is reminiscent of the volume of ornamentation that we have encountered at Başur Höyük and indicates a profuse use of material culture, at least in the burial context. This account also indicates that lozenge-pattern panels were a recurring feature of burial assemblages and likely to have been a status marker. The nature of this identity ascription is less easy to identify. It has been noted that at Ur and the other known cemeteries

⁵³ Sertok and Ergeç 1999, 91.

⁵⁴ Sertok and Ergeç 1999, 91.

⁵⁵ Sertok and Ergeç 1999, 94.

⁵⁶ Sertok and Ergeç 1999, 107, fig. 11.

⁵⁷ Akçay 2017, 69.

⁵⁸ Delougaz et al. 1942, 271, 288, fig. 198.

⁵⁹ Early Dynastic Bracelet from Tell Agrab, Diyala, Iraq; Chicago, Oriental Institute A18236, acq. date n/a; *Oriental Institute*, “Search Our Collections,” <https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/search:A18236>. See also Delougaz et al. 1942, 271, 288.

⁶⁰ Emberling et al. 2002, 71.

⁶¹ Emberling et al. 2002, 89, fig. 16.

⁶² Mallowan 1947, pl. 8.

⁶³ Tobler 1950, 88.

of the slightly later period, grave goods were not designed to give indications of the profession or personal interests of the interred.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, burials at Shahr-I Sokhta in Iran are said to show indications of the deceased's occupation in the form of tool kits and raw materials associated with ornament production.⁶⁵ Similarly, the raw materials found in the Başur Höyük cist might be considered as a sign of control over the procurement and working of the materials or instead as a display of wealth through the disposal of valuable materials. The presence of raw material also has implications for the interpretation of the value of the beads of these materials, given that the occupants of the site might have controlled access to the products as well as the control and organization of production and decisions about design and quality.

The Royal Graves of Ur contained some of the most complex and rich ornamentation of the Bronze Age and are famous for the showy use of gold,⁶⁶ as well as for the combinations of personal ornaments that might have indicated status and identity.⁶⁷ In contrast, the cist grave from Arslantepe contained fewer items of ornamentation, although the metal ornaments give important clues about the ties of the interred, perhaps royal, individual to Transcaucasian material culture.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, there is less information available from both sites about the nonmetal ornaments than about the metal ones.

As mentioned above, the Arslantepe cist grave offers some close parallels to Başur Höyük in terms of retainer burials and types of artifacts. However, the similarities do not extend to the material and quantity of personal ornaments that were chosen to accompany the dead. Given the Transcaucasian origin of much of the material in the Arslantepe tomb, it seems likely that the carnelian items⁶⁹ also derived from the same region, particularly as it is now known that the Transcaucasian sources were in use during this period.⁷⁰ The Başur Höyük carnelian beads show a range of quality and form. Some of the beads are typical of the Mesopotamian tradition and are therefore likely to have been sourced from the Indus region as were examples

found at Mesopotamian sites. Other carnelian beads from Başur, which have the wide, roughly finished, hourglass perforations and poorer quality of material that is typical of examples reported from Transcaucasia, are more likely to derive from that region.

Although the number of comprehensive and detailed publications of ornaments from sites contemporary with Başur is lower than we might like, the above examples show the geographically widespread use of at least some of the bead types and materials that we have recorded at Başur Höyük. This indicates contacts and shared preferences and consumption as well as possibly some shared elements of identity structuring through ornamentation over very extensive areas of the Near East. We argue that the bead assemblages from these and other cemeteries offer some of the best opportunities to investigate wider issues of identity construction of the period, after the Uruk collapse, of which the social organization and economy are still not well understood.

DISCUSSION

The exaggerated deposition of beads in the materially rich contexts 15 and 17 at Başur Höyük, which gives the impression of a deliberate display of wealth, in fact tells a more nuanced story both about the portrayal of identity in burials of the period and about the way that ornamental items can be interpreted. In her assessment of Early Bronze Age burial traditions in northern Mesopotamia, Helwing hypothesized that the very beginning of the period, after the Uruk collapse, was characterized by "individual, merit-based status" because the richest of the burials seemed to belong to adults.⁷¹ Başur Höyük's burial contexts 15 and 17, in which young people were buried with extreme levels of varied types of material wealth, including weaponry, elaborate ritual items, and ornamentation, suggest that individual merit was likely not the reason for the attributed status. Family ties and the status of older members of the interred individuals' social group are more probable sources of their apparent high status. However, the exceptional scale of the material wealth in this largest of the cist graves at Başur Höyük is currently unique in this period and indicates a level of accumulated wealth within the community that had not previously been anticipated by those researching the EB I.

⁶⁴ Pollock 1991, 180.

⁶⁵ Piperno and Salvatori 1983.

⁶⁶ Moorey 1977.

⁶⁷ Gansell 2007.

⁶⁸ Frangipane et al. 2001.

⁶⁹ Frangipane et al. 2001, 109.

⁷⁰ Brunet 2009; Carminati 2014.

⁷¹ Helwing 2012, 55.

The most complex question raised by this fundamentally complicated burial event at Başur is the significance of the unparalleled amount and variety of ornament deposition. The investment in time and resources and the very large number of beads are significantly different from burial deposits of EB I recorded elsewhere in this region.⁷² There are several possible explanations for this, none of which can currently be discounted. First, it is possible that the people buried, or the people of the community inhabiting the site, were wealthy enough in material resources at the time the grave was constructed that taking these items of ornamentation out of circulation did not represent significant damage either economically or socially.⁷³ Second, the status of one or both of the individuals interred in the stone cist might have been of such an extraordinary nature that their burial required a truly remarkable response, community action, investment, or ceremony. Third, the potential political or social gain achieved by this act for those still living could have made this exceptional deposition a good use of resources. This could have been related to the marking by this group of this high point in the landscape, somewhat similar to the kurgan tradition. Since the burials in contexts 15 and 17 appear to have belonged to a single event, immediately after which the cist and context 17 were closed with heavy stones, the last time that the grave goods were visible would have been during the ceremony of the deposition and the closing of the grave. After that, the buried wealth would have lived on as part of social memory, perhaps taking on legendary qualities as part of the mound's history. We assume that the place of the burial was remembered, as it was shortly after revisited for the addition of other interments very close to the outside of the stone cist.

There are several discrete types of bead use that can be identified in this one burial event. Beads were used in large numbers to augment clothing as belts, as decorative panels, or stitched directly onto cloth. Beads were almost certainly also used to augment other artifacts that constituted part of clothing practice, perhaps as decorations hanging from pins, as suggested by pieces of wire found near some beads. They were also used to create composite items of jewelry to be worn

on the body, as indicated for example by the aligned rows of rock crystal discs found *in situ*. In some cases, individual beads were part of the burial ritual without necessarily being threaded, strung, or embroidered onto or into other items. These individual perforated and unperforated (unfinished) beads can be thought of as embodying the concept of bead-ness without physically fulfilling a role normally associated with this type of object, but this leaves open the question of what role these beads played in the burial ritual. The numbers and the apparently diffuse distribution within the grave context of some bead types suggest that they may have been thrown individually into the grave from above as items of ceremonial offering, perhaps to maximize the display of material wealth deposition.

The relationship between lifetime use and burial use of beads can be seen through use wear, which tells us that, on average, the less common or unique forms were more likely to show evidence of heavy wear or adaptation after breakage. A long-term relationship with an owner involving regular use is likely for some of the artifacts. There is relatively little wear apparent on the more frequently represented beads, and these had probably been previously used only a little or not at all before burial.

Although we do not yet know the sources or places of manufacture of the mass-produced items, their reported distribution, which at present underrepresents their use, indicates that they were a widely known and therefore also a shared element of the material culture of groups over large areas of eastern Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and possibly much farther afield.⁷⁴ They would therefore be recognizable to and presumably codified within the value systems of communities that were far removed from one another.

Perhaps the most profound lesson from Başur Höyük contexts 15 and 17 is the contrast between the composite bead ornaments used in clothing, with the aim of providing a uniform visual effect and, we assume, thereby attributing a standard identity to the wearers, and beads used as expressions of a differentiated identity, wealth, and status. While there is already some evidence that such standardized clothing accessories were widely used, for example at Tepe Gawra, the extent to which this was a recognized regional or

⁷² For a survey of available data, see Helwing 2012.

⁷³ See Wengrow 2011 for consideration of the social manipulation through “sacrificial economies” of large amounts of valuable material.

⁷⁴ The distribution was possibly related to long-distance exchange networks more familiar in later periods; see, e.g., Massa and Palmisano 2018. For facilitation of movement, see Ur 2009.

interregional practice in EB I remains to be determined. The bead deposition in the two contexts of the grave shows that there was a clearly distinguishable difference between the individuals inside and outside the stone cist. Most of the high-quality, presumably high-value, objects may have been attributed at the time of death to this single individual in whose honor the cist grave was built. The demise of this individual likely precipitated the death and burial of all the others in contexts 15 and 17. This single death can therefore be seen as the cause of the ornaments and other grave goods being deposited. A putative third category of identity can be proposed for the second occupant of the cist, who probably shared some elements of identity with the individuals outside the cist, as denoted by the black-and-white composite panels, while being given the privilege of access to the cist that the others were not. The burials in contexts 15 and 17 demonstrate that at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, a person only about 12 years of age could be accompanied by enormous material wealth in death and that association with that person probably conferred privileged status that may have been visually codified through personal ornaments. The evaluation of the beads found here fundamentally challenges most previous assumptions about this period of apparent turmoil after the Uruk collapse and profoundly redefines our understanding of material wealth and social structure at the very beginning of the Early Bronze Age.

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