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Edited by
Paolo Matthiae, Frances Pinnock, Lorenzo Nigro
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JEWELRY AS A CULTURAL MARKER IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD. THE CASE OF BASKET EARRING PENDANTS

AMIR GOLANI

ABSTRACT

Evaluation of ancient jewelry objects as cultural markers in the archaeological record may be done through a study of their stylistic origin and development along with their geographic and chronological distribution. Basket earring pendants are a distinctive form that originated in the Southern Levant during the 11th-10th centuries BC and became widespread throughout the Mediterranean at sites associated with Phoenician colonization and settlement at the end of the Iron Age II. This jewelry type may be firmly linked to the Phoenicians, suggesting that they are to be seen as a Phoenician 'cultural marker'. The regularity of these pendants suggests a distinct symbolic or cultic significance, possibly representing a scaled-down depiction of a larger object, once well-known.

In contrast to its small size, jewelry arouses a disproportionately large interest; it may amaze us by its beauty, impress us by its value and skilled manufacture, inform us about its wearer and intrigue us by its significance or hidden properties. Though the physical scale of jewelry usually relegates it to the class of 'minor arts', the importance of jewelry in the study of ancient art, materials processing and fabrication techniques, and in the understanding of the aesthetic, cultic/religious, socio-economic and political factors that led to the creation of various types of jewelry and their use should not be underestimated.

In the past as well as the present, jewelry fulfilled a variety of functions. Today, people may wear certain items not only for adornment, but also as symbols to publicize an association or identification with a cultural group or a set of beliefs. Common examples are items of jewelry such as a cross or a six-pointed 'Star of David' that are worn to express an affiliation with a religious/cultural group. Other items of jewelry may be used to indicate a social outlook, sexual preference, political creed and ethnic or cultural association, to name a few. Though these forms of symbolic advertising are not universal, they are usually readily understood messages within a wider cultural group or geographic area. Jewelry is thus used to convey information about the cultural, social, religious or ethnic affiliation of its wearer. While this is often readily apparent in our own society, can we identify similar uses of jewelry in past societies?

As for ancient jewelry, certain forms, decorative styles and techniques are often associated to specific and well-known cultures. Egyptian jewelry, for example, is

readily identifiable because of the well-known motifs, forms, colors and decorative techniques that it employed.¹

The Egyptians often depicted others wearing specific jewelry they themselves never wore, such as solid metal anklets, yet in Egyptian depictions; Canaanites/Syrians are occasionally shown with one or more metal anklets (see Fig. 1:1).² The fashion of multiple metal anklets was common from the Middle Bronze to Iron Ages in the Southern Levant, as may be seen from clay female figurines (see Fig. 1:2).³ As another example, Egyptian artists often depicted Canaanites/Syrians with rounded star or crucifix pendants (Fig. 1:3) that are also often found on Canaanite ceramic figurines (Fig. 1:4).

The Neo-Assyrians also had their own distinctive jewelry forms that are commonly depicted on their pictorial reliefs (Fig. 1:5). These show specific forms for earrings, pendants, anklets and bracelets that were worn for protection and as symbols of power and status.⁴

ASSOCIATION OF JEWELRY WITH A CULTURAL/ETHNIC GROUP

Material culture objects are often identified with a specific cultural or ethnic group, even when pictorial or iconographic sources are lacking. This is often done in distinctive groups of ceramics, such as Philistine Bichrome ware being identified with the Philistines.⁵ The naming of that culture was done with the help of historical and literary sources yet if none exist; items are often labeled under a generic term of the region or the site where they were first identified. Distinctive forms, techniques or decorations will always suggest a specific cultural affiliation, and though culturally linked items may also move around by trade, it is also their origin, concentration and manner of diffusion that may pinpoint the source and identity of the people producing and using them.

In order to associate a jewelry item to a specific cultural or ethnic group, three basic criteria should be evaluated:

1. The object should be of very specific and distinctive form, often made by a particular fabrication and decorative technique.
2. The origin and the significance of the form may also be associated or otherwise traced to a defined source area of a culture. The significance of the form may bear cultic or protective powers that may change over time yet were probably recognized in some manner by the people wearing them.
3. Lastly, such objects should have a well-defined geographic distribution

1 Cf. Wilkinson 1971; Andrews 1990.

2 Tufnell 1959.

3 E.g. Macalister 1912: Pl. 220:21; Yadin *et al.* 1961: Pl. 253:11.

4 Cf. Madhloom 1970; Maxwell-Hyslop 1971; Bedal 1992.

5 Cf. Dothan 1967.

and chronological range that coincides with settlement or trade patterns of a specific cultural or ethnic group.

In the case of jewelry, these factors may indicate a cultural marker of a specific group.

Examples of such objects that may be firmly linked to a specific culture according to these criteria are basket earring pendants. Basket earring pendants are primarily found in the later Iron Age II and are composed of a small, solid cast or hollow metal cube, with two parabolic wire handles springing crosswise from its four upper corners (Fig. 2:1-13). Many such pendants have a small pyramid of granules or a distinct protrusion underneath the handles, on top of the cube. This protrusion is often missing and in some examples, may have simply broken off. Atop the handles is a small suspension ring, hanging from another suspension ring attached to a earring hoop, usually thickened at its bottom. These pendants are often made of silver or gold, rarely of copper alloy, and are found suspended from earrings. The fact that the two handles surmount what appears to be a cubic receptacle has lent the term 'basket pendant', though other names are also used.⁶ Though found in a variety of sizes, materials and decorative schemes, the distinctive shape is readily identified among other jewelry items.

BASKET EARRING PENDANTS - ORIGINS AND PROTOTYPES

A handful of objects, all originating in the Southern Levant and dated to the late Iron Age I and early Iron Age II periods, are the earliest known examples of this specific form. Though they all lack suspension rings, their small size and specialized construction strongly suggests that they were hung as some form of pendant.

Two of these objects originate from Tel Beth Shan and were found in the Southern Temple of Ramses III. One of these (Fig. 2:1) is made of silver in the shape of a hollow lidless box that contained a scaraboid dated to the 11th-9th centuries BC.⁷ The second object (Fig. 2:2) is similar in shape and is made of a small agate cube pierced at four of its corners by copper alloy wires forming two parabolic, intersecting arches above a small protrusion.⁸ A similar object consisting of a limestone cube with a triangular bronze wire mount is known from Lachish⁹ and another from Tel Migne-Ekron (Fig. 2:3) is made of a human molar ground down on two opposing sides with four holes drilled through and the remains of copper alloy wire, possibly the handles of the 'basket', within the holes.¹⁰ An example from the tomb of Adoni-Nur near

6 Though the term 'basket pendant' is the most common, the literature also includes other names for this pendant type. The earlier terminology of 'ball and cage' (Myres 1914: 381) is more commonly supplanted by the term 'basket pendants' (e.g. Pisano 1987: 78). The French term is 'pendant en forme de boisseau' (Quillard 1979: 50). The Italian term is 'pendante a forma di cestello' (Becatti 1955: 172, n. 220).

7 Rowe 1940: Pl. 28, 73, Pls 30:47, 66A:4, for the scarab see Pl. 36:7.

8 Rowe 1940: Pl. 30:46.

9 Tufnell 1953: Pl. 67:130.

10 Golani *forthc.*

Madaba consists of a limestone cube pierced with four holes through which are passed the ends of two wire loops.¹¹ Another gold basket pendant, also in the shape of a hollow lidless box (Fig. 2:4), originates from Tell el-Farah(S).¹² Yet another object from Kadesh Barnea, a flat limestone cube with incised bands and ring and dot motif around its narrow sides and four drilled holes with remains of metal wire, is dated to the second half of the 8th century BC,¹³ yet could have also originated from earlier strata at this site.

The chronological span of these objects spans a period from the very end of the Iron I (11th century BC) and into the Iron Age II (8th century BC). As this distinctive is not known outside the Southern Levant prior to the late Iron Age I period, its origin is probably local and may be associated to the indigenous culture of the region.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF BASKET PENDANTS AND THEIR VARIANTS IN THE LATE IRON AGE II (Fig. 2:14)

Examples of basket pendants are common from the 8th-6th centuries BC at sites associated with the Phoenicians throughout the Mediterranean basin. Thus, scholars have regarded it as a purely Phoenician phenomenon.¹⁴ In the Phoenician homeland of northern Israel and the Lebanese coastal plain, a more standardized form of this pendant becomes common from the very end of the 8th- beginning of the 7th centuries BC. However, compared to the number of examples from Cyprus and the western Mediterranean (see below), only a few basket pendants dated to the late 8th-7th centuries BC are known in the Phoenician homeland.¹⁵ One silver basket pendant with a pyramid of granules on top was found at Sarafand, dated to the 8th-7th centuries BC¹⁶ and silver and copper alloy pendants, with a chronological range spanning the 8th-6th centuries BC, are known from Akhziv.¹⁷ More examples of unknown context are said to come from Syria.¹⁸

South of Phoenicia, silver basket pendants from the end of the 7th century BC have been unearthed at Tel Mique-Ekron (Fig. 2:5). Two of the basket pendants are hollow and make up a composite earring with a lotus flower attachment (Fig. 2:13), that originates from two sealed jewelry hoards.¹⁹ North of Phoenicia, two gold basket pendants found in an anthropoid sarcophagus dated to the 5th century BC are

11 Harding 1953: Pl. 5:208. Harding (1953) also describes another object with glass in place of the stone, which disintegrated. Though this tomb is dated to the 13th-11th century BC, the available parallels may suggest a more restricted range to the 11th century BC for this tomb, if not even later.

12 Petrie 1930: Pl. 39:452, Pl. 36.

13 Gera 2007: 226, Fig. 13.4:6, Pl. 13.4:6.

14 Culican 1958: 94.

15 The reason for the paucity of such pendants from Phoenicia itself is that the Phoenician culture is primarily known from excavations outside of Phoenicia.

16 Culican 1978: 138, Fig. 5.

17 Dayagi-Mendels 2002: Figs 4.4.16:1; 4.10:17.

18 Culican 1978: 138.

19 Golani 1996: 33-38, Fig. 7, 2-3; Golani, Sass 1998.

known from Tarsus²⁰ though the late date of these examples suggests that they are heirlooms.²¹

Numerous other basket pendants are found outside the Southern Levant, all at sites commonly associated with the Phoenician culture or colonization (Fig. 2:6-12).²² In the eastern Mediterranean, gold basket pendants of the 7th-6th centuries BC have been found in Cyprus, such as at Amathus²³ and at Kourion (see Fig. 2:6).²⁴ A 7th century BC basket pendant suspended from a palmette on an earring is found in the Cyprus museum²⁵ and two additional basket pendants dated 7th-5th centuries BC with a pyramid of granules on top are known from Ayios Georghios near Larnaca.²⁶ A unique silver Cypriot variant of the basket pendant consists of a solid cube with a fluted decoration surmounted by a small pyramid (Fig. 2:10). Such earrings, also possibly heirlooms, have been found at Ayios Nicolaos in Limassol dated to the 5th century BC.²⁷ Gold basket pendants have also been found in Rhodes.²⁸

In the western Mediterranean, many examples of gold and silver basket pendants are known from Phoenician sites situated along the North African coast. These include the necropolises of Carthage dated to the 7th-6th centuries BC²⁹ and from the earliest tombs at Dermech dated to the 7th-5th centuries BC.³⁰ More basket pendants in silver, many of whom also bear a pyramid of granules on top are known from graves at Les Andalouses-Lindles in Algeria, dated to the 6th century BC³¹ and from Morocco, from the region of Tangier, dated from the 7th to the very beginning of the 5th century BC, from the Phoenician cemeteries of Cape Spartel, Ain Dalhia Kebira and Djebila.³²

In Sicily, several silver basket pendants with a pyramid of granules on top are known from Motya, dated to the second half of the 7th century BC.³³ Additional Sicilian pendants in silver are known from Palermo, dated to the late 7th to early 6th century BC.³⁴

In Sardinia, numerous silver examples were found in tombs at Tharros dated to the 7th-6th centuries BC (Fig. 2:7-9).³⁵ Many of these also have a pyramid of granules or a symbolic protrusion atop the basket. An often-published variant from this site is of a pair of gold basket earrings with a pyramid of granules on top in which the basket

20 Ridder 1911: 119, nn. 658-659, Pl. 1:2.

21 Culican 1958: 94.

22 Cf. Quillard 1979: 50-54; Pisano 1987: 79.

23 Murray, Smith, Walters 1900: 110, no. 119, Pl. 14:14.

24 Cesnola 1877: Pl. 27; 1903, Pl. 23, 31-32.

25 Pierides 1971: 27, Pl. 14:6.

26 Karageorghis 1989: 793-794, Fig. 14.

27 Karageorghis 1984: 910-911, Fig. 58a.

28 Fontenay 1887: 97.

29 Quillard 1979: 9, 50-54, Pl. 8, n. 5b, Pl. 14, n. 12, Pl. 21, nn. 9-12.

30 *Ibid.*: Pl. 2, n. 2, Pl. 3, n. 2.

31 Vuillemot 1965: 271, Fig. 119.

32 Ponsich 1967.

33 Whitaker 1921: 340, Fig. 113a; Bevilacqua *et al.* 1972: 67, 70-73, Pl. 48:1, 54:4.

34 Tamburello 1968: 246.

35 Barnett, Mendleson 1987: 79 type Ic, *e.g.* Pl. 38:c. Cf. Pisano 1974.

pendant is suspended from another pendant of a falcon (Fig. 2:11).³⁶

Examples of basket pendants have been found as far west as Spain, where they are dated from the 6th-4th centuries BC. Several gold basket pendants with a pyramid of granules on top suspended from an elaborate leech-shaped earring or suspended by fine chains from a Hathor head are known from Cadiz (Fig. 1:12)³⁷ and a golden pendant is known from the site of La Fonteta, dated to the late 8th-6th centuries BC.³⁸

CHRONOLOGY

Only a handful of basket pendant prototypes dating to the late Iron Age I to early Iron Age II (11th-8th? centuries BC) are known. These pendants are later found from the 8th century BC onwards in Phoenicia and the rest of the Mediterranean basin. The paucity of examples from the early Iron Age II period is probably due to the relatively small number of earlier forms known to date; more examples may probably come to light in the future to fill in this chronological gap. These pendants are most common and have their greatest range of distribution during the main wave of Phoenician westward expansion in the 7th-6th centuries BC when they are found in Phoenicia and the Southern Levant in the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and throughout the regions affected by the Phoenician westward expansion and colonization in the 7th-5th centuries BC (Fig. 2:14). It is significant that outside the Southern Levant, these pendants have so far been found only at sites commonly associated to Phoenician settlement, thus anchoring the cultural attribution of this pendant type to the Phoenicians during the late Iron Age II period. The popularity of this pendant appears to diminish in the 6th to early 5th centuries BC. The examples from Cadiz in southern Spain, dated by the excavators to the 6th-4th centuries BC should probably be attributed to the 6th century BC. The 6th century BC cemeteries of Nora and Cagliari in Sardinia have no basket pendants and while a few early 5th century BC examples are known, such as from Tarsus, these objects may more probably be seen as heirlooms of precious metal jewelry. The development of the western Punic culture after the initial period of Phoenician westward expansion and settlement in the 7th-6th centuries BC may explain the general lack of basket pendants after the 5th century BC. By this time, the meaning or importance of this form, known primarily to the Phoenician colonists of the 7th-6th centuries BC, had been lost.

THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF BASKET PENDANTS

Most suggestions as to the significance of basket pendants are purely speculative and are expressed within their terminology, based on the common, cognitive association

36 *Ibid.*: Pl. 38:b, 84:15-16

37 Perdignes Moreno *et al.* 1990: Figs 34, 36:1, 37:2, Pls IX, XI-XII, XIV:1.

38 González Prats *et al.* 2002: Fig. 17.

that the form of the pendant raises. The term ‘ball and cage’³⁹ saw in these pendants a small object or ball (the small lump or pyramid of granules) ensconced within the parabolic wires above the cube (the cage). This term may have also been inspired by the peculiar, fluted appearance of the lower cube as a cage with bars, a form that has so far been found only among some of the Cypriot examples (see Fig. 2:10). Similarly, the term ‘basket’ defines a container with handles that holds some kind of commodity, such as a bushel of grain or a full measure of corn. This may be a symbolic depiction for successful crops or plenty as suggested by Quillard.⁴⁰ The shape of the pendant may also be seen to resemble a lantern. The pyramid of granules may be a schematic depiction of a light or flame issuing from the cubic receptacle, held and transported by the arching handles. The form of this object could also represent a receptacle for incense.⁴¹

The regularity and relatively constant design of these pendants wherever they are found, naturally suggest that they had a symbolic significance. The constant recurrence of this pendant, whether separately or with other pendants such as hawks, Hathor heads, lotus flowers and palmettes, underlines its symbolic, possibly cultic importance. Basket pendants appear to have been a miniature, even schematic, representation of another larger object that was possibly well-known. The basket with handles, often capped by a suspension ring, suggests that this object may have been portable. Since the first appearance of basket pendants in the late Iron I period is in the Southern Levant, their significance should be sought amongst the local cultural elements of the late Iron Age I period.

Five rather unique artifacts, only one of which derives from a datable stratigraphic context, may possibly illuminate the significance of basket pendants. Two of these are bronze objects from Syria (Fig. 2:15), one of which is alleged to come from the region of Beirut in Phoenicia.⁴² These show a remarkable resemblance to basket pendants, and it has been suggested that they represent portable shrines.⁴³ The best preserved of these two objects stands 14 cm high, 6 cm long and is 5.3 cm wide, while the other is partially preserved and slightly smaller, standing 9.5 cm. Both are fashioned by the ‘lost wax’ method and are composed of a hollow box, standing upon four sculpted hooves at each corner. Two arched handles rising from the corners of the box are capped by a round ring are evidence that these objects were meant to be transported or hung. One of the reliquaries has a standing figurine of a marching deity underneath the handles, while the other exhibits a bull within the box. The deity bears a high conical hat and is highly reminiscent of well-known depictions of the Canaanite gods ‘Ba’al’ or ‘Resheph’.⁴⁴ The sides of each box exhibit cultic symbols executed in relief

39 Myres 1914: 381.

40 Quillard 1979: 50.

41 Incense burners of somewhat similar shape to basket pendants are known from the Roman-Byzantine period (Zori 1992: 221).

42 Seyrig 1959.

43 Seyrig 1959: 43-48.

44 Cf. Negbi 1976; Cornelius 2004.

on the object bearing the standing god and are engraved on the one with the bull. Both objects appear to represent a portable shrine or altar bearing Canaanite and Aramean cultic iconography.⁴⁵

The third object is of unknown provenance, presently found at Leiden.⁴⁶ This item is of similar concept to the two Syrian bronzes yet is missing the arched handles. On top of the cube are found two standing deities, male and female, while the sides of the box are decorated with winged sphinxes.

The fourth object, whose present location is unknown, was allegedly found in the region of Kfar Kanna (Cana) in the lower Galilee.⁴⁷ This object consists of a cube, at the four corners of which are standing deities with slightly conical hats. The two arched handles above the cube are missing, yet may have emanated from the heads of the four deities around the cube. On top of the cube is a bronze figurine of a goddess with one arm raised, wearing a large egyptianizing crown and three horns on the forehead, similar to a 7th century BC clay head of a deity found at Horvat Qitmit.⁴⁸ The total height of this piece is about 9 cm.

Even more suggestive is the fifth object recently found in the renewed excavations at Tel Beth Shean, directed by A. Mazar of the Hebrew University and attributed to an 12th century BC stratum at the site.⁴⁹ Made of copper alloy, this object depicts a flat square platform or shallow box, from the four corners of which are depicted ropes for suspension of the platform, ending at the top in a small ring. On top of the platform is a recumbent small bull or calf. The depiction of the 'handles' as ropes clearly indicates that this is a representation of another object made of perishable materials (such as rope and possibly wood for the platform) of which no examples are known.

The suggestion that basket pendants are miniature representations of a portable shrine originally made of perishable materials now appears feasible.⁵⁰ Basket pendants

45 Krebernick, Seidl 1997: 106-109; Bennett, Keel 1998.

46 Krebernick, Seidl 1997: 106-107, Pl. 4b.

47 Seiden 1980: 110, Pl. 103:1726.

48 Beck 1995: Fig. 3.53-3.55.

49 I would like to thank the excavator, Prof. A. Mazar of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, for allowing me to cite this as yet unpublished artifact.

50 Several more objects may provide further illumination as to the origins of this intriguing shrine. A rectangular box-like ceramic object, open at the top with five schematic depictions of bull's heads modelled in clay and arranged protruding along the rim has recently been unearthed at Tell Pella in Jordan, in a context dated to the 10th century BC (Bourke 2004: 22-23, Fig. 17). Soot marks within the box indicate burning inside, apparently of incense. Though no indications of handles or any form of attachment for handles or ropes are found on this artifact, it is not inconceivable that it could have been a portable shrine of which the above mentioned examples may have represented. Other ceramic objects of similar form to the Pella artifact are known from earlier periods. At the site of Munbaqa in Northern Syria, several such rectangular ceramic boxes were found dating to the MB-LB periods. Some of these were divided into two compartments and bore a plastic decoration of a snake on the side of the box while others bore small figures of an embracing couple schematically modelled in clay and arranged protruding along the rim (Czichon, Werner 2008: Pl. 273:8684, 8685, 8687). A similar object, dated to the LB II period has recently come to light during excavations at Tell Bazi in Syria (B. Einwag pers. comm.).

are but one of the few types of jewelry objects whose origins and distribution may be firmly linked to the Phoenicians and this suggestion⁵¹ now finds additional support in their distribution pattern and chronology. The significance of this form, which is assumed to be a miniature representation of a larger object that was once well-known, may have originally been that of a portable Canaanite shrine during the 12th-10th centuries BC that was symbolically represented at the same time in small pendant form during the late Iron Age I and early Iron Age II periods. These shrines are important evidence of indigenous Canaanite religious and cultic practices. The miniaturized representation of the shrine in pendant form was adopted by the Phoenicians, who grew out of the Canaanite cultural milieu of the Iron Age I and Iron Age II period, and was worn by them as an earring pendant that was popular among them primarily during the 7th-6th centuries BC. The widespread use of this form as a pendant representing a shrine may have provided protective powers for those who wore them and may have also served as an ethnic symbol, identifying their bearer as a Phoenician.

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51 Culican 1978: 94.

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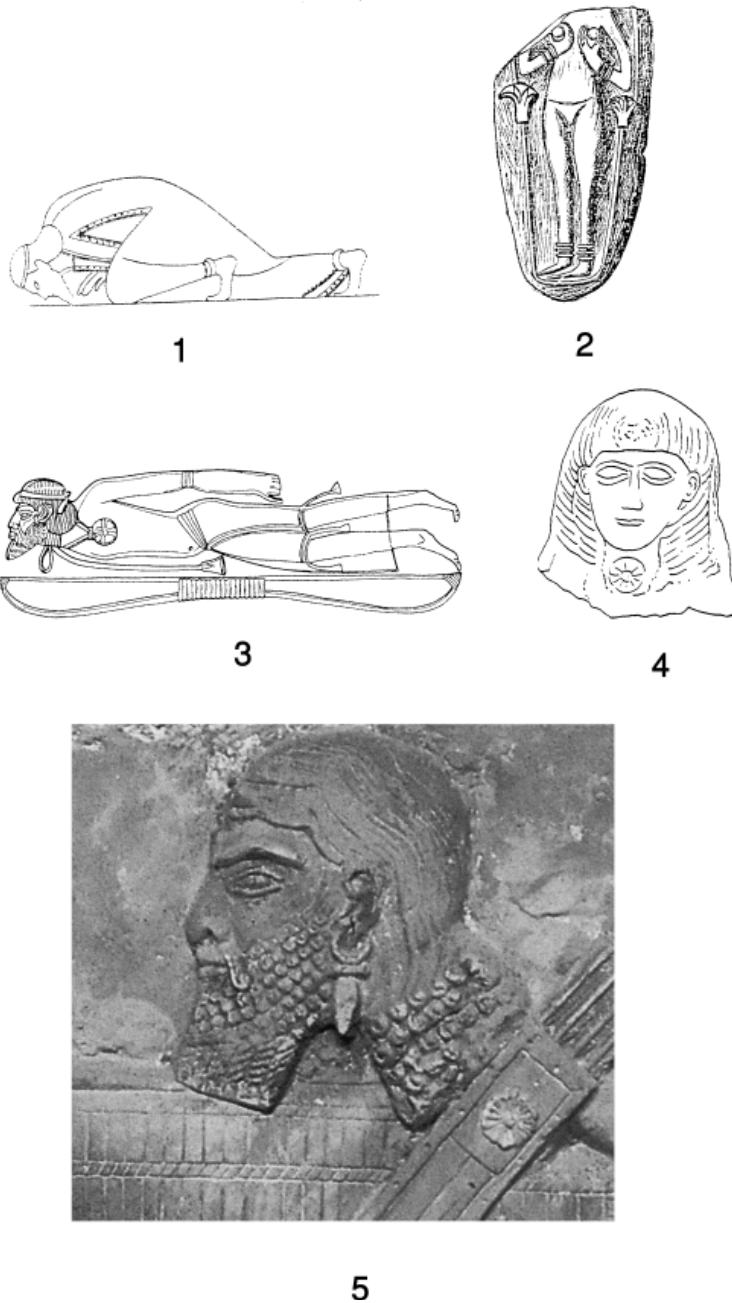


Fig. 1: Various depictions of culturally-oriented jewelry.



Fig. 2: 1-13 Basket pendants; 14 - Distribution of Basket-pendants throughout Mediterranean; 15 - Syrian bronzes.