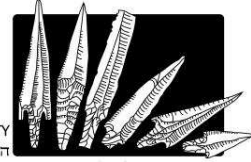


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Ornament in a funerary context: Two case studies on the acquisition, manufacture and use from the Early Natufian of Mugharet el-Wad

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This study is concerned with the Natufian culture (13 100-9 600 Cal. BC) in the Near East. The Early Natufian period marks a major change in the human behavior in the Southern Levant: the transition from a hunter-gatherers nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary life involving the emergence of new structures. This required modifications of the social organization, techniques, economic strategies and especially the symbolic domain. The main objective of this study is to approach the technical system of these populations through one of the means of their symbolic expression: personal ornaments. These were sampled from a particular context, whose boundaries in time and space are determined: the burials. The research included particular questions such as what materials were chosen? according to what criteria? how and by whom were they obtained? how and by whom were they transformed? how were they worn? and especially what information could we generate on the organization of these societies? To address these issues a comprehensive study of two distinct sets of personal ornaments found in burials of a child H28-32.1 (4-6 years old) and an adult H57a (20-29 years of undetermined sex), from the earliest Natufian layers of Mugharet el-Wad was conducted. 964 ornament elements, so far never studied, has been individually analyzed according to a methodological protocol common to all in order to determine their schema of acquisition, manufacture and use. It appears that the “schéma d’acquisition” of raw materials (long bone of medium/large ungulates; scaphopod shells from the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Pliocene formation; tibiotarsus of partridge; phalanx of gazelle) is relatively complex and requires an economic investment. The “schéma de fabrication” tells us about technical investment and skills that was required in the manufacture of each of these elements of ornament, as well as on the notion of “technical signature” or the aesthetic standardization of finished products. Finally the “schéma de fonctionnement” informs us about how these elements were tied and associated in composite arrangements and most important, on the duration, more or less long, of their use. This study attempts to approach the social organization of the Natufian societies through the analysis of interactions between actors of the “schéma opératoire” of personal ornaments and the status of holders of these elements that open a field of reflection on concepts such as “craft specialization”, “capitalization”, or even the “social hierarchy” of these human groups.