An Alternative View on the Roll-Brimmed Hat

Lauren King

Southern Methodist University, laking@smu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.smu.edu/jour

Part of the Near Eastern Languages and Societies Commons, and the Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons

Recommended Citation


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in SMU Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit http://digitalrepository.smu.edu.
An Alternative View on the Roll-Brimmed Hat

Creative Commons License

![Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License

This article is available in SMU Journal of Undergraduate Research: [https://scholar.smu.edu/jour/vol2/iss1/8](https://scholar.smu.edu/jour/vol2/iss1/8)
An Alternative View on the Roll-Brimmed Hat

Lauren King*
laking@smu.edu

ABSTRACT
Why does Gudea wear the roll-brimmed hat? Neo-Sumerian period statues of Gudea, king of Lagash (c. 2100 BCE), were primarily designed to convey the leader’s piety before the gods. The traditional interpretation of the roll-brimmed hat suggests that this garment added to Gudea’s pious affect, serving as a humbler alternative to the divine horned-headress worn by Naram-Sin, the last king of the previous Akkadian period. While acknowledging the less overtly ambitious quality of the roll-brimmed hat, I nevertheless argue that other potential meanings of this headgear have been overlooked. In particular, I take a materiality and haptic approach to propose that Gudea’s hat suggests that he may have learned from, and improved upon, the grand claims of Naram-Sin. Both the Stele of Naram-Sin and the statues of Gudea share the portrayal of a strong and supple right arm, which Irene Winter has interpreted as making both leaders appear sexually alluring and “well-formed”. This paper will argue that the roll-brimmed hat had a similar effect. Exploration of earlier depictions of the roll-brimmed hat from Uruk period artworks and on rock reliefs in the Zagros mountains will demonstrate that this headgear had a history of association with the “well-formed” bodies of powerful rulers. However, those earlier depictions render the hat as a smooth surface. Thus, Gudea’s choice to emphasize his headgear’s woolly quality was deliberate. It not only gave a humble effect to the garment but also, I will propose, offered a distinct kind of allure. The pattern of the curling sheep’s wool on the hat encouraged haptic appreciation, disrupting the smooth materiality for which diorite was usually prized and creating the illusion of a soft, plush texture which contrasted with the rest of Gudea’s relatively undecorated garments. More than simply humble, I propose that this headgear was a deliberate artistic strategy designed to make Gudea powerfully attractive to both his people and his gods.

* Mentor: Dr. Stephanie Langin-Hopper, Assistant Professor of Art History, Meadows School of the Arts