



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Grain standing in her furrow: Toward an animist archaeology of agriculture in Mesopotamia

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Abstract

The Mesopotamian world was an animate, animist world—peopled by a diverse array of human and non-human persons, by beings and presences beyond count. In their relations with other animate entities, the human inhabitants of the region relied on many different modes of observation, communication, supplication, influence, and coercion. When writing about the topic of Mesopotamian agriculture, however, archaeologists have typically relied on a familiar (to us) suite of concepts—for example, the concept of production—that assumes an instrumentalist, subject-object relationship between humans and rest of the world. In this presentation, we ask: What would the archaeological discussion of agriculture in Mesopotamia look like if we were to take native ontologies seriously as a point of departure? What was agriculture in their animist world? And how might we write an archaeology of Mesopotamian agriculture that more accurately reflects that world? In this exploratory effort, we revisit some of our own published work and consider how it might fruitfully be rethought, reframed, or rephrased to better reflect the realities of agriculture in an animate, animist world.

Keywords

Mesopotamia, archaeology, agriculture, pastoralism, animism

Session

2. Natural resources and anthropised landscapes

Type of paper

Oral presentation