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Beadwork in a Basket: An Ornamental Item from the Final Halaf Level of Mersin Yumuktepe

Emma L. BAYSAL*

Introduction

In the summer excavation season of 2014 a total of nearly 1500 beads were recovered from inside a shallow circular basket in the final Halaf levels of the site of Yumuktepe in Mersin. The discovery has been provisionally dated to around 5800 B.C. When found, the beads were still arranged in the rows in which they had been threaded and it was clear that they had once been a single item of beadwork, perhaps a complex necklace or item of clothing. The beadwork consisted of small red and white stone beads that were threaded in patterns. This find gives us a rare opportunity to analyse a complete beadwork item that was recovered from a non-burial context. The find raises questions about what the artefact might originally have looked like, how the beads were made and why they were deposited in a basket, not in a burial. The large quantity of beads that were deposited also raises questions about the time used for bead production, whether it might have been specialised at a household or workshop level and the value attributed to bead products. This article explores what we can discover about this intricate piece of beadwork from the archaeological evidence, and whether it is comparable to other finds of the same period.

The Halaf Levels of Yumuktepe

The late Neolithic phase of Yumuktepe is dated to 6000-5800 B.C. and at its very end is a short Halaf horizon dated to 5800 B.C. cal.[1]. The late Neolithic phase is characterised by north-south-oriented rectilinear architecture with internal hearths and fireplaces. The latest phase also includes monumental walls that might have been defensive in purpose. The walls were plastered and pottery was found within the structures, indicating that these buildings were inhabited. This phase of settlement seems to have been terraced up the slope[2]. Graves and silos both

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1 Thissen 2002; Balossi 2004. There is a single radiocarbon date (R1345) for the very latest Neolithic phase giving a calibrated date of 5890±80 B.C. Caneva has dated the Halaf/Final Neolithic horizon to 5800 B.C. cal. in her interpretations (Caneva 2010, 35; see also Caneva 2012).

2 Caneva 2010, 26.

appear in the habitation area during the Late Neolithic phase. Unlike in earlier phases at the site, the graves often contained beads with the interments as well as pots. The silos were frequently rebuilt, and it has been suggested they were used for a variety of different foodstuffs. Sometimes contracted burials were found inside the silos. There was a proliferation of ornamentation during this phase, in contrast to the preceding early and middle Neolithic phases where ornamentation was not present. Ornamentation continued to be widely used in the following Halaf phase. It has already been suggested that there were probably on-site workshops in the Late Neolithic[3]. The presence and use of seals of stone and bone and in a variety of forms may have been connected to the increase in storage structures, although they are not thought to have been related to prestige[4].

The stratigraphy of these levels is complex because of later terracing that has cut through both the Neolithic and Chalcolithic phases of the site. However, it is possible to say with some certainty on the basis of artefact similarity that it was in the last Halaf level that a shallow round basket, of fairly coarse weave and about 80 cm. in diameter, set into a cutting lined with a layer of earth, was recovered (Fig. 1). The basket sits in the last Halaf architectural level, below the floor of the Level XVI citadel. The citadel floor and the underlying basket were both cut first by the Early Bronze Age fortification wall and later by a terraced medieval settlement. The basket itself would normally be interpreted as a storage vessel used for grains or pulses, however, it contained an *in situ* beadwork artefact composed of around 1450 small stone disc beads (Fig. 2). The item itself is exceptional, and its deposition in a non-burial context raises a number of questions about why it was placed there as well as the value and purpose of the item. The beads, arranged in rows and densely packed in a small area, make it clear that they originally constituted a single item. The nature of the item and reason for deposition are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

The Beadwork Item

The beadwork artefact was made from two distinct types of stone disc bead. The first type is a pale-coloured disc bead with bevelled sides and small flat ends (Fig. 3); the second are discs of shades from dark red to beige (Fig. 4) and shapes varying from circular to square (Tab. 1, Figs. 5, 6). The use of the term "disc" bead here is broadly based on Beck's bead typology[5], although conflating "disc" and "short" beads on the grounds that there is no statistically identifiable distinction in length within this assemblage. The red beads have been divided into four different types according to form (Fig. 6). A random sample of 500 of the total assemblage of beads (381 red, all forms, 119 white) was measured and recorded in detail and the results presented here derive from these measurements.

3 Caneva 2010, 27.

4 Caneva 2010, 33.

5 Beck 1928.

Complete assemblage			
Colour	**Form**	**Number**	**Percentage**
White	Disc bevelled	423	29.2
Red	Disc round	237	16.36
	Disc large round	34	2.35
	Disc square	80	5.52
	Disc uneven	659	45.5
	Broken	15.5	1.07
Total		**1448.5**	**100**

Analysed sample (500 beads)				
Colour	**Number**	**Diameter mm. (average)**	**Thickness mm. (average)**	**Piercing diameter mm. (average)**
White	119	4.3	2	1.8
Red	381	4.3	2	1.9

Tab. 1 Beads of the Yumuktepe composite bead artefact by type

Besides the differences in material and colour, the two different beads types – red and white – have a distinctly different form, and therefore also a different manufacturing technique. The white beads fall into Beck groups IA.2.f and IB.2.f[6] with an average diameter of 4.3 mm. and thickness of 2 mm. On the basis of an exposed area of the inside of a bead (Fig. 3, right), the white beads have been provisionally identified as heat-treated serpentinite[7]. The original colour of the stone was dark greyish green, and the heating has resulted in the white surface colour with fine surface cracking visible under low magnification. The white beads have bevelled sides creating a pointed profile that contrasts with that of the red beads (Figs. 7, 5, 6). The level of standardization is relatively low, with variations in all dimensions of beads (Fig. 8), but particularly in the degree of bevelling which varies from very pointed with no flat end areas (Figs. 7, 5) to almost standard straight-sided disc bead (Figs. 7, 6). The piercings are mostly straight and neat[8]; however, some are clearly bi-directional[9]. There are infrequent examples of mono-directional piercings with punch through to the opposite surface[10]. The smooth and generally straight piercings are indicative of mechanical drilling, probably using a bow drill[11]. As there are no unfinished examples the full *chaîne opératoire* is not known but the beads were certainly individually manufactured. This contrasts with examples from other sites where it is known that beads were manufactured in cylinder form and then sliced into discs, or in some

6 Beck 1928, pls. II-III; for further discussion of the importance of disc bead morphology see Bar-Yosef Mayer 2013.

7 Serpentinite is one of the most common stone materials used in prehistoric Anatolia, and artefacts are often found at a considerable distance from sources (A. Nazaroff and A. Baysal pers comm. 2014).

8 Beck 1928, Type IV.

9 Beck 1928, Type I.

10 Beck 1928, Type III.

11 As described by Coşkunsu 2008, 34.

cases the discs were made and then abraded in groups[12]. The abrasion marks from shaping, clearly visible on all outer surfaces, indicate that the abrasive used was relatively rough, probably a material like sandstone. Further smoothing was not carried out subsequent to final shaping. There are no polished examples of these beads.

The red beads, although all made from the same raw material, show variation both in colour and form. The colour range can be seen in detail in Fig. 4, they are all referred to here as "red" for convenience. Many of these beads are in poor condition, they break very easily and it is likely that a number of them were lost to complete disintegration. Their material has not been identified, but it is likely that, like the white beads, they were heat treated prior to use[13]. The red beads are remarkably similar in size to the white beads, with the same average diameter of 4.3 mm. and thickness of 2 mm. This means that when strung, although their forms are slightly different, they would sit evenly together. The piercings of the red beads are slightly larger on average than those of the white, and are generally straight and smooth, with no sign of drilling marks at 10x magnification. Although the red beads share a similar form, they can be divided into four distinct types. The most common is the uneven disc, which is the lowest quality of the four types and is distinguished by the irregular shape caused by uneven abrasion of the sides of the bead (Figs. 6.3, 7.2). Higher quality finishing resulted in a circular bead (Figs. 6.1, 7.1). The square disc form (Figs. 6.4, 7.3) is a probable result of the abrasion of a number of beads simultaneously that produced pronounced facets[14]. The final type is very similar to the round disc but slightly larger and with a considerably more polished surface finish (Figs. 6.2, 7.4). There are differences in piercing according to bead type; the large round beads all have hourglass piercings[15] and the square beads all have straight piercings[16]. The round and uneven discs are less consistent in their piercing type with the majority of both types having straight piercings. However, the round beads have a higher proportion of bi-directional hourglass piercings. This may suggest that although the unevenly shaped beads were carelessly shaped, they might have been produced at a higher speed in a more specialized environment on the basis that more expertise can be seen in their piercings. All of the red types have a better surface finish than the white coloured beads, and the large round red discs are very well finished, polished and apparently worn. It is possible that these large red beads were recycled from another item for use in this larger artefact as their surface wear is considerably different from that of the other red beads.

The variation in form of the red coloured stone beads indicates both that they were made by individuals who produced slightly varying results and that the variance in form was also caused by slight methodological variations in manufacture. The individual hand of the craftsperson can be detected in the quality of finish, the final shape, the material selected and the piercing of the bead. Fig. 6 shows how these variations can be recognised. The different quantities of the various forms indicate that there was a considerable number of each type, although the large discs are slightly less common (Tab. 1, Fig. 9). The different production techniques and different materials of the red and white bead types suggest either that they were manufactured using a slightly different methodology in the same locale or that they did not originate

12 For detailed diagrams of this process see Bains et al. 2013; for examples of group abrasion see Baysal 2014b.

13 Analyses of both the red stone and serpentinite are currently underway as part of a wider project by the author on the heat-related technologies of prehistoric beads in Anatolia with results forthcoming.

14 See also Baysal 2014b.

15 Beck 1928, Type I.

16 Beck 1928, Type IV.

from the same place. This may mean that different people within the same settlement made them or that they originated from different sites. Given that there are obvious differences in manufacturing technique within the red bead assemblage, it is also likely that these were either the work of a number of different individuals within households or that they originated from different workshop areas within the settlement or elsewhere. It is even possible that this was a standard type of the period that was widely manufactured. This suggestion is discussed further in the following section.

If it is estimated that each bead would have taken a conservative minimum of 15 minutes to produce from raw material to finished product (roughing out, shaping, drilling, finishing), and probably considerably longer given that the white beads and perhaps also the red beads also had to undergo heat treatment after they were shaped, then the almost 1500 beads would have taken a minimum of 375 hours of work. The implication of this level of time investment for the value of the artefact that was created is that, at the very least, the item would have been difficult to replace[17]. The deliberate deposition of the item and its removal from circulation would therefore have been a considerable investment choice.

Although not all the beads could be recorded *in situ*, those that remained intact have revealed at least part of the pattern that the beads were used to make. A total of 13 distinct rows of beads were distinguished, containing a total of 217 beads. Fig. 2 shows the beads as they were recovered and Fig. 10 as they can be reconstructed from their find positions. Surrounding clusters of beads further helped to indicate the original extent of the artefact, which was found in an area approximately 25 cm. long, 20 cm. wide and 6 cm. deep. On the basis of the visible surface area when strung, the total of around 1450 beads would have covered a total area of 181 cm^2, of which approximately 15 % (27 cm^2) remained intact in the excavated context. The positioning of the beads within the fill of the basket, raised perhaps 2 cm. above the base of the basket (although this will have changed through the processes of decomposition) and in a relatively compact formation, may indicate one of two things. Either they were contained at the time of deposition in a bag or a box, or they did not belong to a necklace or belt but were attached to a fabric or leather item of clothing or other organic item as an elaborate decoration. Some red ochre was noticed in patches around the beads suggesting that they might have been deposited with ochre around them or that the now-decayed surrounding materials might have been coated or decorated with ochre.

What Can the Bead Group Tell Us?

Although we know that since the early Neolithic period very large numbers of stone beads were manufactured and deposited in burial contexts[18], the deposition of such an elaborate item of ornamentation in a non-burial context is unusual in a Halaf context. Evidence from previous years' excavations at Yumuktepe tells us that the beads themselves are not unique. A bracelet made from a smaller number of very similar beads, including the colour, form and technological variations, and also dating to the Halaf occupation of the site, is now on display in the Mersin Museum. This suggests that these beads might have been a standard of the period at the site.

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17 For detailed discussion of the organization of production and the identification of early craft specializations see Baysal 2013b and Baysal et al. 2015.

18 For example at Körtik Tepe, Özkaya – Coşkun 2011, 100.

Given the lack of comparable published examples from other sites of this period that might help with the interpretation of this find, its meaning remains open to debate. A beadwork item from Stratum IX of Tepe Gawra is the only plausible parallel for the item in question here; however, the Tepe Gawra example is much later in date. It is described as being made from beads and located at the waist of a skeleton. The beads were arranged in alternate black and white columns in a herringbone pattern. Traces of cloth backing were found with these beads and indicate that the beadwork was a girdle of about 8.5 cm. wide. This skeleton was accompanied by a total of more than 8500 beads with the others located at its head, neck and wrists[19]. While the Tepe Gawra example strongly supports the idea of bichrome beadwork use in clothing as well as jewellery, it is in a burial context so does not give any clues about the reason for the deposition of the Yumuktepe beadwork. Meanwhile, a necklace from a non-burial context at Çukuriçi Höyük shows the earlier use of a bichrome colour scheme, albeit in a much simpler single-strand format[20]. Going back even further in time, from the Epipalaeolithic period onwards red ochre was used to colour marine shells, while some were heated to produce a dark grey/black colour, thereby giving a combination of shades quite similar to the ones seen here[21]. This suggests that the white/red colour scheme is very long lived in prehistory. Evidence from sites such as Canhasan I has already suggested that ornamentation practices became more complex at some stage around the end of the Neolithic and the beginning of Chalcolithic periods, with an increase in large and visually striking items made of materials such as mother of pearl[22].

It is tempting to hypothesise that the Yumuktepe item was either left hidden temporarily and its owner never returned, or that this was some sort of ritual deposition intended to fulfil a specific purpose now unknown. Given the time that would have been used in the production of the item it is reasonable to assume that the beadwork had both social and economic value that would have precluded its thoughtless disposal. If this is to be considered as an example of structured deposition then reasons for its occurrence can be considered. It is possible that this was intended as a closing practice for a building or area, that it was intended to bring luck in the growing of crops or the storage of grain, or that the item might have been hidden to prevent it from being taken by others. Although somewhat distant in both space and time, an example of a child burial in a circular basket with a lid, located in Çatalhöyük BACH Building 3 under the north central floor that contained considerable numbers of tiny clay beads as well as red ochre, a bone point and powdered malachite, is reminiscent of the Yumuktepe example[23]. The association of baskets with burial again raises the question of whether the Yumuktepe example was an empty burial or even a symbolic burial. The purpose remains open to conjecture.

The sparse evidence for Halaf ornamentation indicates that other Halaf period sites in the region have considerable bead assemblages, although none that directly parallel the examples found at Yumuktepe. Similar materials to those of the Yumuktepe beads have been reported at Domuztepe. Heated serpentinite was used at the latter site to make disc beads[24], and it

19 Tobler 1950, 88.

20 Barbara Horejs pers comm. 2014.

21 Baysal 2013a; Lange et al. 2008.

22 French 1967, 170; see also French 2010 and Baysal forthcoming.

23 Wright 2012, 439.

24 Belcher 2011, 138. Although known during the Neolithic period (for example, Baysal 2014a), from the Chalcolithic onwards the use of transformative heat technology in the manufacture of beads becomes common. See, for

is possible that a somewhat similar production methodology might have been employed at Yumuktepe. However, the size and final shape of the Domuztepe disc beads indicates that they are not directly related to those at Yumuktepe. At Arpachiyah, "…black steatite and glazed white steatite, mostly small ring beads, limestone, calcite, quartz, frit, obsidian, shell, terra-cotta, serpentine, carnelian, lapis lazuli and small dentalium shells…" are reported[25], although it is not clear in what numbers or exact forms they occurred, or indeed if the material identifications are correct. These "black steatite" and "glazed white steatite" discs may be counterparts to the Yumuktepe examples. Beads of both the Hassuna and Halaf periods are reported at Yarım Tepe, with small numbers from the former and much greater quantities from the latter, including an assemblage of more than 500 beads of a mixture of materials recovered from a burial[26]. Meanwhile, the burial evidence from the slightly earlier "pre-Halaf" levels of Hakemi Use show an extremely infrequent use of beads. Only eight of 31 burials have beads and only singly or in small numbers[27]. It is not, however, clear how representative the deposition of beads in burials is of their general use in daily life.

Conclusion

Although there are many questions that remain unanswered with regard to the large composite beadwork item found at Yumuktepe, it is possible to draw a few conclusions about its manufacture and deposition. The item required a significant investment of time to produce and can therefore be assumed to have had value based on its economic status, regardless of how its social value was constructed. The probable heat treatment of the white beads seems to be paralleled at other Halaf period sites and may be associated with wider transformative practices that were employed during this period and which may also relate to the imitation of one material using another. Ethnographic examples provide tantalising clues about the possible importance of colours and colour combinations in beaded items[28], particularly the perceived properties of the beads. There are examples of both the importance of the bead as an individual item and of the use of very large quantities of beads in combination[29]. The variety of meanings that might belong to beads is clear from these ethnographic examples. Although these cannot be transposed directly onto archaeological examples they are a reminder of the social constructs and beliefs that might have been signified by bead manufacture and use.

The high number of beads and the slight differences in the technologies used and their finished form is also indicative of their manufacture by a number of individuals. Whether those individuals were working at a number of locations or in a single workshop area is not yet clear, although it is possible that there was a degree of specialization in craft during this period[30], an idea that is supported by the incipient sealing practices that are contemporary with this find. The deposition of an item on which so much effort had been expended in manufacture leaves us asking why the beadwork was in a basket.

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example, Pickard – Schoop 2013. Healey – Campbell (2014) also report craft specialization at Domuztepe in the form of manufacturing areas.

25 Mallowan – Rose 1935, 97.

26 Merpert – Munchaev 1987, 26.

27 Erdal 2013, 218.

28 Özdemir 2014.

29 For example, Popper-Giveon et al. 2014; Williams 1987. Also on the use of ethnographic data see Baysal – Miller forthcoming.

30 For discussion of the significance of the presence or absence of craft specialization, see Baysal 2013b.

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Özet

Sepet Dolusu Boncuk:
Mersin Yumuktepe Höyüğü Son Halaf Seviyesinden Süs Malzemesi

Mersin Yumuktepe Höyüğü'nün Halaf seviyesinde ele geçen büyük yuvarlak bir sepet içinde yer alan yaklaşık 1500 adet taş boncuk yak. M.Ö. 5800'e tarihlendirilmiştir. Söz konusu sepet, höyüğün hem Tunç Çağı teraslaması hem de Ortaçağ faaliyetleri sırasında kesilen kontekst içinde açığa çıkartılmıştır. Kırmızı ve beyaz renkli boncuklar yak. 25x20 cm.'lik bir alanda ve desen oluşturacak şekilde düzenlenmiş olarak orijinal konumlarında bulunmuştur. Aslında bu yörede, bu dönemde, tek bir kontekst içinde bu kadar çok sayıda boncuk ele geçmesi sıra dışı bir durumdur. Halaf Dönemi bezeme uygulamaları üzerine yayımlanmış çok az veri bulunduğundan bu münferit buluntu, mevcut kanıtlara önemli bir katkı yapmaktadır.

Tüm boncuklar hemen hemen aynı ebattadır fakat beyaz boncukların formu kırmızılardan biraz daha farklıdır. Boncuklar şekillendirildikten sonra büyük olasılıkla taş, ısıl işleme tabi tutulmuş olmalıdır. Delikler, el matkabıyla değil, mekanik olarak değişik ustalık seviyelerinde açılmıştır. Boncukların üretiminde kullanılan teknolojiler hakkında bir miktar fikir sahibi olunabiliyor. Ayrıca tek bir kişinin elinden çıkmamış olup, muhtemelen değişik ustalık seviyelerine ve teknolojilere sahip bir grup tarafından yapılmışlardır. Kırmızı boncukların dört değişik formu olup bazıları ustaca yapılmışken, diğerleri çok daha hızlıca yapılmışlardır. Boncukların bu form farklılıkları değişik usta ellerinden çıktıklarının işareti olarak düşünülebilir.

Domuztepe gibi başka merkezlerden de ele geçen kanıtlar, Halaf Dönemi'nde küçük boncukların oldukça yaygın olduğunu ve takı ve süs eşyası yapımında ısıl işleme tabi tutulmuş taş kullanıldığını göstermektedir. Ne var ki, bu kadar çok sayıda kullanılan boncuk ve kayda geçmiş eser sayısı da azdır. Yumuktepe'de ele geçen buluntular bu merkezde boncukların yaygın şekilde kullanıldığına ve belki de buraya özgü ve yerel üretim olduğuna işaret edebilir.

Bu çok komplike ve muhtemelen de çok değerli eserin neden bir sepet içinde bırakılmış olduğu bilinmiyor. Bunun yapımı için harcanan vakit dikkate değer miktarda olup, yaklaşık 375 saatlik bir emek gerektirdiği tahmin edilmektedir. Bu emeğe karşılık ciddiyetsiz bir şekilde saklanması beklenemez. Olasılıkla, saklanmıştı ve sahibi geri gelip almayı planlıyordu. Belki bir gömüt yerinde bırakılmıştı veya sahibi bir daha asla eve dönmedi. Her durumda bu boncuk işçiliği, süsler için çok emek ve zaman harcanabildiğini ve bir bezeme öğesinin nispeten basit malzeme, teknoloji ve bileşenlerle yapılabildiğini göstermektedir. Bu eserin kolye mi, işli giysi parçası mı veya başka bezeyici bir eser mi olduğu bilinmese de yak. 180 cm^2'lik alan kapayan büyük bir şey olduğu kesindir. Her ne amaçla kullanıldı ise, görsel olarak çarpıcı bir eserdi ve desenleri muhtemelen onu daha da çekici kılıyordu. Neye benzediğini ne yazık ki hiç bilemeyeceğimiz bu orijinal boncuklu eser, bize Halaf Dönemi'nin estetik ve ekonomik değerleri hakkında bazı ipuçları vermektedir.

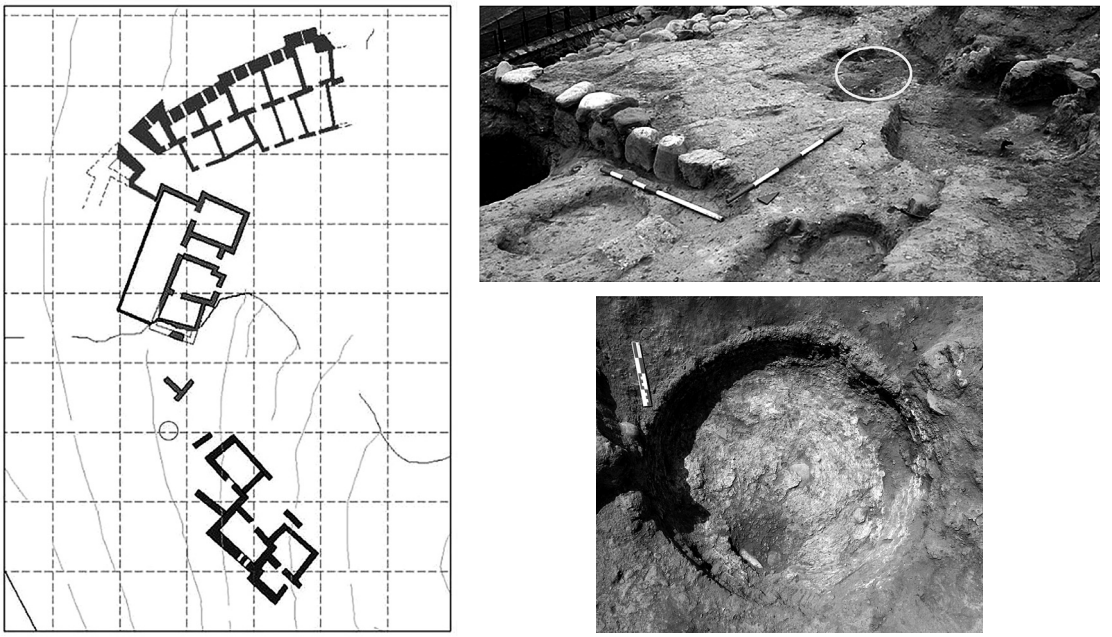

Fig. 1 Location of basket at Yumuktepe

Fig. 2 Beads in basket during excavation

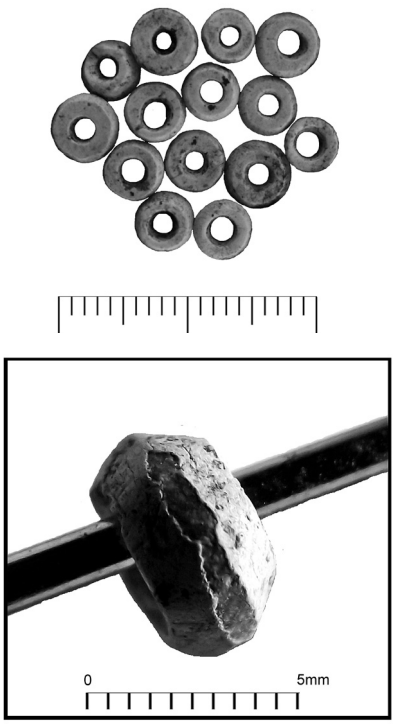

Fig. 3 Pale-coloured disc beads

Fig. 4 "Red" disc beads of various shades

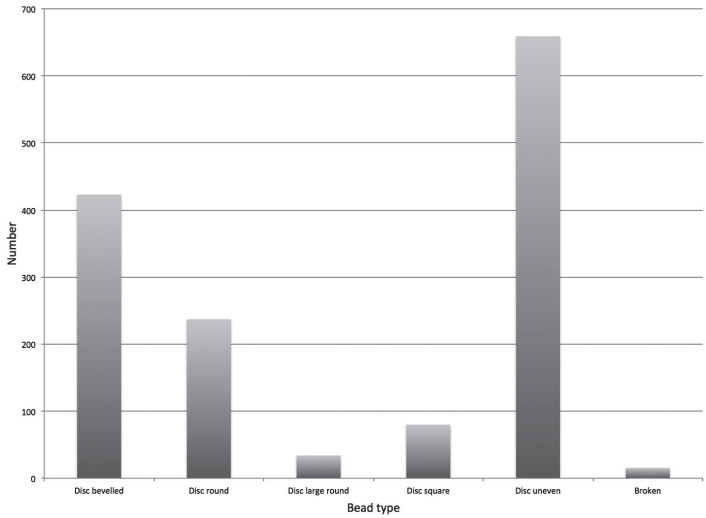

Fig. 5 Frequencies of various bead types

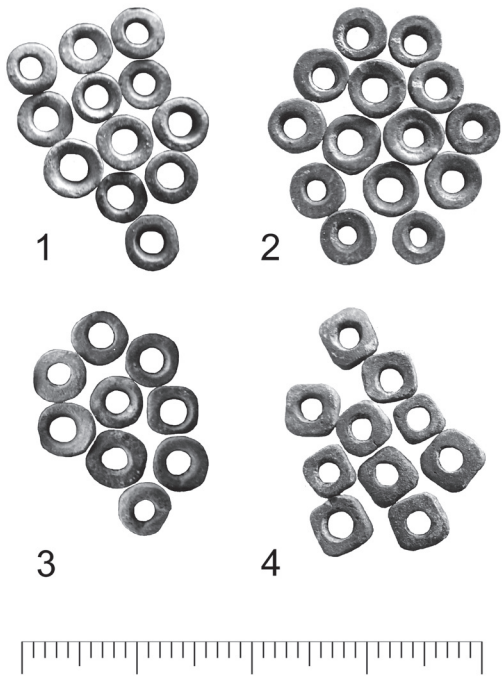

Fig. 6 Four distinct types of "red" disc bead: (1) Disc round, (2) Disc large round, (3) Disc uneven, (4) Disc square

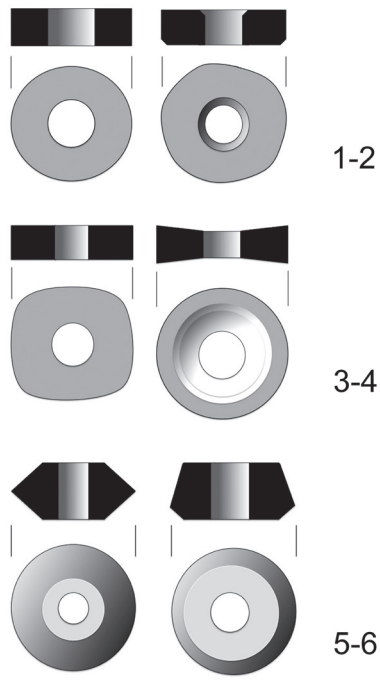

Fig. 7 Schematic diagram of bead types: (1) Disc round, (2) Disc uneven, (3) Disc square, (4) Disc large round, (5) Disc bevelled, (6) Disc bevelled uneven

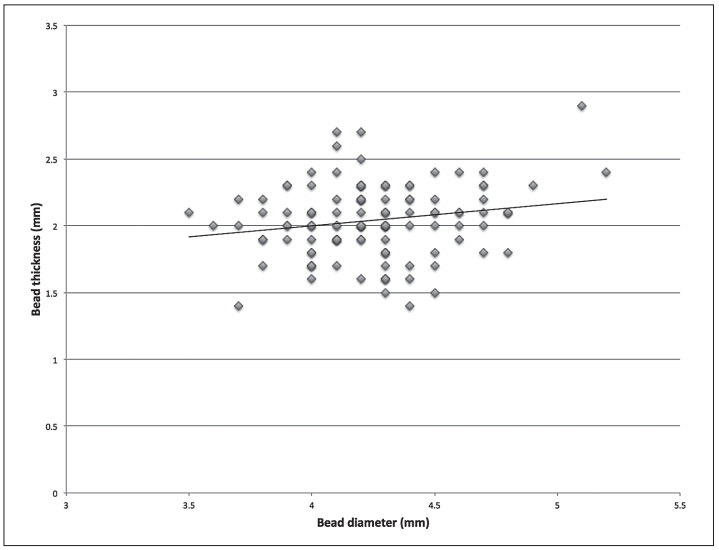

Fig. 8
Diameter and thickness of "white" disc beads

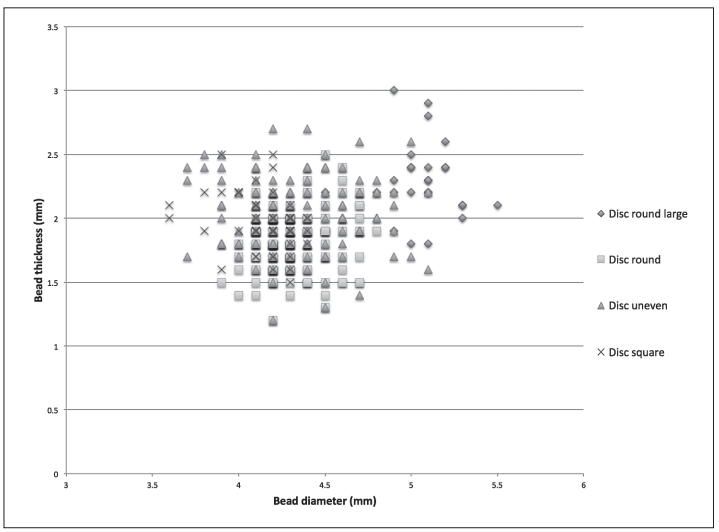

Fig. 9
Diameter and thickness of four "red" bead types

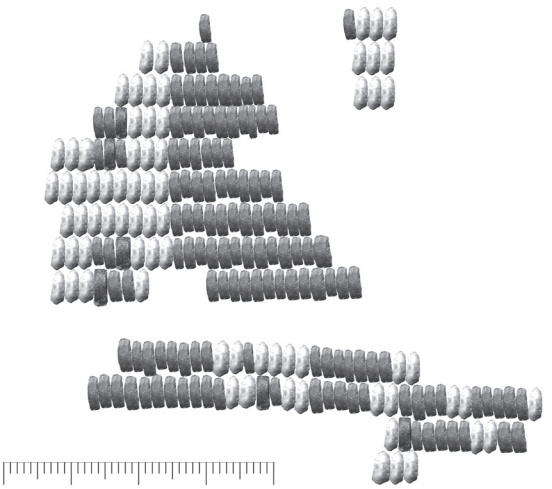

Fig. 10
Reconstruction of original appearance of composite beadwork artefact