



Cover-up! Investigating the Socio-Cultural Significance of Representing Elite Women with Draping Mantels in Iron Age Syro-Anatolia: the Case of the Lady of Tayinat

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Abstract

In 2017, the sculpture of a woman was unearthed within the Iron-Age levels of Tell Tayinat. Disfigured in antiquity and dumped in a pit, the 'Lady of Tayinat' sparked intrigue concerning her identity and status apropos the ruling elite of ancient Kunulua. This paper seeks to investigate one proponent of this subject's representation, specifically the socio-cultural significance of the mantel draped over her head and cascading beyond her shoulders.

A data-driven analysis of 50 examples from Syro-Anatolia exhibits that the majority of high-status women (goddesses, queens, priestesses and nobles) wore a polos or a headband underneath the mantel when represented in ceremonial or funerary contexts. However, the example from Tayinat showcases a stark dichotomy: Although equated to typical elite monumental basalt sculptures of the period, the 'Lady of Tayinat' dons a modest mantel draped directly over her hair. Was this a pious representation of the portrayed subject? Or a symbol of class background/ethnicity?

While the lack of textual sources from the region limits an absolute understanding of mantels, this study presents various theories that aid in revealing new perspectives regarding the cultural significance of these pieces of textile as fashion items, symbols, or indicators of varying degrees of power.

Keywords

Syro-Anatolia, Iron Age, Women, Mantel, Sculpture

Session

4. The materiality of inscribed and figurative objects

Type of paper

Oral presentation