

Emerging Rock Art Assemblage on the Verge of the Blue Nile Valley of Gojjam, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Gojjam, encircled by the Great Blue Nile River, has recently been explored, uncovering numerous rock art sites along the valley. The Blue Nile River provided fertile ground for the development of early pastoralism and foraging practices in the region. Preliminary surveys have revealed five rock art sites, some of which have been documented. Historically, Ethiopia has three established rock art assemblages—northern, south-central, and eastern. However, this study introduces a newly identified assemblage in northwestern Ethiopia, expanding the country's known rock art traditions. The depictions on rock surfaces suggest that the Blue Nile River played a crucial role as a source of subsistence, supporting food systems. Several sites adjacent to the river contain records of aquatic life and human activities, including fishing, hippo hunting, and boat sailing. A key focus of this study is the reconstruction of the dynamic nature of the paintings at Jiru Serit, which showcase both abstract and semi-naturalistic artistic approaches. Geometric patterns dominate, followed by wild animals, birds, and trees. Notably, the depiction of trees and aquatic life is rare in the rock art traditions of the Horn of Africa, making these findings particularly significant.

Keywords: depictions; paintings; pastoralism; hunting; subsistence