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Mathilde Minotti. The ornaments at Tell el-Iswid (Sharqiya) from Lower Egyptian culture to Naqada culture Naqada Culture Lower Egyptian Culture. Origins 7, 7th International Conference "Origin of the State: Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt", Sep 2022, Paris, France. <hal-03795713>

HAL Id: hal-03795713

<https://hal.science/hal-03795713v1>

Submitted on 4 Oct 2022

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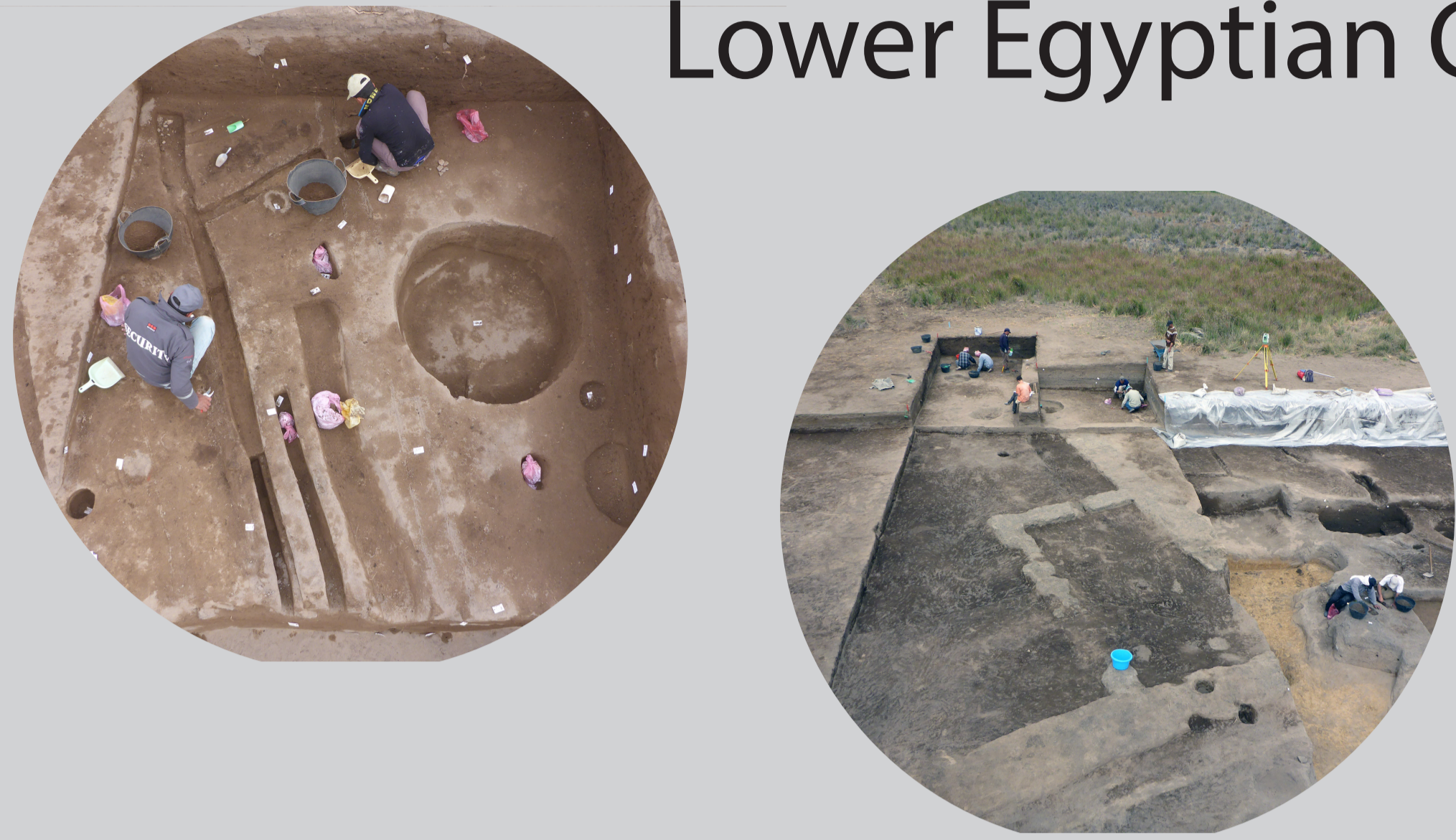
The ornaments at Tell el-Iswid (Sharqiya) from Lower Egyptian culture to Naqada culture

The analysis of ornaments can contribute in an important way to the study and identification of human groups. This question is central to better understand the nature of the "transitional phase" between the cultures of Lower and Upper Egypt during the 4th millennium BC in northern Egypt. Tell el Iswid, where the culture of the Naqada period succeed to the culture of the Buto period in the same place (sector 4), seems to be the ideal site to start an investigation on the styles and habits of body ornamentation of the two cultural entities. The aim of this poster is to see whether body adornments can provide us with arguments for the construction of a scenario for this transition. Sector 4 of Tell el Iswid is characterised by an uninterrupted succession of settlement and abandonment layers dating to the Lower Egyptian Culture period (from Buto Ib to Buto IIIa), then to Naqada III(A2)-B period. After the last house fell into disrepair, some rare burials were implanted during Naqada IIIC2-D period. The ongoing investigations already allowed us to observe real changes in the architectural techniques, in the settling modes and in the material culture of the two main phases of occupation. The settlement context is not the best for studying body ornamentation. Indeed, beads are often lost by the inhabitants and it is impossible to say what type of ornaments – bracelets, necklaces – they came from. One must focus on the typology of the beads, the raw material and the colours to compare what is comparable.

The typology of beads is based on our work in Adaima. Five main categories are identified:
A) Unshaped beads are characterised by minimal intervention on the raw material, just perforated.
B) Geometric beads have a geometric section and a centred perforation
C) Pendants have an offset perforation
D) Figurative pendants have an offset perforation and the shape of an everyday object or animals
E) Bangles are circular object with a large perforation, they can be bracelets or rings.

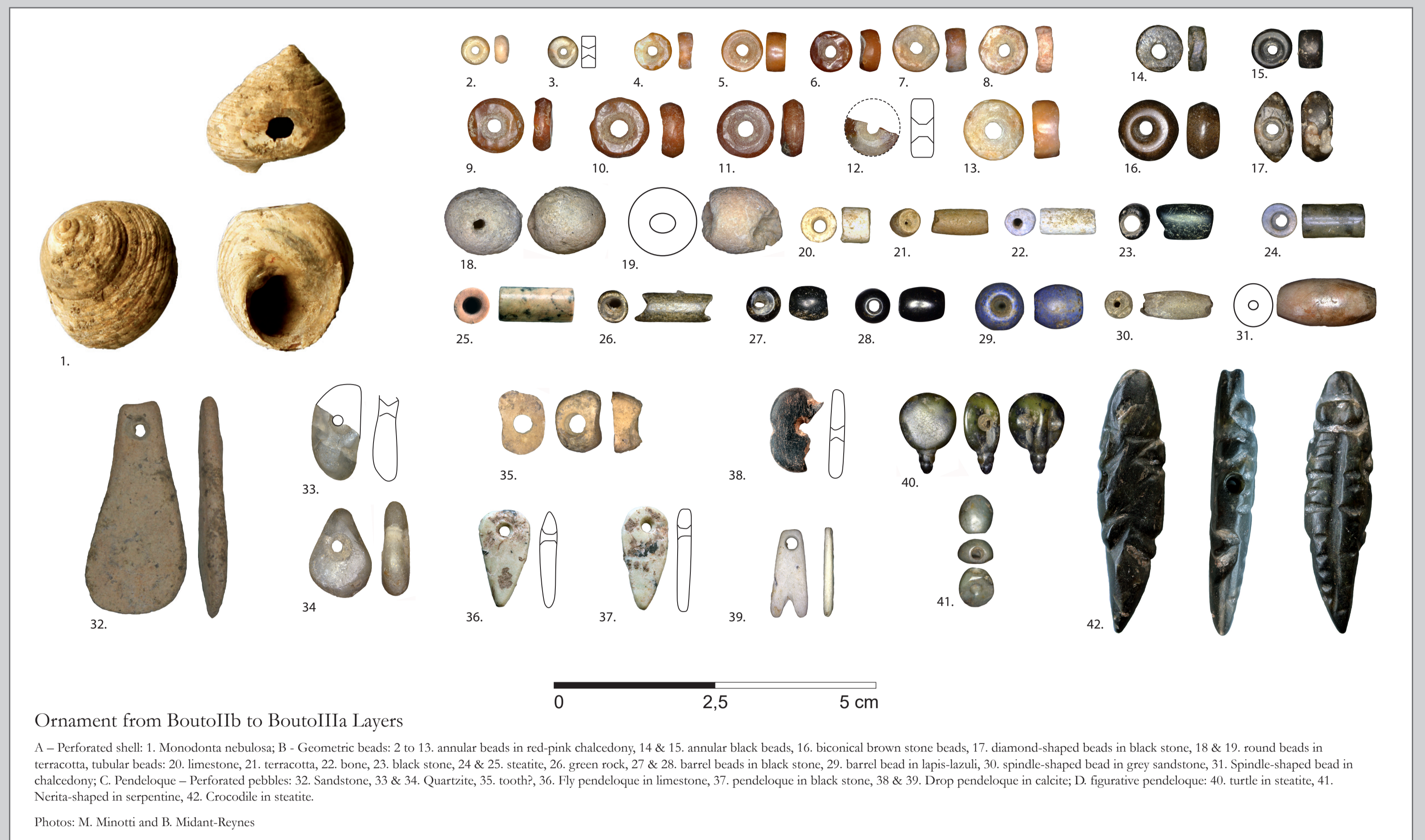
The colours and raw materials were defined visually during the fieldwork at Tell el Iswid based on our experience. These information have been entered into a database that allows quantitative data to be processed.

Lower Egyptian Culture



The excavation was mainly focused on the Buto IIb – Buto IIIa period. The occupation is first characterized by a lightweight architecture and hollow structures (trenches, posts and storage pits), then the first mud brick architecture appears at the end of Buto IIb, and finally, with Buto IIIa the lightweight architecture comes again. The exact nature of this occupation (collective or individual dwellings, specialised activity areas) is still unknown to us.

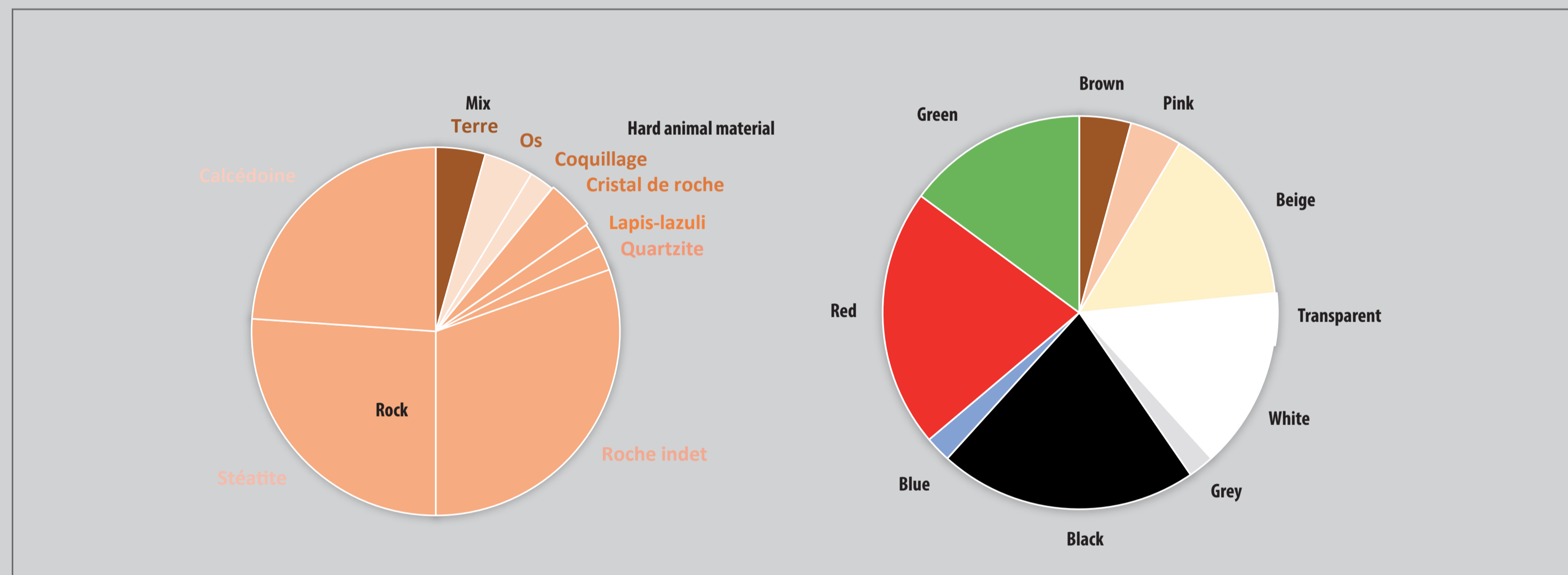
Forty-seven ornamental pieces were found in the Buto layers. One perforated shell from the Red Sea (*Mondonota nebulosa*); thirty-three geometric, annular, tubular and barrel-shaped beads made of terracotta, bone and stone; eight pendants, some of which are simple perforated pebbles of crystalline quartz or granite, one appears to be a perforated tooth, and the others are manufactured from limestone and calcite; three figurative pendants are a crocodile and a turtle in soapstone and a false *Nerita* shell in serpentine. One tubular piece in black rock is not perforated, this lack of perforation can have two interpretations: an unfinished bead or a labret (an object used to adorn the lower lip, the ears or a hole in the skin).



Ornament from BoutoIIb to BoutoIIIa Layers

A – Perforated shell: 1. *Mondonota nebulosa*; B – Geometric beads: 2 to 13. annular beads in red-pink chalcodony, 14 & 15. annular black beads, 16. biconical brown stone beads, 17. diamond-shaped beads in black stone, 18 & 19. round beads in terracotta, tubular beads: 20. limestone, 21. terracotta, 22. bone, 23. black stone, 24 & 25. steatite, 26. green rock, 27 & 28. barrel beads in black stone, 29. barrel bead in lapis-lazuli, 30. spindle-shaped bead in grey sandstone, 31. spindle-shaped bead in chalcodony; C. Pendeloque – Perforated pebbles: 32. Sandstone, 33 & 34. Quartzite, 35. tooth⁵, 36. Fly pendeloque in limestone, 37. pendeloque in black stone, 38 & 39. Drop pendeloque in calcite; D. figurative pendeloque: 40. turtle in steatite, 41. *Nerita*-shaped in serpentine, 42. Crocodile in steatite.

Photos: M. Minotti and B. Midant-Reynes



Shape

Among the unshaped beads we have one *Mondonota* shell (1.), a perforated tooth (25.) and three pebbles just perforated (32., 33., 34.). Geometric beads are represented by little annular beads (between 0,4 and 1 cm of diameter), and tubular and barrel beads (less than 1 cm diameter). The pendants have a simple elongated shape resembling a drop. A sample in limestone can be classified halfway between a pendant and a figurative one, its shape is closed to the fly pendants known in Upper Egypt. The three figurative shapes are inspired by the aquatic world: shell, crocodile and turtle. These three water figures are green, which may have a symbolic meaning of regeneration.

Colours

Light colours ranging from brown to grey to white or transparent are dominant. Red, green and black are found in the same proportion, while blue is an exceptional piece.

Raw material

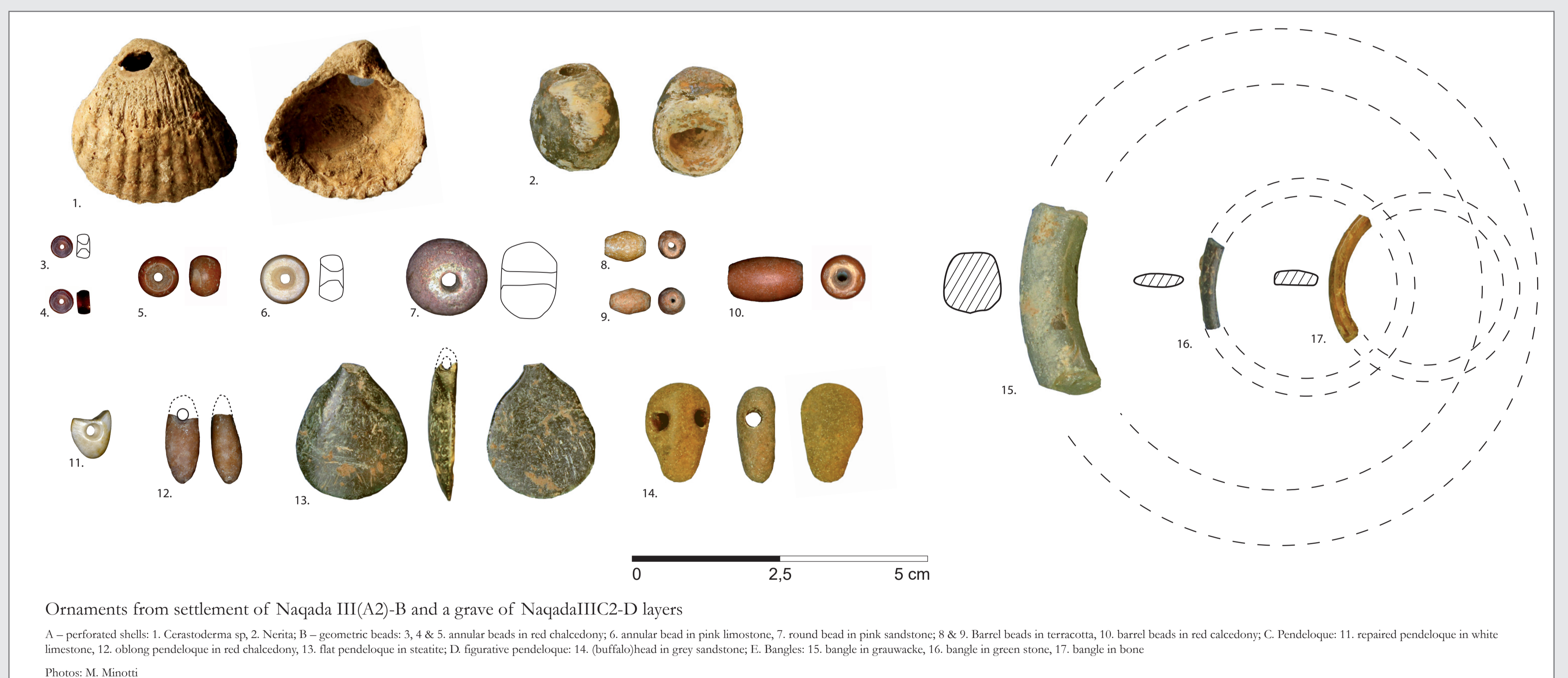
The main raw material used is stone, but some hard animal materials and clay are also used. Most of the stones may have come from the Egyptian deserts. The presence of a shell from the Red Sea is to be found on the eastern region. It is very interesting to note the presence of lapis lazuli barrel beads as they testify to long-distance exchanges and lead our gaze towards the Middle East.

Naqada Culture



In sector 4, the Naqada levels are characterised by a mud-brick dwelling which lies above the last Buto layers. This structure is reused and modified over time. At the end of the occupation, when the dwelling are in ruins, graves are dug, only one (S16) of which contained ornaments.

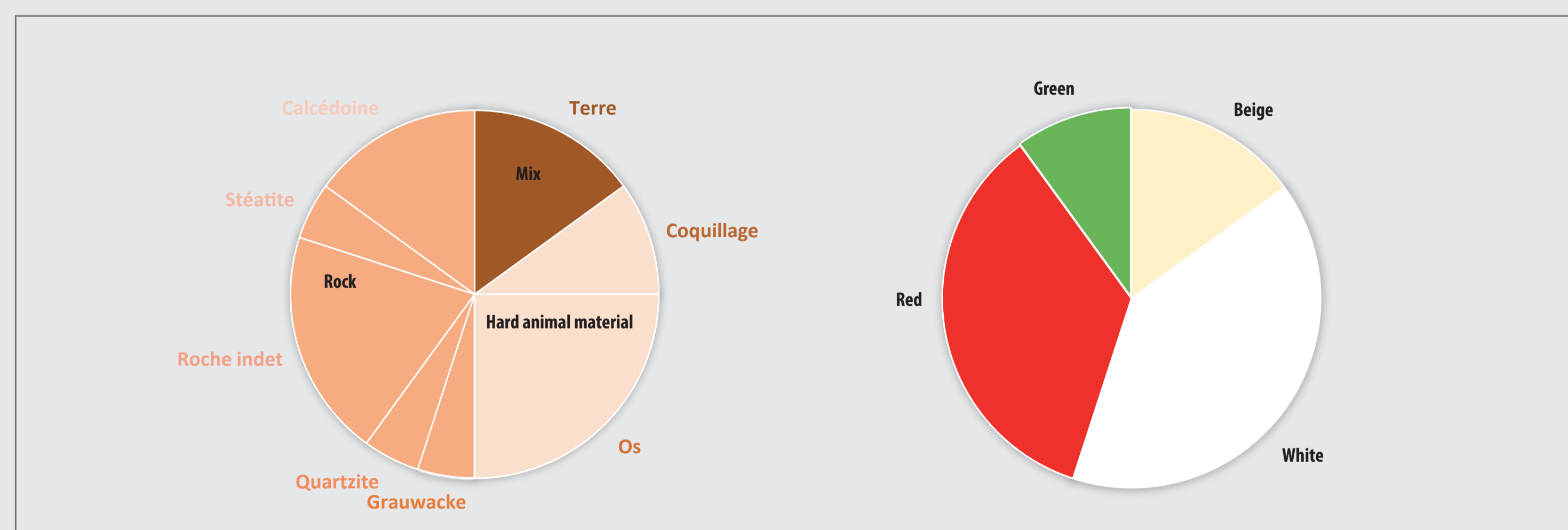
Twenty pieces of ornament were discovered in these levels. Seventeen come from the dwelling, specially from occupation levels (Naqada III(A2)-B). The sample consist of two very worn shell; two annular beads made on red chalcodony and a round bead and two barrel-beads in terracotta; and four pendants of different shapes, colours, and raw materials (two pendants are broken, and one seems to be repaired, a pendant can be considered a bull's head). The six bangles are broken and may have the interior diameter comprised between 2,6 and 7 cm. The finding context and state of preservation suggest that they were abandoned or lost during daily life. Three geometric beads (4,5 and 10) come from grave 16 dated to Naqada IIIC2-D: two annular beads and a barrel bead made on red chalcodony. The position of these beads on the body is unknown as the grave was partially destroyed by burrowing animals and the beads have been found in the sieves used to sift the sediment contained in the tomb. In contrast to the chalcodony beads from the settlement, these seem to be very little worn. The traces of manufacture are still visible, and they are only slightly polished.



Ornaments from settlement of Naqada III(A2)-B and a grave of NaqadaIIIC2-D layers

A – perforated shells: 1. *Cerastoderma* sp., 2. *Nerita*; B – geometric beads: 3, 4 & 5. annular beads in red chalcodony; 6. annular bead in pink limestone; 7. round bead in pink sandstone; 8 & 9. Barrel beads in terracotta; 10. barrel beads in red calcodony; C. Pendeloque: 11. repaired pendeloque in white limestone; 12. oblong pendeloque in red chalcodony; 13. flat pendeloque in steatite; D. figurative pendeloque: 14. (buffalo)head in grey sandstone; E. Bangles: 15. bangle in grauwacke; 16. bangle in green stone; 17. bangle in bone

Photos: M. Minotti



Shape

The unshaped beads are represented by a *Nerita* shell (1) and a *Cerastoderma* shell (2), both perforated on the apex, and two perforated pebbles (11., 12.). Among the geometric beads we have four stone annular beads (3.- 6.), one round bead (7.) and three barrel beads (8 – 10.). There is only one pendant shaped in a flat-round form. A figurative pendant seems to represent a head where perforation figure the eyes, and may be a simplified bull's head. Six fragments of bangles have square or flat section (only three are in the picture 15-17).

Colour

Only a few colours are used, white/beige being the most common, then red is common, and green is more rarely used.

Raw material

Half of the ornaments are manufactured in stone, which may have come from anywhere in the Egyptian desert. Only for the grauwacke we know that it could come from Wadi Hammamat. Three bangles are made of bone. The shells come from different places, one comes from the Mediterranean Sea (*Nerita*) and one from the Red Sea (*Cerastoderma*). Two-barrel beads are in terracotta.

Remarkable differences on the ornamental choices have been noted between the two periods of occupation. This is especially visible in the choice of colors, raw materials, shells and figurative elements, and in the shapes of the pendants.

The quantitative difference between the two phases is essentially related to a methodological difference. The LEC levels were systematically sieved, which was not the case for the Naqada levels (with the exception of the tomb). Thus, we notice more small elements in the LEC levels, beads from there have a diameter of 0,7 cm on average and the Naqada level beads have a diameter of 1 cm on average.

In the choice of material we have points in common since in both phases the use of stone prevails. Red chalcodony is particularly used for geometric beads but the proportion changes between the two periods. This result can also be attributed to the sieving problem, since it is essentially small beads that are made with this stone. The study of raw materials allowed us to see that in both phases the territories of acquisition are different. The LEC raw materials seem to be limited to the east (Red Sea, Eastern Desert, and lapis lazuli from Afghanistan). The Naqada raw materials come from a large but local area (Mediterranean Sea, Eastern Desert up to the Wadi Hammamat and Red Sea). The colors are different, more varied for the LEC phases and a prevalence of light colors for the Naqadan phases.

The biggest difference is in the choice of shapes: bangles are completely absent in the LEC levels and the shells are not the same, although they sometimes come from the same region. The inspirations for the figurative motifs also seem to draw on two very different worlds. The aquatic world with the crocodile, turtle, and shell in green stone VS the terrestrial world with the bull's head in brown stone. It is interesting to note that the fly pendant is known from the sites of Armant and Nagada (Ashmolean Museum), whereas for the moment we have not found any from the LEC sites, with the exception of that of Tell el-Iswid. A sign that the exchange of ideas and forms may already be present.

A comparison database was made to inventory the ornaments found in the tombs of Kom el Khilgan and Minshat abou Omar. These two sites, also located in the eastern Delta, present the interest of covering the same periods of occupation as Tell el Iswid: from the first phases of the Lower Egyptian culture (Buto Ib) to the Naqadan period (Naqada IIIC-D). The second interest of these sites is that they present ornaments in a funerary context. The latter are therefore more numerous, and we have better information on their original location and consequently on their function: necklace, bracelet, headband, etc. These funerary contexts are therefore an important source of complementary information to get more insight on what the "style" of the different communities was.