
A much-desired ornament? The spread of blue fluorapatite beads in prehistoric Anatolia

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Résumé

From around 6400 BC onwards bright blue coloured beads appear at sites around Anatolia and in the Near East. It has been established that these beads were made from fluorapatite formed from fossilized bone/ivory and treated to obtain the blue colour. These beads share a common range of forms that often differ from those seen in the assemblages with which they are associated. The beads raise questions about the nature of interactions in the Neolithic period, as well as the value attributed to, and investment made in, certain items of personal ornamentation. Several years of data collection and scientific analyses of archaeological assemblages in Anatolian sites of the later Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods has produced interesting results regarding the manufacture and use of these beads. This paper uses the assemblages from sites across the region to ask how and why these beads might have been spread across such a large area, why the colour and form might have been important and what we might be able to say about the desire for blue colour. An attempt is made, using the available stratigraphic and dating information, to reconstruct where the beads might have originated and how fast they could have travelled to their final destinations. This is then used as a tool to think about how we conceptualise time and space in relation to material culture in early periods.

Mots-Clés: Beads, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Networks, Distribution, Typology

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