



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Sacred Forms and Materials? The Symbolic Power of Personal Adornments in Late 3rd Millennium northern Mesopotamia graves and temples

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Abstract

The burials of toddlers from the latter half of the 3rd millennium in Syria are characterized by numerous personal adornments, distinguishing them from other age groups. Among the ornaments, zoomorphic pendants are particularly characteristic. Other forms of pendants and beads also appear, which are interpreted as amulets, for example so-called "imitation teeth" or encrusted beads. Such adornments were elements of ritual deposits in some northern Mesopotamian temples, for example in the Eye Temple of Tell Brak. Their selection for these deposits indicates that both certain forms and materials of ornaments were attributed with ritual significance. Throughout the fourth and third millennia BCE, these objects may have served as religious jewelry in northern Mesopotamia. Shells and frit/faience seemed to play a particularly important role among the materials. Both were widely distributed during this period and their symbolic value, rather than economic, seems to have tied them to the sacred sphere. The symbolic significance attributed to these objects suggests that they were used to protect young, newly integrated community members. Using such symbolic and protective jewelry may have been a ritualistic practice associated with rites of passage, signifying stepping into a specific phase of life.

Keywords

religious jewellery, graves and temples, north Mesopotamia, second half of the 3rd millennium, shell and faience

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