

Changing times and faraway places.

The beads and pendants of Canhasan I and III

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Beads and pendants can tell us much about how prehistoric people perceived themselves and also how they presented themselves to others. They can give clues to technologies and interactions that other artefacts might not reveal. The social and individual aspects of prehistoric populations are particularly important in a context where the focus has often been on the more practical elements of human life such as architecture and food procurement.

Surprisingly, preliminary results from the study of beads and pendants at a number of sites in Anatolia suggest that even at the height of periods of social change, such as the beginning of settled life and the adoption of agriculture, ornaments stayed the same. Some materials and forms remained in use consistently from the Epipalaeolithic until the Chalcolithic, a period of almost 10,000 years. The materials often originated far from the places where they were used. My previous research has already shown that materials travelled from the Mediterranean to the Konya plain area from the Epipalaeolithic onwards. It was with this thought in mind that I was prompted to look at the beads and pendants from the Neolithic site of Canhasan III and the later Chalcolithic site of Canhasan I.

As part of a larger project that aims to take a broad look at the use of personal ornamentation in prehistory, the ornaments of the Canhasan sites have been employed to add to the picture of how ornamentation practices changed between the pre-pottery Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. This timespan encompasses major social changes from nomadic to settled lifeways, and from hunter-gatherer to agricultural and pastoral food procurement; in other words, it encompasses some of the most significant social changes in human history. The position of the Canhasan sites in central Anatolia, in an area with a relatively well-known prehistoric record resulting from an illustrious background of excavation, makes their artefacts highly comparable and therefore a great addition to existing evidence. David French's excavations of the Canhasan sites in the 1960s added much to our understanding of prehistoric settlement in central Anatolia and employed, for their time, state-of-the-art excavation techniques for the recovery of high-quality excavation data (see, for example, French et al. 1972; French 2010).

The materials recovered from the excavations have been stored at Karaman Museum, and in July 2014 I was able to study them. The museum catalogue revealed 181 beads and pendants from Canhasan I and 60 from Canhasan III. Preliminary results and initial comparison with materials from other sites have revealed that the Canhasan ornaments both share common features with other contemporary sites and have their own unique characteristics. For example, the Neolithic assemblage of Canhasan III, although somewhat



Neolithic beads from Canhasan III (top) and Chalcolithic beads from Canhasan I (bottom). Included are examples of materials that originated far from the sites: shell from the Mediterranean and obsidian from Cappadocia.

limited as a result of the short period of excavation at the settlement, contains, like those from other sites, many small stone disc beads, the single unifying feature of Neolithic ornamentation practices across Anatolia. However, distinct bead types, such as a large flat bead made from conglomeritic rock to create an interesting surface pattern (see photo) and a 'seal' form which resembles those used to mark possessions in later periods, display both variety and a higher degree of technical skill. A single obsidian bead testifies to long-distance contacts, while two examples of half-finished beads tell us that manufacture was carried out at the site.

Meanwhile, the larger and more diverse assemblage of Chalcolithic Canhasan I tells a very different story. Some astonishingly complex use of mother of pearl to produce visually striking items that would have reflected light and glittered when worn (see photo) is added to the repertoire of less conspicuous items. A wide variety of stone and shell beads hints at long-distance contacts with coastal areas and faraway sources, and thus indicates how connected a Chalcolithic site in central Anatolia was with the wider world.

The study of the Canhasan artefacts in Karaman Museum, carried out with the kind support of David French, was generously funded by the Mediterranean Archaeological Trust and the British Institute at Ankara. The work was carried out with permission from the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and with the patient assistance of Ercan Er of Karaman Museum, to whom I extend my sincerest thanks.

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