
Plants as materials in ritual practice

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Résumé

While there is a significant body of evidence for the ways that plants were used in economic and craft activities, their role in ritual practice has received very little attention. This is surprising given that plant materials, or indirect evidence for their use, occur frequently in mortuary and other ritual contexts. Wooden posts and post-built structures, for example, have been recorded within or around graves, and in association with disarticulated human remains. And plant materials (including wood and fungi) occur alongside animal bone, antler, and osseous artefacts that have been intentionally deposited into bogs and pools of water. However, when we come to interpret these contexts the significance of the plant materials is often overlooked. This paper argues that by incorporating plant material in our interpretations of these assemblages, we can show that particular plants played an active role in ritual practice, were intentionally selected for use in certain ritual contexts, and were subject to prescribed forms of treatment and disposal. Taking this as a starting point it will discuss the ways in which plants were perceived by Mesolithic communities, and how interactions between humans and plants were structured through prescribed forms of behaviour.

Mots-Clés: Plants, Archaeobotany, Ritual

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