

Marine Shell Exchange in the Bronze Age (c. 2600-1900 BC)

By the 3rd millennium BC, highly integrated trade networks were established in the Persian/Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean. These vast maritime networks incorporated a variety of societies, including the Indus Valley Civilization, Mesopotamia, and communities in East Arabia. Marine shell objects and raw material were widely used in these three regions, despite the limited natural range of important species. Marine shell had important and inherent worth in prehistoric society, and it was an important exchange commodity in the Bronze Age. Southeast Arabia played a vital role in supplying marine shell to both the Indus and Mesopotamia, despite early archaeological claims that the region was nearly a passive periphery. Mesopotamia also acquired objects from the Indus, home to master shell craftworkers.

