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# Changes in Climate, Environment, and Populations in Northern Malawi as reflected in Bead Assemblages

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## Résumé

Since 2016 the Malawi Ancient Lifeways and Peoples Project has been excavating and analyzing materials from four sites (Hora 1, Hora 5, Mazinga 1, and Kadawonda 1) in the Kasitu Valley of Northern Malawi. The deposits at these sites span the terminal Pleistocene to Holocene (ca. 30,000 – present), and include the Last Glacial Maximum, as well as a substantial Early Holocene (11.7 – 8.2 ka) component. These two time periods potentially represent very different climatic and environmental conditions in the region, which provides opportunity to examine bead manufacture in the larger context of resource availability and population demographics. Hora 1, dating from 21 ka – present, has also yielded multiple human burials that suggest the site had sustained cultural significance. Disc beads made in hard animal materials have been recovered from all represented time periods. Here, we report trends in the manufacture of beads at these three sites that correspond with changes in climate, environment, and potentially also human populations. One important trend is a shift from ostrich eggshell (OES) to land snail shell (LSS) as OES disappears from the record toward the end of the Pleistocene. There is also a new addition to bead morphology with the appearance of elliptical, or "cat's eye" beads that may coincide with the arrival of agro-pastoralist populations with the Bantu expansion. Trends in bead production at these sites show a flexible adaptation of existing technologies to changing raw material abundances, rather than maintenance of specific raw material traditions through large-scale trade.

**Mots-Clés:** ostrich eggshell, land snail shell, bead, adornment, Malawi

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