

Most of the excavated graves have been robbed in the past. All of them must have been at least penetrated. This is the reason why the number of finds they yielded is restricted and the skeletal remains they contain are generally poorly preserved. Only mortuary gifts that have been omitted by the plunderers can be found today. An exception is tumulus grave SMQ 30, investigated by our team in 2007-08, where an extraordinarily rich collection of beads, comprising as many as 600 items, was found. What is unusual, apart from numerous personal adornments found in the grave chamber (247), there was a still greater number of such finds (353) scattered between the stones of the tumulus mantle. It is reasonable to suppose that at least this second bunch of beads must have been put into the grave by relatives of the deceased during a funeral ceremony. Up till now, it is the only grave in which such a practice was detected.



Collection of personal adornments discovered in tumulus grave SMQ 30; enlarged view of beads (micro-beads, pearls, and beads of lapis-lazuli in the middle)

Adornments from SMQ 30 are mainly made of seashell. Most numerous among them are tube-like beads worked from tusk shells (*Scaphopoda*), small shells and ring-shaped beads made of *Conus* shells, disc- or lobately-shaped, perforated sequins mostly made of colourful shells (red to orange and white), and perforated shells with brown stripes (*Engina mendicaria*). The assemblage is supplemented by stone micro-beads, limestone spacers, and a few more precious specimens, including two perforated pearls, five beads of lapis lazuli, a small coil of copper wire, and finally a large round pendant (diam. 7.50 cm) made of mother-of-pearl and bearing incised dot-in-circle decoration, with two drilled holes for stringing.

Simple shell ornaments can be encountered in Ubaid-period settlement sites in the Gulf region, dated to the 6th – 5th millennia BC. Similar beads were found in As-Sabbiya, at H3, excavated by a Kuwaiti-British mission and at Bahra 1, excavated by KPAM (see below). However, decoration of the pendant, which is believed to be characteristic of the late 3rd and first half of the 2nd millennium BC (Dilmun culture), as well as the presence of lapis-lazuli beads and the metal item might suggest a later date. The lack of pottery considerably limits the possibility of dating the structure.



Imaginary arrangement of adornments from SMQ 30



SMQ 30, view of the grave chamber with remnants of a skeleton and scattered beads on the paved floor. An anthropological analysis showed that the burial contained bones of at least two adult individuals, one of them a female. Considering the paucity of findings in other graves, it was our pleasantry to call SMQ 30 "the jeweller's wife grave".



A few graves explored in the Mugheira area yielded a small number of adornments. Their types, and materials they were made of, clearly mirror the bulk of SMQ 30's collection, which indicates that all these graves were roughly contemporaneous. On the left, assemblage of beads found in tumulus grave SMQ 33.

Although not numerous, especially in relation to the number of skeletons, the objects discovered in tumulus SMQ 49 were very interesting. Apart from several simple shell adornments (yet different in type from SMQ 30's set), a bead of aquamarine (precious stone, a variety of beryl) and an exceptional artefact – a barbed-and-tanged flint arrowhead – were found in the grave chamber. On the basis of known analogies with other Gulf sites, arrowheads of this type are dated to the Ubaid period. Moreover, a very similar arrowhead was discovered in Bahra 1 settlement (see below), which provides an important piece of evidence indicating a prehistoric date of the graves, at least for the earliest burials.



Finds from SMQ 49 (flint arrowhead, bead of aquamarine, and perforated shells)

Collection of all 600 adornments discovered in tumulus grave SMQ 30





At least 12 individuals were buried in the grave chamber of SMQ 49, which was partly hewn in the bedrock (its maximum depth from top of the mantle to the chamber's bottom reached 1.30 m). Skeletons, deposited in the tomb consecutively, were found lying on their sides in a contracted position. Earlier skeletal remains were not moved aside while a new deceased was buried. In consequence, bodies were deposited one on top of the other, occasionally with a separating layer of stones, which makes it evident that the tomb was used for a very long time. Apart from individual burials, there was at least one double burial of an adult and a child. What is more intriguing, a skeleton of an equid was buried inside the grave chamber too. On the contrary to implications on early date of the grave, such a discovery is unknown from prehistoric sites, whereas a practice of burying equids (donkeys/horses) in grave chambers is known from later epochs.



A set of four small stone implements (two mortars and two grinding slabs) was found in the mantle of the tumulus, which should also be regarded as a peculiar discovery

Apart from testimonies associating of As-Sabbiyan tumuli with the Ubaid period, there are some graves that produced mortuary gifts apparently of a later date. A small collection of copper-alloy items (fragmentarily preserved) and several personal adornments made of semiprecious materials, were found in tumulus SB 65. Three beads made of varieties of carnelian and one of agate were of very high quality, exceeding that of most of the items from SMQ 30. Tumulus SB 60 yielded only three small finds but all of them of special interest: a bronze leaf-shaped, tanged arrowhead, a trilobed object probably made of lead, and a small stone mortar similar to those found in tumulus SMQ 49. The arrowhead should be dated back to the Bronze Age. The mortar provides an important clue for linking separate graves in terms of funerary customs.



Semiprecious beads from SB 65



Stone beads (carnelian and limestone) from SMQ 35A



Lapis lazuli beads and perforated pearls from SMQ 30

Metal objects from SB 60



Dating the tumuli graves is a real puzzle. On the one hand, there are some hints indicating their pretty early date, such as the archaic, simple forms of common adornments, that can be found also on prehistoric settlement sites in the vicinity (Bahra 1, H3). On the other hand, there are some indications pointing to a date later than Neolithic times. Circle-in-dot motif on the pendant, relative abundance of metal objects and the presence of elaborated beads of semiprecious stones. The number of explored graves which yielded some grave goods is not sufficient to pin down a certain date for the erection of the tumuli. Moreover, it is possible that the tumuli graves were in use over a very long span of time. These discrepancies can, to some extent, be explained by long-lasting sepulchral traditions that may have been retained in the region, and by reusing earlier graves by people living there in later times.