



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Earrings and the Encoding of Social and Cultural Identity in the Southern Levant: Commonalities and Shifting Adornment Strategies

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Abstract

Although the field of archaeology has generally overlooked the importance of personal adornment, jewellery—particularly earrings—has held significant social, cultural and symbolic meaning across various civilisations throughout history. In this paper, I examine earrings of the Southern Levant as signifiers of identity during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, a period characterised by intercultural relationships that reshaped social structures and contributed to the forging of new local identities. These small ornaments functioned not only as decorative items but likely as indicators of personal choice, community traditions, age and gender relations, social status, religious or ritual significance, and broader cultural trends. Additionally, unlike most other forms of jewellery at this time, earrings required body modification through ear piercing—a permanent inscription on the body. Adopting a framework drawing from phenomenological theories and the somatic processes of memory formation, I explore how individuals used these specialised bearers of tradition to express personal intentions and communicate cultural identity. In doing so, I highlight the multi-dimensional nature of identity expression and the shifting cultural influences within the Ancient Near East.

Keywords

Earrings, Adornment, Cultural Identity, Ancient Near East, Memory Formation

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