



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Revising the grand narratives of pastoralism in the Ancient Near East

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Abstract

The study of pre-modern pastoralism, in the Near East and elsewhere, has relied largely on ethnographic analogies and environmentally deterministic models, often with little or no data on historically specific communities. This approach has yielded a static picture of pastoralism through time that has only recently begun to be challenged. New laboratory methodologies, fieldwork orientations, and theoretical frameworks have in the last years allowed archaeologists to empirically reconstruct herding strategies, mobility practices, and the long-term impacts of pastoralism on society and environment. In this paper, I sketch the role that herders and pastoralism have historically played in five 'grand narratives' of Near Eastern history, and I discuss how recent empirical evidence has shifted these narratives. Zooarchaeology and archaeobotany have complicated our understandings of domestication and the emergence and long-term development of pastoralism. Archaeobotany and geoarchaeology have nuanced—and in some cases, have reversed—earlier assumptions about the environmental impacts of herding. Survey and excavation demonstrate the environmental, demographic, and material impacts of built infrastructure by supposedly 'invisible' pastoralists. Genetic and isotope studies suggest that ideas about mobility, migration, and early long-distance trade require modification. Finally, many lines of evidence indicate the social, political, and material complexity of communities engaged in pastoralism

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