



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Re-evaluating the Iron Age Snake Depictions of south-eastern Arabia

CIAN T. 1*

¹ Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, United States

*Corresponding author

Abstract

Thousands of snake artefacts have been discovered in south-eastern Arabia in recent years. Dating to the Iron Age (c. 1000–800 BC) and appearing in different forms, from metal figurines to appliques on ceramic vessels, these snakes appear to be connected to special sites, located on the major transit zones in the region, and share a number of significant commonalities. Scholarship has commonly associated these depictions with hypothesised deities and so-called “Snake Cults”.

Based on ongoing typological and contextual research, the proposed paper will critically examine these ideas, re-evaluating the symbolism and significance of snake depictions in Iron Age south-eastern Arabia. In particular, the paper will question the purpose and usage of these depictions, as well as the artefacts they are found upon, seeking to better understand their connection to the local fauna and the different sites across the region. It will also explore whether the snakes themselves may have assumed different meanings according to the artefacts, sites and contexts in which they were utilised. Finally, moving beyond the local level, tentative comparisons to the wider region of the Near East will be proposed by considering iconographically similar objects from the Levant, Iran and a unique tradition from Bahrain.

Keywords

"Snake Cults", Iron Age, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Snake figurines

Session

4. The materiality of inscribed and figurative objects

Type of paper

Oral presentation