



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Rock Art and identity in the Neolithic of northern Arabia

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Abstract

The rock art of northern Arabia is an extraordinary cultural marker that provides insight into the lives and symbolic worlds of Neolithic people. Analyses of the content, distribution and stylistic features of these ancient images capture human animal relationships, customs such as clothing, weapons and jewellery, as well as a shared understanding of how to depict humans and animals in a 2D medium. These traits are found across a large area that stretches over several hundred kilometres from Jubbah to AIUla and from Tabuk to Ha'il. The distribution of this Neolithic rock art matches the distribution of other Neolithic traits such as mustatils, likely tracing a community of dispersed groups whose subsistence involved herding, hunting, and grinding of plants. However, the Neolithic of northern Arabia is also marked by strong Levantine connections visible in the stone tools, and in decorative artefacts such as shell beads. Their production and use have been shown to be contemporaneous with equivalent types in the Levant. The juxtaposition of indigenous symbolic expression and long-distance cultural exchange charts a development where technological and economic innovation was selectively adopted, creating a mosaic of cultural traits that helped Neolithic herders to thrive in comparatively arid environments.

Keywords

rock art, lithics, Arabia, pastoralism, palaeoenvironment

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