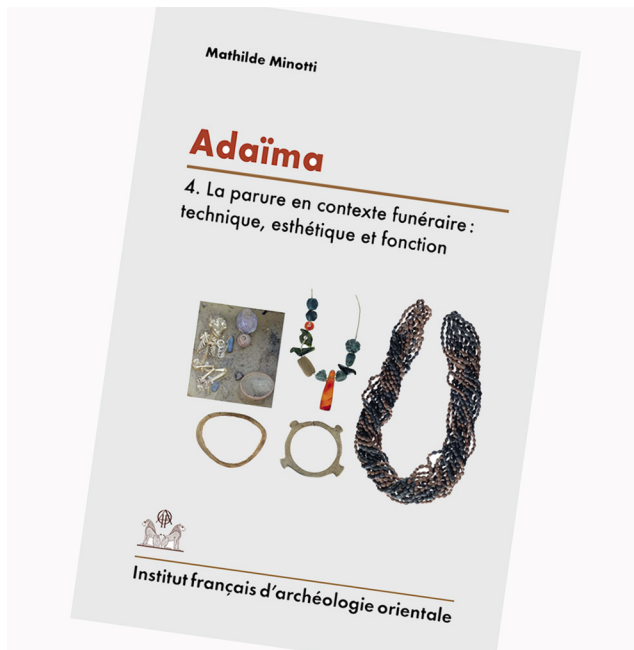


BOOK REVIEWS

Adaïma IV. La parure en contexte funéraire : technique, esthétique et fonction.

Minotti, Mathilde. Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale 88. 2 vols. 2021. xiii + 520 pp., 514 color figs. ISBN: 978-2-7247-0777-9. 48 € (paper), 33 € (pdf).

Sources of information about the structuring of individual and social identities are rare in pre-literate societies, so cemeteries with personal ornaments are a precious resource for researchers. As personal ornaments in their many guises have rarely received equitable treatment in the final publications of excavation projects, it is encouraging to see this two-volume set (text and appendix), by Mathilde Minotti, as the fourth in the Adaïma monograph series. Minotti's book and catalogue describe and evaluate the ornaments of the various cemetery areas and phases at the Predynastic (4th millennium BCE) site of Adaïma in the Nile Valley. The book aims to consider not only the metric and material aspects of the artifacts, but also delves further into the materiality and human relationships revealed by ornaments deposited in graves, considering their contextual role as part of death rituals.



Volume 1 starts with excellent points about the role of personal ornaments in archaeology, answering the general negative prejudices relating to their study and interpretation in the academic sphere. The dynamic relationship between living ornamentation and ornaments for the dead is a fundamental and often neglected part of ornament research that is highlighted both here and throughout the work. The main text is divided into five chapters bracketed by an introduction and conclusion. The introduction to the site gives vital background for those not familiar with the region or period. Adaïma is important for its occupation during the increasingly complex Neolithic/Bronze Age transition and the artifacts are contextually significant because of their location in graves which are informative about many aspects of use and social life.

Over the following four chapters, the ornaments are presented starting with typology and life cycles, followed by materials and manufacture, aesthetics, and finally, the function of ornaments in the funerary sphere, together characterized by the author as a “holistic” approach. The presentation of the ornaments throughout the book is smoothed by a logical and easy-to-understand approach to typological classification accompanied by clear diagrams which will facilitate comparative work by others in the future. Criticisms of existing inherently interpretive terminologies are well placed, and Minotti provides clear, if somewhat complex, neutral alternatives which she uses consistently throughout.

Beyond basic identifications, materials are characterized according to their wider use. Those used only for ornaments and those also exploited in the production of other artifacts are used to identify both possible procurement strategies and the exploitation of different source areas according to need. Thinking about the nature of procurement sheds light on opportunism, choice, value, and ties to different and apparently unrelated areas of procurement, offering a fascinating insight into where ornaments may have fit in the wider activities and contacts of the community.

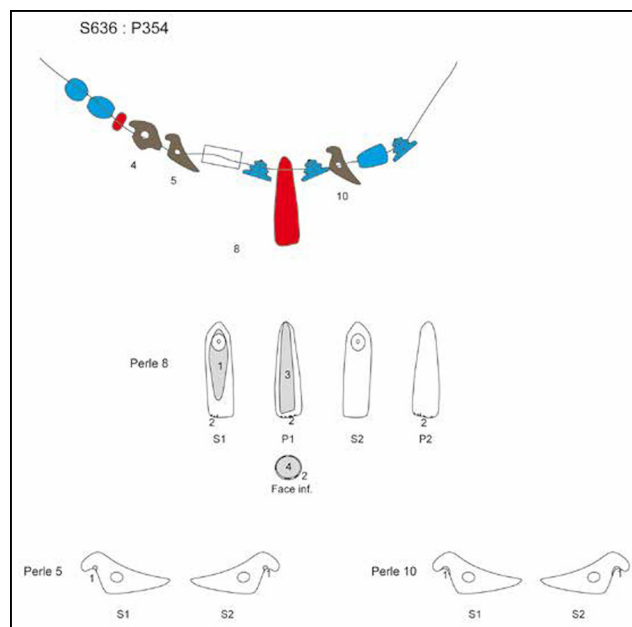
Emphasis is placed throughout on the color of ornaments, centering aesthetics – in the sense of impression created by the ornaments – in the interpretive framework and relating color and form strongly to the human body. Given

our limited understanding of the economic and social values attributed to materials, this is a useful different perspective on the human/ornament relationship. This relationship is further investigated through use-wear. Within complex archaeological assemblages involving multiple materials and many forms, this is a complicated task, which may be why many researchers avoid the subject. Here, use-wear in some materials is investigated using a limited range of techniques, offering some insight into how various materials may have been utilized. Of course, to fully explore and give this subject the attention it deserves would require a second book and years of further experimentation; however, the potential for further work is emphasized.

The use of ornaments on the body, whether in life or death, is a major element of contextual study that is often lacking in archaeological work either because of a lack of data or poor preservation of the contexts. Here the author exploits the data to its maximum potential to investigate not only the positioning of different ornaments on the body, but also the relationship between mode of use, color, and material to understand the visual effect of each object (Chapter 4). In combination with the wider contextual, skeletal, temporal, and spatial assessments, this gives a good idea of by whom, where, and when different ornaments were used in death. The distribution of artifacts throughout the wider cemetery provides insight into temporo-spatial human ornament relationships at the site (Chapter 5). In conjunction with use data, this allows the development of a comprehensive view reaching from context to life history, providing a thoughtful perspective on the burial process itself.

One of the most prevalent problems with the publication of archaeological material culture is the lack of sufficient published supporting data, or suitably presented data, for future comparison with different assemblages by other scholars. Data sharing and comparability are now considered essential in journal publications as well as in project planning; it is, however, still rare that books/book chapters provide sufficient detail to enable either validity testing or continuing study. Here we can ask: would these volumes, particularly the catalogue in Volume 2, allow another specialist to compare this material with their own? The answer is certainly yes, with the proviso that additional images of both the ornaments and their contexts would have been desirable.

The catalogue provides a descriptive inventory of the individual burials and their accompanying ornaments. Beads and pendants are represented by various forms made of faience, marine gastropod shells, bone, and various stones including chalcedony, calcite, quartz, serpentine, and steatite. The artifacts are illustrated in both drawings and color photographs.



Overall, *Adaima IV* offers detailed insight into the ornamentation practices and expressions of identity within grave contexts during an important period of increasing social and economic complexity in Egypt. The detailed data presentation will undoubtedly prove useful in future comparative studies and the level of detail and generally clear and comparable presentation can be regarded as a model for future studies which aim to be both fresh in perspective and widely useful.

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