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CULTURAL FUSION IN LATE BRONZE AGE GOLDWORK: DIADEMS AND MOUTH-PIECES FROM HALA SULTAN TEKKE, CYPRUS

Summary. This study investigates recently discovered gold diadems and mouth-pieces from seven chamber tombs and one shaft tomb at the Late Bronze Age cemetery of Hala Sultan Tekke, dating from the fifteenth to the thirteenth centuries BC. The chamber tombs, all containing multi-generational burials, yielded a variety of ornaments, which are analysed in terms of typology, patterns of use, and their associations with age and sex. The results indicate local Cypriot production that integrates Minoan, Mycenaean, Egyptian, and Near Eastern influences while maintaining a distinct regional style. These findings offer new insights into craftsmanship, intercultural exchange, and mortuary practices in the eastern Mediterranean during a period marked by intense connectivity and cultural interaction.

INTRODUCTION

The ancient city of Hala Sultan Tekke thrived from the end of the Middle Bronze Age through most of the Late Bronze Age, approximately 1630 to 1150 BC (Fischer 2023). Situated on the south-eastern coast of Cyprus, west-south-west of the Larnaca Salt Lake near Larnaca Airport, the city occupied a strategic location (Fig. 1). The present-day salt lake, now isolated from the open sea due to tectonic uplift, was once a sheltered Mediterranean bay (Dalongeville *et al.* 2000). During the Late Bronze Age, this natural harbour served as one of the island's most accessible ports, playing a crucial role in facilitating long-distance trade.

The current archaeological project, led by the author, commenced in 2010. Geophysical surveys employing magnetometers and ground-penetrating radar have identified numerous subsurface structures across an area of approximately 25 hectares (Fischer and Bürge 2018, 603–19). Excavations conducted between 2010 and 2019 focused primarily on the urban centre (City Quarters 1–4). Beyond the main settlement, trial excavations initiated in 2014 in Area A, located just east of the city (e.g. Fischer and Satraki 2014; Fischer and Bürge 2017), have continued through to 2025. These investigations have revealed multiple-burial tombs, primarily chamber tombs, along with associated offering pits. The absence of architectural remains in Area A suggests that it functioned as an extra-mural cemetery – a noteworthy distinction, as Late Bronze Age



FIGURE 1

Location of Hala Sultan Tekke on Cyprus, with a drone overview depicting City Quarters 1–4 and Area A (the cemetery). The Larnaca Salt Lake lies to the north, and the Mediterranean sea is to the east. (Photograph and map by Teresa Bürge and Peter M. Fischer).

Cypriot burials were more commonly intra-urban (Fischer 2023, 95). Artefacts recovered from the stratified tombs, which contain successive interments spanning several generations, contribute a complementary chronological framework that refines the stratigraphy of the settlement. The generally poor preservation of the human remains should be noted, a condition that is certainly a consequence of the saline groundwater and marine aerosol infiltration at Hala Sultan Tekke resulting from the site's proximity to the Mediterranean (cf. Kost and Stoll 2023).

Hala Sultan Tekke's cosmopolitan nature is reflected in the extensive array of imported goods, underscoring the city's economic and cultural prominence from the fifteenth to the twelfth centuries BC, corresponding to Late Cypriot IIA(–B) to IIC¹ (Fischer 2023; for the comparative chronology of Late Cypriot (LC), Late Helladic (LH), Late Minoan (LM), and the Egyptian, Anatolian and Levantine chronologies used in this paper, see Table 1). During this period, large-scale copper production took place in urban workshops, as evidenced by furnaces and substantial quantities of copper slag and ore. Additionally, the city produced purple-dyed textiles and pottery. These and other commodities were exchanged for luxury goods such as gold, silver,

¹ There are, however, occasional finds from the end of the Middle Cypriot period and LC I corresponding to the end of the seventeenth and the sixteenth centuries BC (cf. the chronology of Åström and Åström 1972, 700).

TABLE 1

Comparative chronology. The division of the periods is floating, and the absolute dates are rounded up or down to fit, approximately, the periodization of the listed cultures in a single table (cf. Fischer 2023, table 1)

Late Cypriot	Late Helladic	Late Minoan	Egypt	Anatolia	Levant	Approx. Dates BC
IA1–2	I	IA	Hyksos	Old Hittite	MB III	1630–1560
IB	IIA	IB	18th Dyn.	Old Hittite (Middle Hittite)	LB IA	1560–1450
IIA(–B)	IIB	II	18th Dyn.	Middle Hittite	LBA IB	1450–1400
II(A–)B	IIIA1–2	IIIA1–2	18th Dyn.	Imperial Hittite	LBA IIA	1400–1300
IIC1–2	IIIB1–2	IIIB	19th Dyn.	Imperial Hittite	LBA IIB	1300–1200
IIIA1–2	IIIC	IIIC	20th Dyn.	Neo-Hittite I	Iron Age IA	1200–1100

lead, ivory, precious stones, faience, glass, and high-quality ceramics, either directly or through intermediaries.

A significant proportion of the imported materials, including several hundred ceramic vessels, originated from the Aegean, particularly from mainland Greece and Crete (for stylistic and archaeometric analyses, see e.g. Fischer 2023; 2024; Fischer and Feldbacher 2025). Among the numerous imports from Egypt are gold jewellery, scarabs, faience and glass objects, and calcite vessels (e.g. Fischer and Bürge 2017, 178, fig. 12; 2022, 27, fig. 10; 2023, 35, fig. 32; Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 30, fig. 15). Anatolia provided pottery including many vessels of Red Lustrous Wheel-made ware, such as spindle bottles, lentoid flasks, kraters, and bowls (examples in Fischer and Bürge 2023, 35, fig. 31), and objects of silver (see e.g. the pendant depicting an Anatolian deity, N516 in Fig. 7). Levantine imports were restricted mainly to pottery and cylinder seals (for the latter e.g. Bürge and Dybkjaer in Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 46–51). More distant connections are attested by imports from Mesopotamia, including a large faience flask (N1143 in Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 14, fig. 5) and a haematite cylinder seal with a cuneiform inscription (N383 in Fischer and Bürge 2022, 24, fig. 9), while black burnished hand-made pottery derived from the Nuragic culture of Sardinia (Gradoli *et al.* 2020). Lapis lazuli arrived from Afghanistan, carnelian from India, and amber from the Baltic (Fischer 2023 and references).

The aim of this study is multifaceted. It seeks to present and discuss a collection of gold diadems and mouth-pieces recovered from the cemetery at Hala Sultan Tekke, placing particular emphasis on their documentation and interpretation. The research further explores the archaeological contexts of these objects, based on data from the Swedish excavation project conducted between 2016 and 2024. Through stylistic and technological analyses, the study investigates questions of provenance, production techniques, and usage. Finally, it considers the cultural hybridity expressed through these ornaments, highlighting their significance within interaction and exchange in the Mediterranean world of the Late Bronze Age.

DEFINITION

In the literature, gold facial ornaments are referred to by various terms, typically as strips or bands, and more specifically as headbands, frontlets, diadems, or mouth-pieces (e.g. Graziadio 2013). However, the terminology remains fluid, with similar objects sometimes classified as both diadems and mouth-pieces. In this study, these items are defined as follows (for dimensions

GOLDWORK FROM HALA SULTAN TEKKE

TABLE 2
Diadems and mouth-pieces from Hala Sultan Tekke: dimensions, weights and attributions

Find no.	Identification	Tomb	Locus	Length cm	Width cm	Thickness cm	Weight g	Attribution	Age
Diadems									
N1056	Bull	XX	402	34.2	3.8	0.006–0.007	11.70	female	35–40
N1205	Ibex-Feline	XX	406	20.8	4.3	0.017–0.018	23.14	?	adult
N1193	Double-spiral I	XX	405	15.2	2.3	0.005–0.006	2.52	?	adult
N845	Rosette	YY	475	24.4	4.3	0.009–0.010	14.24	male	40–49
N512	Double-spiral II	RR	105	15.1	2.1	0.005–0.006	2.49	child	4–5
N1472	Double-spiral III	ABW	580	16.1	2.1	0.005–0.006	2.47	possible female	15–17
N69	Cross-hatched	X	48	10.0	1.3	0.005–0.006	1.02	?	?
N137	Plain I	LL	99	14.3	1.0	0.006–0.007	1.03	?	?
N740	Plain II	UU	304	13.0	2.5	0.006–0.007	2.66	?	?
Mouth-pieces									
N882	Plain I	VV	454	7.2	2.8	0.006–0.007	1.60	?	?
N1208	Plain II	XX	406	9.5	4.2	0.009–0.010	4.88	?	adult

and weights, see Table 2): diadems are relatively long adornments, too lengthy to cover only the mouth, and were worn on the forehead by both the living and the dead (discussed below). Mouth-pieces, which are shorter than diadems, served exclusively as funerary objects, placed over the mouth as part of mortuary practices (all in Fig. 2). These functions have been confirmed by various burial contexts (see below).

THE TOMBS AND THE ORNAMENTS

*Chamber Tomb XX:*² Bull diadem N1056, Ibex-feline diadem N1205, Double-spiral I diadem N1193, and Plain I mouth-piece N1208

The two chambers of this tomb measure 4.40 m north-south by 3.0 m west-east, forming a figure-8 shape (Fischer and Feldbacher 2024, 24–42). It contained the remains of 29 individuals – 12 adults and 17 non-adults – buried in four successive layers: Layers 1, 2/1, 2/2, and 3, with Layer 3 being the oldest (Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 16–34). The accompanying mortuary assemblage comprises 299 virtually complete objects made of fired clay (including local and imported figurines), faience, glass, gold, silver, bronze (including a cylinder seal), lead, amber, carnelian, turquoise, and ivory (including an Egyptian scarab), making it the wealthiest tomb discovered to date in terms of artistic quality, material value and the quantity of both locally produced and imported goods. The mortuary goods suggests that the tomb was in use from LC II(A)–B to LC IIC1, viz. from the second half of the fourteenth to the early thirteenth centuries BC.

² For this and all other tombs: in accordance with the directives of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus, no topographic plans or coordinates of the features are provided.

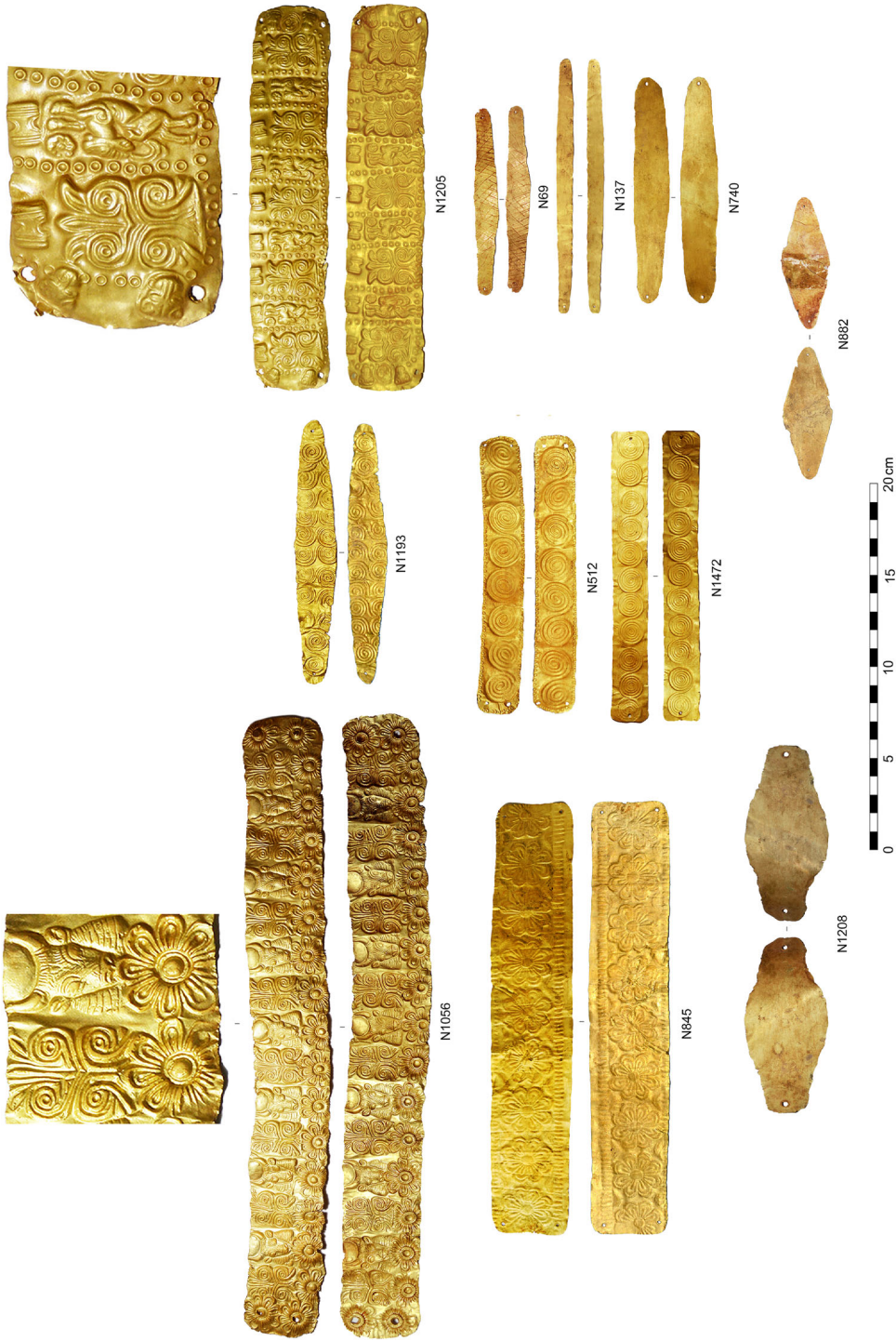


FIGURE 2
Diadems and mouth-pieces from Hala Sultan Tekke excavated between 2016 and 2024. (Photographs by Rainer Feldbacher and Peter M. Fischer).

BULL DIADEM N1056

This diadem, at 34.2 cm the longest in Hala Sultan Tekke identified to date (Figs. 2, 3), is associated with Cranium B in Layer 2/1 of the northern chamber (Fischer and Feldbacher 2024, 60–3; 2025, 16–34).³ The cranium was uncovered in an upright position facing north. Cranium B, along with the post-cranial bones, was partially displaced from its original location during the interment of individuals in the most recent burials (Layer 1). It has been attributed to a 35–40-year-old female exhibiting ante-mortem tooth loss and a periapical abscess but no other pathological conditions.

Selected artefacts associated with this female are shown in Fig. 3. These include locally produced White Slip II (mature to late) bowls and Base-ring I pottery. Among the Mycenaean imports are a mug and a Psi-type figurine, while an Egyptian faience bowl – adorned with the image of the deity Hathor who is depicted as a cow in a marsh environment with papyrus and a pond with fishes – represents an Egyptian import (cf. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1982, 142–4). Also significant among other bronze objects is a slightly curved bronze knife with an ivory handle. The knife belongs to a group of objects known in the literature as ‘Siána knives’, which were produced in the Aegean (e.g. Roháček 2018).

Iconography

The bull motif is depicted seven times in a naturalistic, en-face pose. Between its curved horns appears a sun disk-like object, while a striated wig extends on either side of the bull’s head, widening toward the muzzle – a characteristic Egyptian trait (e.g. Wegner 2002, 187–204). Composite floral motifs border the bull depictions eight times. These motifs combine palm and other floral elements found on painted Mycenaean pottery (Furumark 1972, 276–98; from Hala Sultan Tekke e.g. the palm motif in Fischer and Feldbacher 2024, 36, fig. 16, N805). A rosette with eight petals occurs 19 times, primarily in the lower portion of the diadem, and two pairs of these rosettes are located at either end, pierced from the reverse side. These rosettes occur in large numbers on items from Mycenaean tombs (e.g. Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985).

IBEX-FELINE DIADEM N1205

This diadem, weighing 23.14 g, is the heaviest identified in the current project (Figs. 2, 4). It was recovered from the southern chamber of Chamber Tomb XX in Layer 2/2 connected to Cranium H (Fischer and Feldbacher 2024, 60–3; 2025, 16–34). The cranium, found in a face-up orientation with its head pointing south, is attributed to an adult; however, the individual’s gender remains indeterminate due to the fragmented condition of the remains.

Artefacts associated with this individual include locally produced pottery – namely, Base-ring I and II, White Slip II, and Monochrome – as well as imported items of Minoan, Mycenaean, and Egyptian provenance (selected finds are illustrated in Fig. 4).

³ The bioarchaeological investigations were undertaken by K. Lorentz and Y. Miyauchi.



FIGURE 3

The Bull diadem N1056 from Chamber Tomb XX and its context. (Photographs by P.M. Fischer); the gold-plated wooden box (inv. no. HNAM Π 808-811): Photographic Archive of the Hellenic National Archaeological Museum, Athens; ©Hellenic Ministry of Culture – Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.R.E.D).



FIGURE 4

The Ibx-feline diadem N1205 and the mouth-piece from Tomb XX and their context. (Photographs by P.M. Fischer).

Iconography

The diadem features nine hourglass-shaped motifs, each characterized by a pair of three prominent lines at either end. Four ibexes, depicted in a dynamic running pose with large, curved horns, are positioned alongside a rosette in front of each. A composite motif, integrating palm and floral elements, appears five times, forming a border around the four ibexes. At both ends of the diadem, the heads of four felines frame the composition. A single spiral, embossed between the second pair of felines on the right end, appears incompatible within the overall design and may reflect artistic freedom.

DOUBLE-SPIRAL I DIADEM N1193

This diadem was discovered in the southern part of the southern chamber of Chamber Tomb XX in Layer 2/2 (Figs. 2, 5). The association of this small diadem with a specific individual is tentative because this individual and the associated mortuary goods were moved to make space for more recent burials. However, the diadem was found close to the fragmented Cranium L, which faces west. Cranium L belongs to an adult of indeterminate sex, which could not be determined due to the specimen's fragmented state.

Other mortuary goods surrounding Cranium L include Cypriot-produced pottery of Base-ring I and II, White Slip II, Buccherio and White Shaved. There are also decorated discs of ivory (Fig. 5).

Iconography

The double spiral motif appears in both vertical and horizontal orientations, and in some instances, the spirals overlap. This design is a common element on Mycenaean pottery (FM 47), closely related to the running spiral motif (FM 46; Furumark 1972, 352–9).

PLAIN I MOUTH-PIECE N1208

The mouth-piece was found in Layer 2/2, in the same stratigraphical context as the Ibex-feline diadem (N1205), which is located 0.3 m to the south-east (Figs. 2, 4). Both the mouth-piece and the diadem are associated with the fragmented Cranium H (see N1205 above).

Chamber Tomb YY: Rosette diadem N845

This small chamber tomb is also figure-8 shaped (Fischer and Feldbacher 2024, 39–46; 2025, 34–43). It measures 3.70 m north-south and 2.40 m west-east. It is positioned just to the north of Chamber Tombs VV (see below) and XX. There are two distinct burial layers (Layers 1 and 2, Layer 1 being the most recent). The most recent entombments include individuals who were found in articulated positions. The minimum number of individuals in Chamber Tomb YY is 17. Eight are adults, four are of indeterminate age, and five are non-adults. Personal belongings and mortuary gifts are presented by 135 objects of fired clay (including a Mycenaean figurine), faience, gold, bronze, amber, carnelian, ivory, and a cylinder seal, most of them intact or complete. The finds,



FIGURE 5

The Double-spiral I Diadem N1193 from Chamber Tomb XX and its context. (Photographs by P.M. Fischer).

dated mainly according to the Mycenaean pottery, suggest that the tomb was in use from the second quarter of the fourteenth to the transition to the thirteenth century BC.

The diadem, apparently the most worn of the examples presented here, was associated with the articulated Individual A from Layer 1 (Figs. 2, 6; find position indicated with by a red arrow in



FIGURE 6

The Rosette diadem N845 from Chamber Tomb YY and its context, including in situ photographs. (Photographs by P.M. Fischer).

Fig. 6). The individual was found in an extended supine position orientated west–east with the head in the west. It is a 40–49 years-old male with ante mortem tooth loss, but no other evident pathologies.

According to the stratigraphical evidence, the pottery associated with Individual A includes Base-ring II bowls, juglets, and jugs; Plain White Wheel-made jugs; and a broken, heavily corroded and large Mycenaean krater, designated the ‘Charging Horse Krater’ (N941 in Fig. 6; see also Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 34–6). Additional mortuary goods may also belong to this individual (selected finds shown in Fig. 6).

Iconography

A rosette with eight petals occurs nine times (concerning the rosettes from e.g. Mycenaean tombs, see N1056 above; Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985).

Chamber Tomb RR: Double-spiral II diadem N512

The double-chamber tomb exhibits a roughly figure-8 shape, extending 3.5 m from west to east and 2.3 m from north to south. Excavated over four seasons (2018–2021), the tomb yielded a minimum number of 34 individuals, including 17 non-adults, making this the most densely populated tomb within the project (see a summary and further references in Fischer 2024, 76–80). The deceased and their mortuary goods are distributed across five well-defined stratigraphical layers (Layers 1–5, with Layer 1 being the most recent). These layers comprise artefacts of fired clay (including four bird-faced female figurines), gold, silver, bronze, faience, carnelian, various minerals (including several cylinder seals), and ivory. Although many items were recovered within distinct layers, some were displaced during later entombments. Radiocarbon and the pottery sequences indicate that the earliest contexts date to approximately 1350 BC, while the most recent burials date to the beginning of the thirteenth century BC.

The gold diadem is associated with Individual 73 (preliminary identification number retained) from Layer 5 of the western chamber, dated to approximately 1350 BC (Figs. 2, 7). The skeleton, though poorly preserved with paper-thin cranial bones, was fully articulated, with all body parts present and the cranium oriented southward. Despite the overall fragility, the dentition was well preserved, with many teeth remaining in situ within the jaws. Dental calcification indicates an estimated age at death of 4–5 years, a finding further supported by the degree of postcranial bone fusion. Preliminary analyses revealed no skeletal pathologies.

The diadem remained in situ on the child’s forehead (Fig. 7). Additional mortuary goods associated with this individual include a necklace composed of 68 gold beads and four gold earrings located near the cranium, which were likely attached to the ears in pairs. This interpretation is supported by several bird-faced female figurines from the same tomb, which all display two perforations in each ear for the attachment of four earrings (see the marked square in Fig. 7, lower right, showing N427, one of the four figurines; Fischer and Bürge 2022, 19–21, fig. 7). Other associated items include a silver figurine-pendant depicting an Anatolian deity (N516), a silver ring featuring a triple spiral motif, a Base-Ring I lentoid flask, a White Shaved juglet, and a cylinder seal (N531) of Cypriot style carved from chlorite (Fischer and Bürge 2022, 25).

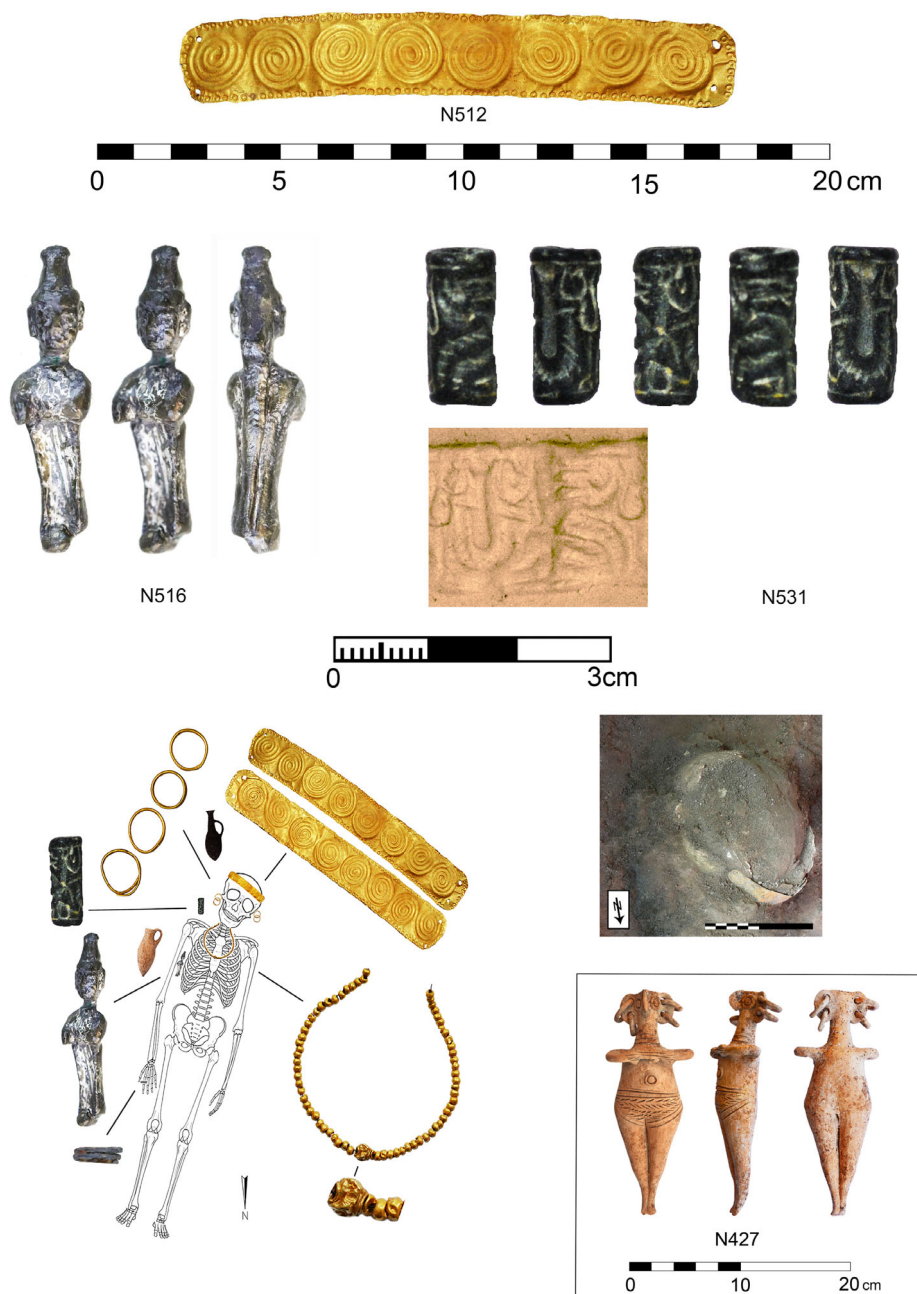


FIGURE 7

The Double-spiral II diadem N512 from Chamber Tomb RR and its context, including an in situ photograph and reconstruction of its context. (Photographs and reconstruction by P.M. Fischer).

Iconography

See the discussion on the double-spiral motif above (N1193).

Chamber Tomb AB West: Double-spiral III diadem N1472

The tomb consists of two connected double-chambers (Chamber Tomb AB East and West), each with a figure-8 shape (Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 51–9). These chambers are linked by a horizontal dromos 2 m long and 1 m wide, which is accessed from the surface via a short vertical dromos above its centre. Chamber Tomb AB West measures 3.6 m north-south by 2.7 m east-west. It contained 71 artefacts (with 92 from Chamber Tomb AB East). The artefacts from both tombs comprise both locally produced pottery and imported wares – including Minoan/Mycenaean and Anatolian vessels, a rare local figurine of a seated individual (Darwin and Fischer in Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 54–9), and a Mycenaean figurine. Egyptian imports of calcite and glass have also been identified. The finds, dated primarily based on the Mycenaean pottery, suggest a date in the second half of the fourteenth century BC.

The diadem (Figs. 2, 8) is associated with Individual A, a 15–17-year-old possible female. The skeleton was found in an articulated position with the cranium facing north. The diadem was discovered near the cranium, having apparently fallen from its original placement. The most significant locally produced ceramics associated with this individual include Base-ring I, mature White Slip II, and Plain White Wheel-made ware. An Egyptian import is a calcite juglet (N1471). Additional finds include a plain (elephant) ivory distaff (N1490) and a silver ring on the right foot (index toe and ring marked with a red arrow in Fig. 8 lower left).

Iconography

See the discussion on the double-spiral motif above (N1193, N512).

Chamber Tomb X: Cross-hatched diadem N69

The tomb exhibits a figure-8 shape (Fischer and Bürge 2017, 165–95). The two chambers are oriented along an east-west axis, with overall dimensions of 3.75 m by 2.5 m. A centrally positioned, circular vertical dromos of one-metre diameter provided access to the chambers. The disarray of the human remains – comprising 17 individuals (8 juveniles and 9 adults) – suggests that the tomb was reused for multiple interments. It was not possible to associate the diadem with a specific individual. The accompanying mortuary assemblage consists of 109 objects made of fired clay, faience, gold, bronze, amber, carnelian, and ivory. Pottery sequences and radiocarbon dates provide robust evidence for prolonged use of the tomb, spanning from the sixteenth to the thirteenth centuries BC.

Although the burial sequence could not be fully reconstructed, numerous undisturbed or only slightly displaced individuals along the tomb's periphery enabled the development of a stratigraphical model. This divides the burial sequence into three periods (Periods 1–3, with Period 3 being the most recent), each associated with a distinct array of mortuary goods (see Fig. 9). The diadem was recovered from Period 2 – dated to approximately 1450 BC to the beginning of the thirteenth century BC.



Chamber Tomb AB West, Individual A

FIGURE 8

The Double-spiral III diadem N1472 from Chamber Tomb AB West and its context, including in situ photographs. (Photographs by P.M. Fischer).

Iconography

Cross-hatched incisions are common on a variety of objects from multiple cultures, for instance, on Mycenaean pottery (FM 57; Furumark 1972, 383) and Levantine diadems (Goring 1983, 129–30).



FIGURE 9

The Cross-hatched diadem N69 from Period 2 of Chamber Tomb X and its context, with illustrations of the contexts of the preceding Period 1 and subsequent Period 3. (Photographs by P.M. Fischer, drawings by Teresa Bürge).

Shaft Tomb LL: Plain diadem I N137

The tomb is a rectangular shaft oriented along an east-west axis, measuring 2 m in length and 1 m in width (Fischer and Bürge 2018, 53–8). It contained secondary burials, indicating that the human remains were transported from another location before interment. It remains uncertain whether these burials occurred during a single event or over multiple occasions. No articulated skeletons were present, but numerous disarticulated bones and teeth were discovered. Several skeletal elements – particularly teeth – exhibited discoloration suggestive of fire exposure, with affected enamel displaying cracking and partial detachment from the underlying dentine (Fischer and Bürge 2018, 57, fig. 24). Additionally, traces of soot were observed on some bones, though not universally.

The minimum number of individuals interred in the tomb is estimated at nine, comprising five infants or juveniles and four adults. The burial goods consist of 50 relatively complete objects made of fired clay, bronze, silver, faience, gold, amethyst, haematite, and other minerals. Based on the associated finds the tomb is dated to approximately 1450–1350 BC (Fig. 10, upper). If the burials represent a single phase of interment, a date around 1400 BC is suggested.

The diadem (Figs. 2, 10) was discovered just above the bottom of the tomb, adjacent to a partially preserved cranium of indeterminate sex and age.

Chamber Tomb UU: Plain diadem II N740

Directly beneath the colluvial soil, the contents of a partially disturbed, large chamber tomb were uncovered (Fischer and Bürge 2023, 23–38). The tomb consists of a single chamber measuring approximately 3.5 m by 3.0 m. A dromos to the east – measuring 1.5–2 m in width and approximately 6.5 m in length – provides access to the chamber. The uppermost mortuary goods and human skeletal remains were located just 0.25 m below the present surface and were impacted by modern activities.

In addition to three partially articulated individuals, the tomb contained numerous disarticulated human bones intermingled with complete, mostly intact objects. Bioarchaeological analysis has identified a minimum of 19 individuals, comprising 15 adults and four sub-adults. The accompanying mortuary assemblage comprises a total of 140 objects made of clay, gold, silver, bronze, faience, and various minerals. Analysis of both local and imported pottery dates the tomb to the fourteenth century BC, with a more precise estimation suggesting its use around or within a few decades after 1350 BC.

The tomb's contexts were divided into four layers (Layers 1–4, with Layer 1 being the most recent). This stratigraphical division was based not only on observable stratigraphy but also on elevation levels, rendering the distinction between layers somewhat arbitrary due to post-depositional disturbances.

The plain diadem was discovered in Layer 3, where it is associated with Cranium B – attributed to an adult female aged 18–22 years (Figs. 2, 10). Other associated finds include locally produced pottery of Base-ring I and II, White Slip I–II, White Shaved, and Plain White wares (see Fig. 10, middle). Imported ceramics comprise Mycenaean and Anatolian pottery, along with an Egyptian calcite goblet (tazza).

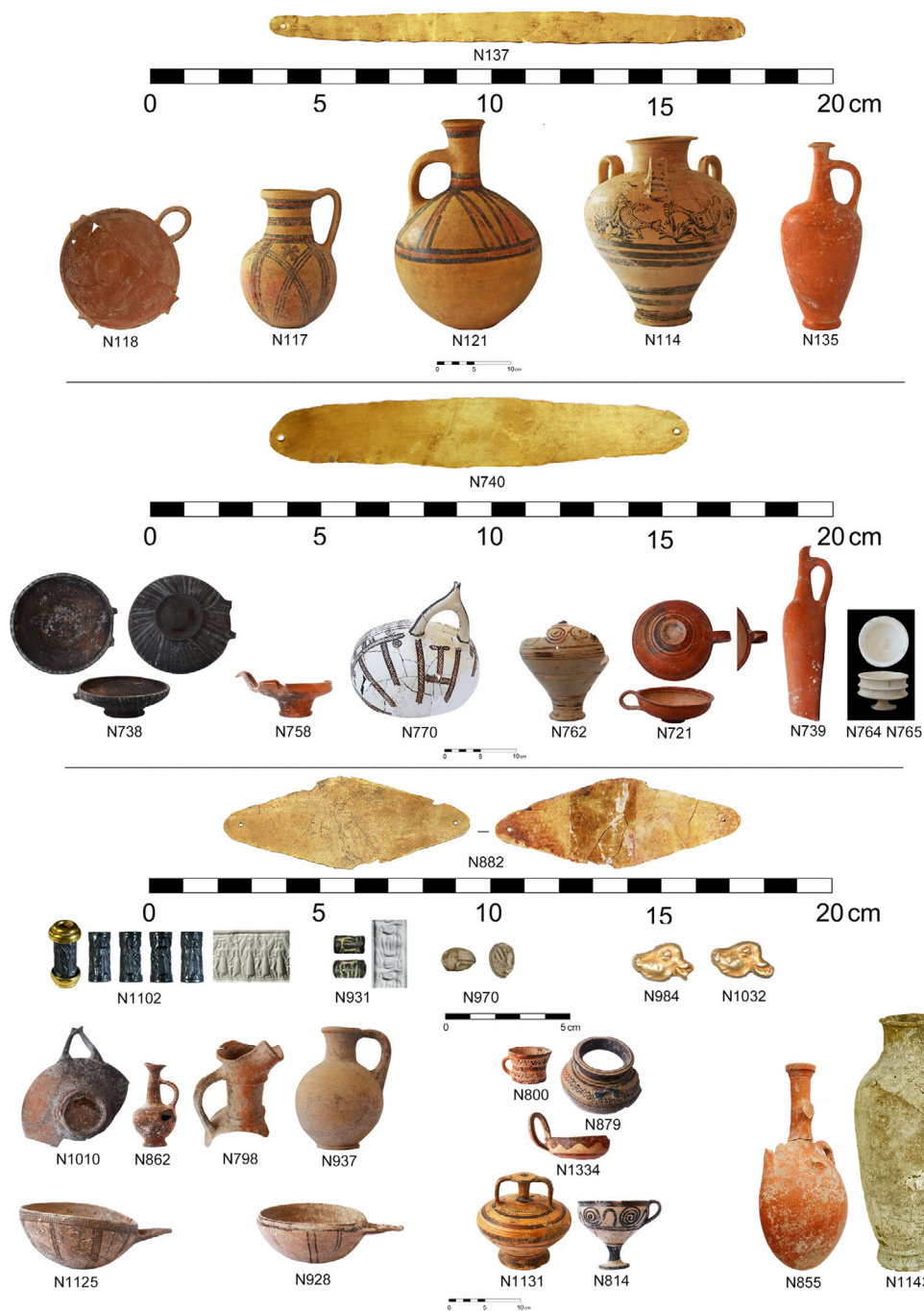


FIGURE 10

The Plain diadems N137 (Shaft Tomb LL) and N740 (Chamber Tomb UU), and mouth-piece N882 (Chamber Tomb VV) and their contexts. (Photographs by P.M. Fischer).

Chamber Tomb VV: Plain mouth-piece II N882

In the area of Chamber Tomb VV, a concentration of pottery sherds was observed on the surface of a field that has been cultivated for centuries. The ploughed soil yielded numerous larger fragments of broken pottery along with scattered human remains – these being the first indications that this tomb had been disturbed in the past and partially looted, likely in great haste.

The tomb consists of two chambers oriented north-south, forming a figure-8 shape. Its maximum dimensions are 4.40 m north-south by 3.0 m east-west (Fischer and Feldbacher 2024, 19–24; 2025, 9–15). No articulated skeletons were recovered. The spatial distribution of the dislocated human bones and mortuary goods indicates that tomb robbers concentrated their activities in the central parts of the tomb. Nevertheless, numerous scattered human bones were recovered and analysed, with a minimum number of 11 individuals – comprising infants, non-adults, and adults.

The mouth-piece was crafted from gold sheet, seemingly assembled from three sheets and shaped into a rhomboid form (see the sharp borders between the sheets of N882 in Fig. 10 right). The accompanying mortuary assemblage consists of 87 objects made from materials such as amber, bronze, clay, faience, ivory, glass, calcite, gold, and various other minerals. Among the latter, two cylinder seals were identified, one of which is gold-mounted (N1102). Ceramic imports include vessels of Minoan/Mycenaean, Egyptian, Anatolian, and Middle Mesopotamian/Kassite origin (the latter is N1143; other selected finds are illustrated in Fig. 10, lower). Based on the analysis of both local and imported pottery, the tomb is dated from the fourteenth to early thirteenth centuries BC.

DISCUSSION

The tombs and their chronology

Except for Shaft Tomb LL, which contained secondary burials, all other tombs (X, RR, UU, VV, XX, YY, and AB West) are chamber tombs.

A defining characteristic of Bronze Age Cypriot mortuary practice is the reuse of chamber tombs over multiple generations – here, spanning up to approximately 150 years – a pattern once again evident in this study (cf. Keswani 2004, 84–144). Consequently, the sequence of interments provides an excellent complement to the stratigraphy of the city and offers an opportunity to compare and classify, for instance, single sherds from the settlement areas with corresponding complete objects from the cemetery. The contexts in which the diadems and mouth-pieces were found date from the end of LC IB to LC IIC, approximately corresponding to the fifteenth to thirteenth centuries BC (see the detailed chronology of each find context above).

A striking aspect of these tombs is that, despite their exceptionally sophisticated and valuable contents, they were simply cut into clay-rich soil without any other apparent structural reinforcements. Alternatively, this simplicity may have been intentional, an effort to keep the tombs inconspicuous and thereby reduce the risk of looting. Nevertheless, most were marked with stone slabs, including a reused anchor buried at the entrance of Chamber Tomb AB East. Although relatively unobtrusive and likely originally partially buried beneath the soil, these markers remained sufficiently traceable to permit the reopening of tombs for subsequent interments. Over time, the modest and physically unstable construction of the tombs led to the collapse of their roofs. While

this collapse caused the breakage and displacement of some human remains and mortuary goods, it also effectively sealed the chambers, thereby preserving their archaeological context.

The use of the gold sheet ornaments

The wear evident on the diadems, and especially on the Rosette diadem N845, together with their weight, between 11.7 and 23.14 g, suggests that these artefacts were not created exclusively for funerary deposition but were likely used in life prior to burial. However, given their brittleness, it is plausible that they were worn only on rare occasions during life before being deposited with the deceased for use in the afterlife (though some uncertainties remain; see the section *Production techniques* below). It is therefore questionable whether such relatively heavy diadems were manufactured exclusively for funerary use (contra Goring 1983, 170), even though comparable objects have not been recovered from the settlement at Hala Sultan Tekke. In contrast, the smaller and lighter diadems – ranging from 1.02 to 2.66 g – show no clear evidence of wear and may have been specifically crafted for interment.

Based on undisturbed contexts where sex and age could be determined, the presence of diadems at Hala Sultan Tekke confirms their use by individuals of both sexes, and children (see Table 2). Remarkably, the diadem featuring the traditionally ‘masculine’ bull motif was found in association with a 35–40-year-old female, implying a certain degree of gender parity or overlapping symbolic roles.

Level 5 of Chamber Tomb RR, dating to LC II(A–)B or the fourteenth century BC (e.g. Fischer 2024, 76–80), contained the burial of a 4–5-year-old child accompanied by an assemblage of exceptional objects (Fig. 7): a gold diadem still in place on the head (N512), a necklace composed of 68 gold beads, two pairs of gold earrings affixed to the sides of the cranium, two silver items, a figurine depicting a Hittite god and a ring, and a Cypriot-style chlorite cylinder seal engraved with a seated griffin and a tree (Fischer and Bürge 2022, 25). This context clearly reflects the elevated social status of children who belonged to the elite of Hala Sultan Tekke.

The objects identified as diadems featured either two or four perforations, allowing them to be affixed to the forehead of the deceased using perishable strings. Another hypothesis proposes that these diadems may have been attached to a perishable material, which was then tied around the head (e.g. Ramé 2022, 152–4).

It appears plausible that the larger diadems with four perforations were intended for adults, while the smaller examples were designed for sub-adults. This pattern is evident in the case of the large Bull, Ibex-feline, and Rosette diadems, all featuring four perforations, compared with the relatively small Double-spiral III diadem (N1472), which had only two perforations and was associated with a 15–17-year-old likely female (Fig. 8). The difference in perforation number and size may thus reflect not only practical adjustments to head size but also a degree of social differentiation, with larger, more elaborate diadems perhaps denoting higher status. Mouth-pieces generally exhibit only two perforations, consistent with their simpler, standardized form. However, the available evidence from the mouth-pieces excavated at Hala Sultan Tekke is insufficient to establish any firm correlation with sex or age-related use, though their placement and context suggest a primarily funerary function rather than one of social display.

Motifs

Goring (1983, 124–69) classified motifs into six main groups, each comprising numerous sub-groups (additional classifications e.g. in Courtois *et al.* 1986, 116–22; Konstantinidi 2001, 24–7; Ramé 2022; Puljiz 2021, 78–112; Verducci 2018, 184–8). In principle, all six of Goring's main motif groups are represented in the diadems from Hala Sultan Tekke.

Several of these motifs appear on multiple diadems (here grouped according to Goring's classification):

- I. Simple curvilinear and rectilinear motifs (N69 and N1205);
- II. Spiraliform decorations (N512, N1193, and N1472);
- III. Rosettes (N845 and N1056);
- IV. Palmettes and other floral motifs (N1056 and N1205);
- V. Complex abstract motifs (N1205, if the hourglass-shaped elements are included); and
- VI. Figurative motifs (N1056 and N1205).

The raw material and production

In addition to recycled material likely used in the production of gold sheet ornaments, a substantial portion of the raw gold may have been imported from the Nubian mines of Egypt – particularly considering the contemporaneous influx of Egyptian imports to Hala Sultan Tekke. In the several alternative sources proposed, the Balkans should also be considered, especially given the discovery of Cypriot objects in the region (cf. Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 17–26 and references therein). The presence of Cypriot-produced oxhide ingots during the Late Bronze Age – particularly in the easternmost Balkans (here Bulgaria) – indicates established connections between these regions, whether through direct contact or via intermediaries.

In this context, the rich gold deposits of Ada Tepe, along with other nearby mines and gold-bearing rivers in southern Bulgaria, should be seriously considered as potential sources of gold exported to the eastern Mediterranean. Although no scientific confirmation currently exists, such as general compositional and trace element analyses or the identification of imported ceramics from this region in Cyprus, such evidence may yet be forthcoming or currently remain unrecognized. Ada Tepe is the oldest known open-pit gold mine in the Balkans, extracting gold from the host rock in substantial quantities (Popov and Jockenhövel 2018). It is thought to have begun operation in the early fifteenth century BC, continuing until the end of the Bronze Age – a timeframe that corresponds closely with the period of occupation at Hala Sultan Tekke.

The pictorial decorations on the diadems were evidently stamped using matrices (cf. examples from Mycenaean Greece in Ogden 2023, 101–2, fig. 6.13–15; see also Goring 1983, 88–120; Poldrugo 2002, 91; Ramé 2022, 154–9). In a few instances, simple patterns were engraved directly from the obverse side, differing from the decorative techniques characteristic of Minoan and Near Eastern gold bands (see refs. above).

Although no apposite moulds or stamps have been recovered at Hala Sultan Tekke, it is likely that suitable tools were fashioned from hard materials such as stone, bronze, or bone. While similar motifs, for instance the rosettes, appear across various diadems, they are not identical, suggesting the use of different matrices.

The initial gold sheets used in the production of the diadems and mouth-pieces were larger than the final products, allowing them to be trimmed to the desired dimensions during manufacture.

It should be noted that the precision of the cutting varies considerably. In several cases, the decorative motifs along the edges are incomplete, suggesting a relatively rough finishing process (e.g. N1193, Fig. 2), whereas others were more precisely cut and finished (e.g. N1472, Fig. 2).

The attachment holes were created by simply punching through the sheet with a pointed tool from the back or the front. In the case of the diadems, the final stage of production appears to have involved polishing the obverse side. However, distinguishing between the traces left by final polishing and those resulting from wear remains somewhat problematic.

Assuming that the diadems are of Cypriot origin, there is no scholarly consensus regarding their place of production. Sites such as Kition, Enkomi, and Paphos have been proposed (e.g. Goring 1983, 175–6; see also Courtois *et al.* 1986, 116–22), although these suggestions were made prior to the intensified exploration of Hala Sultan Tekke that began with the current project in 2010. Even though fragments of sheet gold have been discovered at the site, there is no clear evidence linking them directly to the manufacture of diadems or mouth-pieces. Nevertheless, given the quantity of diadems recovered and the numerous other pieces of gold jewellery, and pieces of sheet gold from the site, Hala Sultan Tekke should not be excluded as a potential production centre for such adornments.

The pictorial diadems: contexts and cultural fusion

THE BULL DIADEM N1056 (Fig. 3)

This diadem and associated mortuary goods reflect multiple cultural influences. The bull's head with a wig and a sun disk between its horns finds its closest parallels in New Kingdom Egypt, where it is linked to Apis, the god of creation (e.g. Pinch 2004). Representations of Apis with a sun disk appear in ceiling paintings from Amenophis III's palace at Malqata (Wysocki and O'Connor 1978). Bietak *et al.* (2007) suggest that New Kingdom depictions of Apis were influenced by Minoan iconography, supported by Minoan-style wall paintings at Tell el-Dab'a during the 18th Dynasty (cf. Anderson 2024). A bucranium with a sun disk also appears on a stamp seal from Enkomi (Dikaios 1969, pl. 187, 31). Among an array of interpretations, Rice (1998) argues that bulls represented the supreme sacrificial animal and a symbol of political authority, sexual potency, economic wealth, and strong forces of the underworld.

The plant motifs situated between the bulls' heads resemble FM 15 (Palm II) and FM 18 (Flower) as classified by Furumark (1972). Similar decorative elements appear on diadems from Enkomi (Murray 1900, pls. 11–13). The wooden hexagonal pyxis (L 17/16.5, H 8–8.5 cm) with repoussé gold plates from Mycenae, Grave Circle A, Grave V (16th century BC; National Archaeological Museum of Athens inv. no. HNAM II 808–811, Karo 1930–33, 143–4; here Fig. 3 lowest) replicates several of these motifs, including bucrania featuring a rosette symbol between the horns, alongside the plant motifs. The 19 rosettes adorning the lower part and sides of the diadem are common floral motifs found on objects from funerary contexts (e.g. from Enkomi in Murray 1900, pl. 8; see also Xenaki-Sakellariou 1985, 303–4). These motifs have also been interpreted as solar symbols in the study by Marinatos (2010, 131–4; see though the critical reviews by Weingarten 2012 and Boardman 2012).

Another link to Egypt is a faience bowl discovered in the same context (N876, Fig. 3). The bowl depicts Hathor as a horned white cow with black spots and a cross on her belly resembling an

ankh sign. She is shown walking through a marshland with papyrus and a pond, where a fish appears to be chasing a smaller fish. While Hathor was occasionally associated with Apis in a maternal role, directly connecting this faience bowl to the bull motif on the diadem within the shared context of Chamber Tomb XX remains challenging.

The associated curved bronze knife with an ivory handle (N892) is one of several found in this tomb and belongs to a group of objects commonly named in the literature as ‘Siána knives,’ which were produced in the Late Bronze Age Aegean (Fischer and Feldbacher 2024, 47 and references therein). The Mycenaean mug (N1015) from the same context is among numerous Aegean imports datable to the same period as the Psi-figurine (N1114), that is, to LH IIIA2 or the second half of the fourteenth century BC.

In contrast to the abundance of mainly Aegean, but also Egyptian imports found in this tomb, artefacts of Levantine origin are conspicuously rare among the tomb assemblages at the site. Levantine items from Tomb XX are presented by a Canaanite jar and a spherical flask (Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 29, fig. 14 lowest right), while no objects can be clearly attributed to Anatolia. The absence of Anatolian Red Lustrous Wheel-made vessels – commonly found in other tombs at Hala Sultan Tekke (cf. Figs. 9, 10) – suggests that the entombed individual’s trade connections or broader affiliations were primarily oriented toward the Aegean, and to a lesser extent, Egypt and the Levant. This pattern may point to a degree of trade specialization among the elite families of Hala Sultan Tekke (cf. Papadimitriou 2022, 185–9; Graziadio 2025, chapter 6).

THE IBEX-FELINE DIADEM N1205 (Fig. 4)

The decoration on the Ibex-feline diadem appears to exhibit less contrast than that of the Bull diadem, where the incised lines are more sharply defined. This difference is likely due to the varying thicknesses of the gold sheets: 0.017–0.018 cm for the Ibex-feline diadem, and less than half that – only 0.006–0.007 cm – for the Bull diadem. Although gold is highly malleable, thicker sheets make embossing more challenging. With the exception of the Ibex-feline diadem, all other diadems from Hala Sultan Tekke are made from gold sheets of a thickness comparable to that of the Bull diadem. This suggests that the use of thin gold sheets was likely motivated not only by considerations of availability and cost, but also by the practical advantages they offered in enabling intricate decorative work.

The nine hourglass-shaped symbols, which appear in various contexts within the Minoan cultural sphere, were originally referred to as ‘incurved altars’ (Evans 1935, 614 typically). Marinatos (2010, 136–8), however, draws a parallel with the equivalent Egyptian hieroglyph denoting a ‘support’ and reinterprets these forms as ‘incurved podia.’ This reading finds some support in the Minoan wall paintings from Pseira, recently reconstructed by Jones (2024), which depict multiple hourglass-shaped elements serving as supports for a large podium. Nevertheless, in Aegean iconography, this motif is frequently depicted with heraldically placed mythical creatures resting upon it, and in some cases it is associated with sacred horns – elements that lend continued weight to the ‘altar’ interpretation (see, e.g. seal iconography of ‘Altar Siegel’ in the IDAI database).⁴ What distinguishes our symbols from related motifs is their clearly structured upper and lower

⁴ <https://arachne.dainst.org/search?q=altar%20siegel>.

sections, which likely reflect the artistic freedom of Cypriot craftsmen in incorporating additional decorative elements.

At first glance, the five floral motifs on the Ibex-feline diadem appear identical to those on the Bull diadem (see references above). Closer examination, however, reveals subtle differences – the most noteworthy being in the depiction of the uppermost branches of the palm tree motif (cf. Figs. 3 and 4). This suggests that two distinct matrices were used to emboss nearly identical designs. Whether these decorations were produced in the same workshop or in different ones remains an open question.

In terms of iconography, no motifs resembling a running ibex appear in the material from Enkomi or on the numerous cylinder seals from Hala Sultan Tekke, including those produced on Cyprus (see *inter alia* Porada 1948). Instead, ibexes are depicted in static poses, standing on all four legs, rearing on two legs, seated, or suspended. A relevant parallel to the running ibex's posture can be found on a gold-plated hexagonal wooden box from sixteenth century BC Mycenae, Grave Circle A, Grave V (Fig. 3 lowest), which features a running lion (Mylonas 1966, pl. 139).⁵ This motif, the 'Flying Gallop Lion' (e.g. Boardman 1978) is a stylistic convention in Aegean and Near Eastern art used to depict animals in swift motion, with all four legs stretched out to convey speed and vigour. Regarding the rosettes positioned in front of the ibexes, see the discussion above.

The distinctive depiction of four feline (lion?) heads reflects influence from cultures beyond Cyprus, as lions were not native to the island, though they were present in regions such as Greece, Egypt, and the Near East (Thomas 2021). This motif finds a close parallel, for instance, in the Mycenaean gold rhyton featuring a lion's head from Grave IV in Grave Circle A (National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. no. NAMA 867), exemplifying the Mycenaean and Minoan artistic traditions that also influenced the material culture of Hala Sultan Tekke.

The associated burial goods include locally made pottery such as Base-ring I and II, White Slip II (mature), and Monochrome ware. Also present is an Egyptian bowl (N1222) crafted from multicoloured faience in shades of yellow, blue, and black with brown decoration. In international collections, this type of bowl – along with the Hathor bowl N876 (see above) – is generally dated to the second half of the 18th Dynasty (cf. e.g. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1982, 142–4).

THE ROSETTE DIADEM N845 (Fig. 6)

Each of the identical embossed rosettes features eight petals (cf. Enkomi; see above). While their overall design is reminiscent of those on the Bull and Ibex-feline diadems, they are not identical. In N845, the rosettes are larger and more crudely crafted.

The ceramic imports in Chamber Tomb YY originate exclusively from the Mycenaean–Minoan cultural sphere, with a ratio of approximately 3:1 between locally produced ceramics (69) and Mycenaean–Minoan imports (22). Among the latter, a Mycenaean figurine depicts a bovine and a human figure guiding or controlling the animal (N925 in Fischer and Feldbacher 2025, 38, fig. 21). No artefacts can be confidently attributed to Anatolia, the Levant, or Egypt. This distribution may once again indicate a degree of trade specialization by the family of the interred

⁵ The photograph of gold-plated wooden box (inv. no. HNAM II 808-811) was kindly provided by the Photographic Archive of the Hellenic National Archaeological Museum, Athens; ©Hellenic Ministry of Culture – Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.R.E.D.).

individuals, specifically oriented toward interaction with the Mycenaean world diadems with rectilinear and spiral motifs (Figs. 5, 7–9).

The double-spiral motifs on N1193, N512 and N1472 are common motifs in the corresponding material from Enkomi. The motif is reflected in Furumark's FM 46, the Running Spiral, a design frequently painted on Mycenaean pottery from the LH IIIA–B period, and also depicted on the wooden gold-plated box from Mycenae (see above), and several diadems/mouth-pieces from Enkomi (Murray 1900, pls. 7–11; Dikaios 1969, vol. IIIa, pls. 208, 211).

Beyond its occurrence in Mycenaean iconography (see above), the cross-hatched decoration on diadem N69 finds parallels in the Levant (Goring 1983, 129–30; Fischer and Bürge 2017, 194, fig. 12:6; Puljiz 2021, pl. 87d), and among Minoan specimens (e.g. Ramé 2022, 310, nos. 26 and 27).

Stylistic echoes and cross-cultural impulses

Simple head adornments of gold and silver shaped as small oval or rhomboidal plates or single leaf-shaped adornments appeared in the fourth millennium BC and became more popular in the third, being recovered from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean coast and Anatolia, and continuing in use in funerary context until at least the second millennium BC (cf. Wygnańska 2014, 89, 90, 117–21). The bearers of these adornments were generally accompanied by other precious mortuary goods obviously indicating the high status of the interred. From Anatolia and the Levantine coast, the use of these diadems spread to the Aegean and Cyprus. Goring (1983, 174) argued that there are no connections – either stylistic or chronological – between Aegean and Cypriot diadems, instead suggesting that the decoration on the Cypriot adornments aligns them with a sub-group of the Syro-Palestinian tradition (itself influenced by Mesopotamian artistic conventions).

However, at least stylistically – if not strictly chronologically – certain motifs on the diadems from Hala Sultan Tekke appear to have forerunners in the Late Helladic Aegean of the sixteenth century BC within LH I. In addition to the previously discussed 'Flying Gallop Lion' motif from Grave Circle A at Mycenae, stylistically echoed in the 'Running Ibex' motif on our diadem N1205, there is a gold band from the same grave circle (National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. no. NAM P 649; Karo 1930–33, 125: nos. 649–50; pl. LVI). This object, interpreted as a belt, displays plant motifs comparable to those adorning the Bull and Ibex-feline diadems from Hala Sultan Tekke and echoed in the painted decoration of contemporary and later Mycenaean pottery (e.g. Mountjoy 1986). Such stylistic correspondences suggest not only shared aesthetic preferences but also the circulation of iconographic themes and symbolic motifs within the Aegean–Cypriot artistic koine of the Late Bronze Age, suggesting ongoing interaction and exchange between Mycenaean and Cypriot workshops.

CONCLUSIONS

The earliest head adornments appeared in the fourth millennium BC in the Near East and Anatolia and became increasingly popular and widespread during the third and second millennia BC. Their use in Cyprus appears to have commenced in the Late Bronze Age, reaching its peak between the late fifteenth and early thirteenth centuries BC. This chronological framework, corresponding to LC IIA(–B) through LC IIC, aligns with the archaeological contexts in which

diadems have been recovered at Hala Sultan Tekke. The period coincides with the expansion of intercultural trade and the emergence of a broader cultural koine.

Diadems – defined here as relatively long forehead adornments – are too elongated to have served as mouth coverings. This interpretation is substantiated by their *in situ* discovery in multiple contexts adjacent to the crania at Hala Sultan Tekke. Wear patterns observed on several diadems likely indicate that these objects were worn in life prior to their deposition with the deceased for the afterlife. The hypothesis that the relatively heavy diadems, ranging from 11.7 g to 23.14 g, were produced exclusively for burial appears improbable. Conversely, smaller and lighter examples, weighing between 1.02 g and 2.66 g, show no clear signs of use and may have been manufactured specifically for funerary deposition. Mouth-pieces from Hala Sultan Tekke are plain, typically with a single perforation at each end, and appear to have been used exclusively as funerary objects placed over the mouth.

Most diadem specimens exhibit one or two perforations at each end, facilitating attachment to the forehead using perishable string or cord, or perhaps to a perishable support that was then tied around the head. Both diadems and mouth-pieces were used for adult individuals of both sexes and, in one case at Hala Sultan Tekke, a diadem was found associated with a 4–5-year-old child. All of these items derive from elite burial contexts in chamber tombs, associated with individuals interred alongside rich assemblages of mortuary goods, including numerous imports that attest to participation in extensive intercultural exchange.

It is likely that both diadems and mouth-pieces from Hala Sultan Tekke were produced locally in Cyprus, possibly even at Hala Sultan Tekke itself, as their designs incorporate foreign motifs while simultaneously displaying distinct local characteristics. Skilled Cypriot artisans seem to have adapted broader Near Eastern traditions, creating hybrid stylistic forms that blended influences from the Near East, Egypt, and the Aegean.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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