



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Exploring bitumen trade in northern mesopotamia. Pitfalls, potentials and a case study from the Bronze Age, Tell Lashkir.

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Abstract

In ancient times, bitumen was a valuable commodity used for its stickiness, ignition, and waterproofing properties. It was widely traded across south-west Asia from early prehistory and played a significant role in the economic and political developments of the Bronze Age. Bitumen was used in monumental architecture, shipbuilding, water management, art pieces, magic, and medicine, and its use in boat construction facilitated trade itself. The study of Bitumen provenance provides insights into the exchange networks established across multiple time periods. This communication will present the current state of the art in provenancing bitumen remains by Gas Chromatography and statistical models. At Tell Lashkir, a site from northeastern Mesopotamia in the early third millennium, the study of archaeological bitumen has been successful in helping identify the sources of various mixtures. Results suggests that the people living in the site were part of exchange networks that extended to southern Mesopotamia, while accessing both nearby and distant sources of bitumen. The results also support the widespread use of central Mesopotamian bitumen at this time. Results show bitumen as an excellent record of Mesopotamian-wide trade networks, sometimes revealing connections invisible by other materials.

Keywords

Bitumen, Bronze Age, Tell Lashkir, Gas Chromatography, Bayesian models

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