Composite Artefacts in the Ancient Near East

Exhibiting an imaginative materiality, showing a genealogical nature

edited by

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Entangled Relations over Geographical and Gendered Space: Multi-Component Personal Ornaments at Hasanlu

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Abstract
Hasanlu, in Northwestern Iran, is best known for its catastrophic destruction ca. 800 BC, likely at the hands of the Urartian army. Excavations of the site revealed more than 100 burials from the period leading up to the destruction, Hasanlu Period IVb (1050–800 BC). Among these burials are five adult women decorated with multicomponent personal ornaments consisting of repurposed copper alloy or iron armour scales with attached garment pins, stone, shell and composite beads, and copper alloy tubes of various lengths. If worn on the body during life, these objects would have been both visually and aurally conspicuous. Bead and tube elements are typical of the material culture of Hasanlu, used in mortuary jewellery from the Middle Bronze Age forward. The armour scales, however, are found only in these few female burials at Hasanlu. In the broader ancient Near East, scale armour is associated with representations of male bodies in military contexts, and is found archaeologically in military, palatial, cultic and mortuary contexts. These particular scales are characteristic of regions to Hasanlu’s north (the South Caucasus) and east (the Caspian littoral). This paper proposes that the creation of composite objects from these parts—fragments of masculine armour, components of personal adornment, and sound making tubes—entangled people and things across gendered and geographical boundaries.

Keywords: Hasanlu, Mortuary Archaeology, Archaeology of Gender, Entanglement, Personal Adornment, Dress, Militarisation; Armour Scales

Introduction
Hasanlu is a site in the Ushnu Solduz valley in Northwestern Iran (Figure 1) that was excavated by a joint expedition of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Iranian Antiquities department, between 1956–1977 under the leadership of Robert H. Dyson. The site has a relatively large horizontal expanse and a long occupation sequence, beginning in the Prepottery Neolithic and stretching into the Medieval period. It consists of a high mound, or citadel, with a core of monumental buildings appearing in the Late Bronze Age (Hasanlu V, 1450–1250 BC) and developing continuously through the destruction at the end of Hasanlu IVb (1050–800 BC) (Figure 2). Surrounding the citadel is the lower mound, the site of burials from the Early Bronze Age forward.¹

This paper deals with durable goods relating to dress that come from the burials of Period IVb, the period in which Hasanlu reaches its zenith in terms of wealth, and one which ends with its dramatic, total destruction and abandonment at the hands of the Urartian army in 800 BCE. In particular, this paper examines a group of multi-component ornaments that were found on the bodies in the best furnished women’s burials of Period IVb.

While the material culture of Hasanlu displays continuous development from the Middle Bronze Age through the destruction, there is archaeological evidence from both the citadel and the burials for a heightening of social hierarchy in Period IVb, with increasing restriction of access to buildings on the citadel and the goods therein, as well as an

¹ For a thorough analysis of the archaeology of Hasanlu from the Middle Bronze through early Iron Age, see Danti 2013.
amplification of the status differences evident in mortuary assemblages. The burials of earlier periods show few correlations between grave goods and the biological sex of the burial’s occupant, but in Period IVb the mortuary assemblages of men and women diverge sharply (Figure 3), illustrating a change in this community’s social understanding of these male and female bodies.

The burials emphasise the division of people into material categories – those who wear garments fastened by pin (biological women) and those who do not but are likely to be accompanied by weapons (biological men), indicating the increased importance of gender as a social distinction. An unusual, and to my knowledge unparalleled, composite dress item was found on the chests of five women of varying ages. These burials contain the wealthiest women among the Period IVb burials, as determined by the number of metal objects, and the presence of gold, albeit in token quantities, among the dress ornaments (Figure 4). The

\[ \text{Figure 2: Site plan of the Hasanlu IVb Citadel, showing location of bead storage (Courtesy of the Penn Museum).} \]

\[ \text{Figure 3: Composite dress from Period IVb burial at Hasanlu.} \]

\[ \text{Figure 4: Wealthy women's burials from Period IVb at Hasanlu.} \]
composite ornaments consist of rounded, triangular copper alloy or iron plaques that range from 7–15cm in length attached to clothing by way of riveted studs, accompanied by beads of various types, including vitreous materials, metal, carnelian and shell, as well as copper alloy tubes of varying lengths. Beaded ornaments are inherently composite in nature - they incorporate multiple elements, often in a wide range of materials, with varying methods of manufacture, geographical and chronological points of origin (Figure 5).

**Beaded Dress Items**

When considering beaded dress items as artefacts, it is tempting to define them in terms of individual elements, or ‘parts’, assembled into a ‘whole’. I would argue, though, that objects composed of beads are neither parts nor whole. They are rather, in the words of Marcus Brittain and Oliver Harris, engaged in ‘ongoing transformations’, a cycle of creation, fragmentation and recreation. The integrity of a beaded dress ornament is as fragile as the material that holds it together, and in the archaeological record these objects are very rarely found strung or sewn together in their original arrangement. Anyone who wears beaded jewellery or clothing is aware of its precarious nature, and has left at one time or another a trail of sequins or beads that if sufficiently valued are gathered up and refabricated.

These composite assemblages, therefore, require sustained engagement in the form of maintenance and
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Reworking over time. As artefacts, they are analogous to Ian Hodder’s example of the clay houses at Çatal Hüyük, for like clay structures, the continued existence and utility of these dress items requires frequent human interactions, by which they entangle and even entrap the humans with which they are associated. As beaded jewellery was found in 40% of the burials from Hasanlu IVb, in the burials of both men and women, children, adults and the elderly. The excavation records are often imprecise, with groups of beads described as necklaces regardless of their placement. In instances where the excavators provided more explicit information, records show that beads were found at the neck, the hand or wrist, on the torso or shoulder, and in the case of certain young women, surrounding the head in a way that suggests the presence of beaded headdresses. While their precise arrangements are perhaps not possible to reconstruct, artisans seem to have combined the beads in ways that juxtapose the colours, textures, sheens, shapes and perhaps sounds of varied materials including vitreous materials, stone (often carnelian), bone, shell and metal, usually copper alloy, and very rarely antimony or gold.

A Case Study: Arcularia Shell Beads and Entanglement across Space and Time

As a human made object, what Ian Hodder defines as a ‘thing’, each element in these compositions has its own point of origin and biography, and participates in broad networks of human-thing interaction across considerable expanses of time and space. Each of these objects carries its own entanglements and chaînes opératoires, from the extraction of raw materials; to crafting, circulation and initial use; to assembly into an item of adornment; to reassembly and reuse, and ultimately to burial, thus removal from circulation. As an example of such a thing, beginning in the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1900–1600 BCE), a particular type of sea shell of the genus Arcularia gibbosula was integrated into dress ornaments found in burials at Hasanlu (Figure 6).

At Hasanlu these shells are quite a long way from their point of origin, as Arcularia live in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Their presence at Hasanlu speaks to the existence of complex networks of long distance interaction, and it isn’t surprising that they appear at a time when the ceramic record at Hasanlu indicates intensive interaction with the northern Mesopotamia. Arcularia shells are found elsewhere in the Near East, in northern Mesopotamia, Syria and the Levant, as well as in the eastern Mediterranean at site in Cyprus and Greece, appearing in burials, in offering contexts, and temple foundation deposits. Unlike most northern Mesopotamian sites, at Hasanlu these items are not found in a single time horizon, but in contexts separated by hundreds of years. The earliest burial in which they appear at Hasanlu, Burial SK45-7, dates to the Middle Bronze Age (Hasanlu Vlb, ca 1900–1600 BC), and is well furnished for the site, with high quality goods including.

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8 Hodder 2011: 156.
in addition to Arcularia, exceptionally well carved beads of carnelian and rock crystal. Arcularia also appear in contexts dated to Period IVb (1050–800 BCE), including the burial of a young woman (SK481) on the low mound, and at the neck of a young adult crushed in the collapse of the largest temple at the site, BBII. These shells are found as well in the treasury of Temple BBII amidst a cache of thousands of beads, perhaps integrated into beaded jewellery. Once part of living creatures, then harvested from the Mediterranean sea, these shells were collected, and at some point in time were moved across long distances either as unprocessed shells, perforated for use as beads, or integrated into dress ornaments. Their distribution in the Period IVb contexts clearly demonstrates that Arcularia were worn as personal ornaments in life and in death, and their presence in the treasuries perhaps provide evidence for another stage in their biographies, as cultic equipment or gifts to the gods.

The Temple BBII storage context for the Arcularia shells was located two meters above the floor level in debris from a collapsed second story room (Figure 2, lower right). The contents, in addition to thousands of beads, included fine furniture, glassware and vases, maceheads, fine and common ceramics, metal vessels, ivory inlays, and significantly, jar sealings, which indicated that some of these valuable gifts to the deity were safeguarded. Among these the finds in this context, and in other storerooms on the citadel in temples and elite residences, are numerous examples of ‘heirlooms’, objects whose date of manufacture considerably precedes that of the context in which they were found, a surprising occurrence given that a significant fire destroyed much of the citadel at the end of Period IVc (ca. 1050 BCE). These include Kassite glass vessels, a Middle Assyrian mace head, a bowl inscribed by a 14th or 13th century BCE Babylonian ruler, two stone maceheads inscribed with the name of the king of Susa, Tan-Ruhuarater (ca. 2100 BCE), as well as the famous Gold Bowl, likely made locally in the 11th century BCE. These inscribed and otherwise datable examples provide the clearest evidence at the site for the collecting and enclaving of valuables in the citadel over time, but there can be no doubt that other older objects, perhaps more difficult to identify, will be found within the thousands of luxury objects enclaved in Hasanlu’s temples and elite residences. The Arcularia shells in use- and storage-contexts at Hasanlu during Period IVb likely participated in this phenomenon, coming into the site during the Middle Bronze Age – the era when they first appear in burials and when the connections between Hasanlu and the west were most strong.

True heirlooms – objects transmitted from one individual to another across generations – enchain people over time, creating a liminal space where the past intersects with the present. Katina Lillios argues that the control and display of heirlooms play a significant role in constructing and reproducing elite social identity and inequality within communities. We have no way of knowing if the older objects discovered in the Period IVb citadel were true heirlooms in this sense, but the elite contexts in which they were found suggest that they share the function of reinforcing local hierarchy. It seems quite clear that Hasanlu’s elite collected valuable luxury goods, imported and locally made. That they did so well before Period IVb is suggested by the presence in the Period IVb destruction

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14 Cifarelli 2013: 314.
15 HAS64-200 (location unknown), HAS64-421 (Teheran Museum).

Figure 6. Beads, including Arcularia, from Middle Bronze Age Burial SK45-7, Hasanlu Vlb, HAS 58-134 (UM59-4-78) (Courtesy of the Penn Museum)
Composite Artefacts in the Ancient Near East

Initial processing

Obtaining raw materials

Repair/Reforming

Completed component*

Accidental or intentional fragmentation*

Burial/loss Deposition

Functional/Ritual use*

Integration into composite object*

Circulation*

* Possible point of enclaving in Temple Inventory

Figure 7. Object biography of beaded dress ornaments (adapted from Jennings 2014, Fig. 1).

That the *Arcularia* shells are found in this range of contexts, integrated into personal ornaments in intentional as well as accidental burials and in the treasury of temple BBII, complicates their biographies as objects (Figure 7). The examples found on the citadel entered the archaeological record not through intentional deposition, but through the agency of destruction. We can’t know at what stage in their object biography they were enclaved, and whether their presence there indicates that they were removed from circulation. Those found in temple treasuries may have been gifts to the gods, or cultic equipment for the use - through dress - of temple personnel. Elisa Roßberger argues that regardless of whether objects found in temples were placed there as votives or were 'temple inventory', such collections of older objects serve as the material correlate of the collective memory of the society, bringing the past into the present.21

These *Arcularia* shells are sufficiently rare at the site to render their wearers visually conspicuous, and their inclusion in composite dress items links their wearers both with upper reaches of the social hierarchy at the site, as well as with the past. Even if over the generations these elements had lost their specifically ‘imported’ or ‘exotic’ identity, by integrating elements which had been collected, handed down, and enclaved, into new items of adornment, the residents of Hasanlu IVb preserved the memory of, and thereby reproduced, a sense of the ancestral accomplishments and prestige that resulted in the presence of these items at the site. The example of the *Arcularia* shells, found thousands of miles from their point of origin and safeguarded for hundreds of years, illustrates the complexity of the biographies of elements that contribute to composite dress items, shows the ways these things connect the present with the past, and underscores the importance of deep history and cultural continuity over generations at the site.

Entangled by Gender: Militarisation in Period IVb

Continuity, however, is not the entire story. Period IVb – which began in the eleventh century BC with a major fire and ended with the total destruction of the site around 800 BC – was a time of change brought about by external threats and internal crises.22 The increased emphasis on the material differentiation of men's and women's dress and mortuary assemblages is a manifestation of the social forces at work in this period. These distinctions were created using some objects that appear to have been locally made, but far more that were strongly correlated to, and perhaps imported from, the northern, often proto-Urartian material culture of sites in the South Caucasus and the Talesh.23 These ‘foreign’ objects lead us back to the five burials introduced earlier, where they are integrated into composite dress items on the women’s bodies. In these five burials, copper alloy and iron armour scales were decorated with beads and worn on the women’s chests as dress ornaments (Figures 4, 5, 8). Armour scales are part of the kit of elite male warriors in the ancient Near East during the Late Bronze and Iron Ages.

20 Cifarelli 2013; Danti and Cifarelli 2016.
21 Roßberger 2016.
22 Cifarelli 2017; Danti and Cifarelli 2015.
23 Rubinson 2012; Danti and Cifarelli 2015; Cifarelli in press; 2017.
Archaeological and visual evidence indicates that their geographical range is extensive, from Babylonia in the south to Armenia in the north, as far west as the Mediterranean coast, with isolated examples in Greece and Cyprus. The sheet metal scales are assembled into armoured garments by either lacing them together or attaching them to textile or leather, and in order for them to perform their protective function they require frequent repair and reconstruction. Like jewellery elements, they are neither parts nor wholes, but objects engaged in ongoing transformations.

In addition to the five armour scales found in women’s burials, approximately 37 other examples of armour scales were found at Hasanlu in Period IVb citadel contexts. They are made of iron and/or copper alloy, in a wide range of shapes, sizes and styles of decoration. Most were found in a treasury associated with Temple BBII, and two others in a storage room in elite residence BBIII. A number of examples were found in buildings and courtyards on the citadel, in what might have been use-contexts related to the battle that destroyed Hasanlu, although none were directly associated with bodies. A complete armoured garment would require a large number of similar scales, and not only are scales not found in sufficient quantities at Hasanlu, no such ‘sets’ occur there. Even if we assume that some of the soldiers who fell in the final battle were stripped of their armour by the victors, many combatants were struck down when buildings collapsed on them, prohibiting the looting of the dead, and none of whom were found with any scales on their bodies. There is therefore no evidence that armour scales were actually used in armoured garments by the residents of Hasanlu, although they would have been objects whose function was well known.

Of the five scales found in women’s burials, only one - the iron example from Stein’s excavation - has any correlates on the citadel, with one example in temple BBII and two in mixed household storage in Elite Residence BBIII. The other four examples of smaller copper alloy scales with a central rib, embossed dots around the edges, and riveted studs attaching them to textile or leather – are not found elsewhere at Hasanlu. They are paralleled, however, in slightly earlier burials at northern sites in Armenia and in the Talesh region of the Caspian coast, an area whose material culture is linked to that of the Caucasus in the Bronze and early Iron ages. Interestingly, at the site of Djonu in the Talesh, we see armour scales repurposed as women’s dress, in this case linked together in a belt in what Jacques de Morgan believed to be a woman’s burial. The particular scales associated with women’s bodies at Hasanlu, were likely northern in origin.

As was the case at many sites throughout the Near East and eastern Mediterranean, the armour scales found in the temples and residences at Hasanlu seem to have functioned synecdochally as emblems of militarism and gifts to the gods rather than useful military equipment. In his discussion of the single armour scales found in Aegean contexts, Joseph Maran describes the intellectual process by which the part stands for the whole as an ‘act of abstracting’ from which ‘it is only one step to an apotropaic use in which a single scale is meant to convey the protective properties of the complete corselet’. In the case of the armour scales in Hasanlu burials, the object undergoes an additional stage of abstraction in which they are converted and

\[ \text{Figure 8. Excavation photograph of Burial SK 448, adult female, Operation VIC Burial 4 (Courtesy of the Penn Museum).} \]
integrated into an entirely different sort of object. What would have been clearly recognizable to the residents of Hasanlu as a piece of elite male military equipment becomes an element of feminine attire.

These northern style elements of masculine military equipment found in the five women’s burials were repurposed, converted into components of beaded dress ornaments, some of which include Arcularia shells. It is not possible to reconstruct the original arrangement of these components with great precision, due to the uneven quality of the excavation records. Stein describes the composite ornament as consisting of three bundles of copper alloy and iron tubes, arranged end to end and connected with copper rings, attached to and partially overlying the ‘broader edge’ of the armour scale. Excavation photographs of Burial SK481 suggest much the same arrangement, with two large groups of beads that appear to have been hung from the scale lying on the body’s upper right chest (Figures 4, 5, 9). The beads integrated into this ornament include Arcularia, Dentalium and cowrie shells, carnelian, vitreous materials, antimony, iron, copper alloy barrel beads and various lengths of copper alloy tubes. This variety of color, sheen, size and shape provides a glimpse of the visual richness and complexity of this woman’s dress. Stein further observed that when lying across ‘a lady’s breast [this composite object] would have vibrated as she passed and produced a pleasant musical tinkling whenever she moved’. The noise-making or musical aspect of these composite artefacts is quite important, as it would have contributed significantly to their social impact.

Certainly metal scales serving their armorial function when integrated into a man’s protective garment would have made distinctive sounds as the male body moved and interacted with weapons in battle, and perhaps the percussive elements were added to these dress ornaments in imitation or evocation of this effect.

There are as well numerous ethnographic and archaeological parallels for ‘musical’ adornment from around the world – the corded skirts decorated with similar copper tubes found in Bronze Age burials in Denmark would surely have rendered the movements of their wearers audible. Both the Hebrew Bible and the Quran characterize the sounds produced by the interaction of jewellery on women’s bodies as immodest, indicating both its prevalence and the potential nature of its appeal. The social value and constructed meaning of these composite objects, the reasons why the armour scales were converted and integrated from masculine to feminine, and from armour to adornment, present considerable challenges to interpretation. The process of fragmentation that separated the scales from their original armorial purpose may have taken place far from Hasanlu, as may the shift from their placement on men’s bodies to those of women. The armour scales themselves appear to be earlier than the burials in which they are found at Hasanlu, but we cannot know if they are heirlooms in the strictest sense, linking individuals across generations and serving as a reminder of someone’s social or political presence. It is tempting to infer biographical information about these women and their relationships from their dress – to conclude that the integration of masculine military equipment into the dress of a few elite women manifested actual same values are in place at Hasanlu, they merely illustrate the erotic potential of audible ornamentation.

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28 Stein and Andrew 1940: 397–8.
29 Kolotourou 2007: 80–86; for examples from Denmark see Kristiansen 2013: 756, fig. 1.
30 Surah 24: 31 of the Qur’an states ‘that [women] should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments...’ In the Hebrew Bible, Isa 3:16 describes the ‘wanton’-eyed daughters of Zion, ‘walking and mincing as they go, (make) and making a tinkling with their feet’. These examples are not intended to suggest that the
connections or enchainments to elite military males living or dead, local or foreign. While there is ample evidence for the presence of such warriors among the Hasanlu IVb burials, the type of documentary or scientific information that could directly link individuals and support such an interpretation simply does not exist at Hasanlu.

Ian Hodder has described webs of human-thing entanglements as cables in which material, biological,
social, cultural, psychological, and cognitive strands interact and bind.\textsuperscript{32} But we simply have no way to untangle the strands that connect these artefacts on women’s bodies in burials at Hasanlu to their geographical points of origin in the proto-Urartian north and original owners. Were they spoils of war? Souvenirs of travel? Gifts? Trade items? Does their presence and distribution correspond to John Chapman’s notion of fragmentation and enchainment, binding individuals at Hasanlu to those in distant lands, binding these five individuals together, or binding men to women?\textsuperscript{33} Do they function in a ceremonial or emblematic fashion on the bodies of these women in much the same role played by northern-style copper alloy armoured belts in male warrior burials?\textsuperscript{34} Would they even have been understood at Hasanlu as ‘foreign’ or ‘imported’? What of their original ‘aura’ – that which according to Jody Joy loads objects with agency, which otherwise would have chimed against the sheet metal scales. The attribute of audibility highlighted the movements of these women’s bodies and drew attention to the bodies themselves, while contributing to the social soundscape of Hasanlu in Period IVb. These unusual, composite artefacts drew upon the rich object biographies of each constituent element, bringing the past into the present, the far into the near, the masculine into the feminine. The abundantly entangled objects, as part of the elite women’s dress at Hasanlu, contributed to the construction and performance of a complex social identity, one with ties to the past, as well as links to a particularly northern, militarized masculinity.

The leap of imagination by which these imported armour scales were integrated into beaded, perhaps musical, dress ornaments is remarkable. Tubes and beads were found with the armour scales in every instance, but interestingly the sets of beads associated with each of these scales are not standardized, indicating that each one of these composite objects resulted from a unique and personal human-thing interaction. The scales were separated from one arena of social value with its own biography, then inserted into another existence as part of a composite personal ornament. In its new life as part of a dress ornament, the scale retained biographical associations of its earlier existence, particularly masculinity and militarism, and perhaps foreignness. We can consider these armor scale elements as having been ‘singularized’, or invested with particular, personal meaning by their owners.\textsuperscript{35} The processes of singularization allow for the conversion of this object and its integration into an entirely different, and differently gendered, type of object (Figure 10).\textsuperscript{36} As unusual as these composite ornaments are, the series of choices by which they came into being is entirely in keeping with the cultural practices at the site that privilege the collection, curation, juxtaposition and integration of objects that are deemed special – because of their age, exotic origin, or aesthetic qualities.

This addition of a singularized armour scale – an item of great social value, esteemed highly enough to be a gift for the gods – to a woman’s beaded dress ornament was an individual act, invested with rich social meaning. The visually compelling, composite ornament that linked these women across gendered and geographical space to a northern inflected, militarized masculinity, was made more prominent by the inclusion of metal tubes that more prominently by the inclusion of metal tubes that would have chimed against the sheet metal scales. The attribute of audibility highlighted the movements of these women’s bodies and drew attention to the bodies themselves, while contributing to the social soundscape of Hasanlu in Period IVb. These unusual, composite artefacts drew upon the rich object biographies of each constituent element, bringing the past into the present, the far into the near, the masculine into the feminine. The abundantly entangled objects, as part of the elite women’s dress at Hasanlu, contributed to the construction and performance of a complex social identity, one with ties to the past, as well as links to a particularly northern, militarized masculinity.

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