



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Ubiquitous but overlooked: Multi-analytical perspectives on the bitumen from Ur III Girsu

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Abstract

This paper presents preliminary findings from the analyses of bitumen artifacts from Ur III Girsu. It forms part of a larger study incorporating bituminous material from ongoing excavations at Nippur, Lagash, Nigin and Tell Muhammad. Approaching the Girsu bitumen through its *chaîne opératoire*, this study traces its lifecycle from sourcing and processing to use and deposition. Bitumen was central to a range of craft and subsistence practices in Girsu; a more detailed consideration of this material provides insights into broader production methods and economic activities. Samples from the Louvre Museum are investigated using an interdisciplinary approach, comparing material, textual and archaeometric analyses. Results from the application of digital microscopy, scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and isotopic analyses are contextualised to explore the role of bitumen in the sociopolitical and economic environment of Ur III Girsu. Employing a multi-analytical process allows us to explore the significance of bitumen in daily life, as well as its value in examining trade and exchange networks in ancient West Asia. To facilitate future analyses and the creation of robust comparative datasets, this study highlights the need for a clear methodology for bitumen sampling and recording.

Keywords

bitumen, craft production, Lagash, archaeometry, isotopes

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