

prehistoric art significance

prehistoric art significance is a topic that unveils the profound influence of early human creativity on culture, society, and the development of communication. In exploring the significance of prehistoric art, this article discusses its pivotal role in understanding ancient civilizations, the symbolic meanings behind artifacts, and the impact on contemporary archaeology and anthropology. Readers will navigate through the origins of prehistoric art, its diverse forms—from cave paintings to sculptures—cultural and spiritual implications, and modern interpretations and preservation efforts. By delving into these subjects, the article reveals how prehistoric art acts as a bridge to our distant past, shaping our knowledge of humanity's early expressions, beliefs, and social structures. Whether you are a student, enthusiast, or researcher, this comprehensive guide will illuminate why prehistoric art remains crucial to our understanding of history and human development.

- Understanding Prehistoric Art and Its Origins
- Major Forms of Prehistoric Art
- Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Prehistoric Art
- Prehistoric Art's Role in Social Development
- Modern Interpretations and Preservation of Prehistoric Art
- Key Examples of Prehistoric Artistic Achievements
- Conclusion

Understanding Prehistoric Art and Its Origins

Prehistoric art refers to creative works produced by human societies before the advent of written language and recorded history. The significance of prehistoric art lies in its ability to provide a visual record of human existence, beliefs, and daily activities from periods as early as the Paleolithic era. Archaeologists and historians rely on these artifacts to reconstruct the lifestyles, cognitive development, and social structures of early humans. Prehistoric art is not limited to paintings; it encompasses carvings, engravings, sculptures, and symbolic objects created thousands of years ago. The study of prehistoric art reveals the evolution of human intelligence, communication, and the need for self-expression, making it an essential field in both anthropology and archaeology.

Major Forms of Prehistoric Art

Prehistoric art manifests in various forms, each carrying unique significance and insights into ancient societies. The diversity in artistic expression highlights the adaptability and innovation of early

humans. Researchers classify prehistoric art based on technique, medium, and intended function.

Cave Paintings

Cave paintings are among the most iconic forms of prehistoric art, with renowned sites like Lascaux and Altamira illustrating scenes of hunting, rituals, and daily life. These artworks often feature animals, geometric shapes, and handprints, created using mineral pigments and natural tools. The significance of cave paintings extends to understanding symbolic communication, religious beliefs, and group identity among prehistoric communities.

Petroglyphs and Rock Carvings

Petroglyphs consist of images or patterns carved directly onto rock surfaces, often found in open-air sites across continents. These carvings depict animals, humans, and abstract symbols, serving as enduring records of prehistoric thought. The importance of petroglyphs lies in their widespread geographic distribution and their role in deciphering migratory patterns, environmental adaptation, and early storytelling.

Sculptures and Portable Art

Small sculptures, figurines, and decorated objects represent the portable aspect of prehistoric art. Notable examples include the Venus figurines, which are believed to symbolize fertility, femininity, and spiritual beliefs. These artifacts demonstrate advanced technical skills and offer clues about social roles, ritual practices, and artistic innovation during prehistoric times.

- Cave paintings: Depict animals, scenes, and rituals
- Petroglyphs: Carved symbols and figures on rocks
- Sculptures: Figurines, tools, and decorative items
- Engravings: Etched patterns on bones and stones
- Textile fragments: Early woven materials and ornaments

Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Prehistoric Art

The cultural and spiritual significance of prehistoric art is evident in its repetitive motifs, placement, and themes. These artifacts functioned as more than mere decorations; they embodied collective beliefs, rituals, and social values. Prehistoric art often served as a medium for communication with

spiritual realms, honoring deities or ancestral spirits.

Symbolism in Prehistoric Art

Symbolism is a defining feature of prehistoric art, with recurring images like animals, fertility icons, and geometric patterns representing deeper meanings. Scholars interpret these symbols as manifestations of early mythologies, cosmologies, and ritualistic behaviors. The significance of these symbols is reinforced by their presence across multiple regions and eras, suggesting shared beliefs and cultural exchanges among prehistoric peoples.

Rituals and Ceremonial Functions

Many prehistoric artworks are found in locations associated with rituals, such as caves, burial sites, and sacred landscapes. The placement and context of these creations indicate their role in ceremonies, rites of passage, and spiritual observances. By studying the significance of these artifacts, researchers gain insights into the relationship between art, religion, and social cohesion in prehistoric societies.

Prehistoric Art's Role in Social Development

Prehistoric art played a crucial role in the development of social structures, communication, and collective identity. These creative expressions facilitated the transmission of knowledge and values across generations, ensuring cultural continuity and adaptation.

Communication and Storytelling

Artistic representations in prehistoric times were essential for conveying stories, instructions, and collective memories. The significance of prehistoric art in communication is seen in its ability to transcend spoken language, allowing complex ideas and experiences to be shared visually. This laid the foundation for later advancements in writing and record-keeping.

Social Cohesion and Identity

Artistic activities fostered group identity and unity, as evidenced by communal projects like cave paintings and megalithic monuments. The shared creation and appreciation of art contributed to social bonds and the establishment of cultural norms. The significance of prehistoric art in promoting social harmony and collective action remains a subject of ongoing research and debate.

Modern Interpretations and Preservation of Prehistoric Art

Contemporary archaeologists and art historians continue to interpret and preserve prehistoric art, recognizing its significance for both academic research and public education. Advanced technologies, such as 3D scanning and pigment analysis, have enhanced our understanding of ancient techniques and meanings.

Challenges in Preservation

Preserving prehistoric art presents numerous challenges, including environmental degradation, human interference, and limited accessibility. Efforts to protect these artifacts involve legal regulations, conservation techniques, and digital documentation. The significance of preservation lies in safeguarding these irreplaceable records for future generations and ongoing study.

Influence on Modern Art and Culture

Prehistoric art continues to inspire contemporary artists, designers, and thinkers. Its motifs, themes, and techniques have influenced modern movements and contributed to a deeper appreciation of human creativity. The enduring significance of prehistoric art is reflected in museum exhibitions, educational programs, and cultural heritage initiatives worldwide.

Key Examples of Prehistoric Artistic Achievements

Several prehistoric artworks stand out for their exceptional craftsmanship, symbolic depth, and historical impact. These masterpieces showcase the diversity and significance of prehistoric art across different regions and eras.

1. Lascaux Cave Paintings (France): Detailed depictions of animals and human figures, demonstrating advanced techniques and symbolic sophistication.
2. Altamira Cave Paintings (Spain): Vivid representations of bison, horses, and handprints, reflecting communal artistic activity.
3. Venus of Willendorf (Austria): A small limestone figurine interpreted as a fertility symbol, highlighting the role of sculpture in prehistoric societies.
4. Chauvet Cave Art (France): Some of the oldest known cave paintings, with dynamic animal scenes and abstract motifs.
5. Petroglyphs of Valcamonica (Italy): Thousands of rock carvings illustrating daily life, rituals, and symbolic communication over millennia.

Conclusion

The significance of prehistoric art extends far beyond aesthetic appreciation. It serves as a vital source of knowledge about early human behavior, culture, and spirituality. Through its varied forms and enduring presence, prehistoric art continues to shape our understanding of the origins and evolution of creativity, communication, and social organization. As research progresses and preservation efforts intensify, the legacy of prehistoric art remains an indispensable part of humanity's shared heritage.

Q: What is the significance of prehistoric art in understanding ancient societies?

A: Prehistoric art provides critical insights into the beliefs, daily life, and social structures of ancient societies, revealing how early humans expressed themselves, communicated, and interacted with their environment.

Q: How do cave paintings contribute to our knowledge of prehistoric culture?

A: Cave paintings depict animals, rituals, and symbolic motifs, helping researchers understand prehistoric hunting practices, spiritual beliefs, and group dynamics.

Q: Why are Venus figurines important in studying prehistoric art?

A: Venus figurines are significant for their representation of fertility and femininity, offering clues about prehistoric social roles, spiritual beliefs, and artistic skills.

Q: What challenges are faced in preserving prehistoric art?

A: Preservation challenges include environmental degradation, vandalism, and limited accessibility, requiring specialized conservation techniques and legal protection.

Q: How does prehistoric art influence modern artistic expression?

A: Prehistoric art inspires contemporary artists through its motifs, themes, and innovative techniques, influencing modern art movements and cultural appreciation.

Q: What methods do archaeologists use to study prehistoric art?

A: Archaeologists employ methods such as pigment analysis, 3D scanning, and contextual interpretation to uncover the techniques and meanings behind prehistoric artworks.

Q: What is the cultural significance of petroglyphs?

A: Petroglyphs hold cultural significance due to their widespread use in storytelling, ritual practices, and recording events, providing a visual narrative of prehistoric life.

Q: Are there common symbols found in prehistoric art across different regions?

A: Yes, common symbols such as animals, geometric patterns, and fertility icons appear in prehistoric art globally, indicating shared beliefs and cultural exchanges.

Q: How did prehistoric art contribute to social cohesion?

A: Prehistoric art promoted social cohesion by fostering group identity, facilitating communal rituals, and transmitting cultural values across generations.

Q: What role does prehistoric art play in modern anthropology and archaeology?

A: Prehistoric art is fundamental in anthropology and archaeology for reconstructing early human behavior, social organization, and cognitive development, enhancing our understanding of human history.

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prehistoric art significance: New Perspectives on Prehistoric Art Günter Berghaus, 2004-04-30 Following the discovery of Franco-Caribbean cave art in the nineteenth century, standard interpretations of these works usually revolved around hunting, magic, and fertility cults. Orthodox positions such as these have weighed heavily on later generations of art historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists, even those whose views dissented from those of their predecessors. In the last few decades, however, new approaches to cave art, often based on

discoveries made in Africa, Asia, Australia, North America, and the Arctic region, have produced new insights into possible meanings and functions of prehistoric paintings and sculptures. This new collection of essays explores these insights, gathering the observations of eight experts from a variety of disciplines, and examining some of the social and spiritual functions of a variety of artistic genres ranging from 40,000 B.C. to 5,000 B.C. These insights, which derive from evolutionary biology, feminist scholarship, ritual studies, and new modes of anthropology, argue collectively that prehistoric art was a culture-specific form of communication that should be interpreted in the social context of early hunter-gatherer societies and should not be measured with the criteria and paradigms of modern art. Essential reading for anyone interested in prehistoric art or its cultural implications, this volume represents a bold step forward in the research and analysis of the very first artists.

prehistoric art significance: *Creativity in Human Evolution and Prehistory* Steven Mithen, 2005-08-10 The book examines how our understanding of human creativity can be extended by exploring this phenomenon during human evolution and prehistory.

prehistoric art significance: *Statement of Significance, Study of Alternatives* , 1990

prehistoric art significance: *Interpreting Ancient Figurines* Richard G. Lesure, 2011-02-21 This book examines ancient figurines from several world areas to address recurring challenges in the interpretation of prehistoric art. Sometimes figurines from one context are perceived to resemble those from another. Richard G. Lesure asks whether such resemblances play a role in our interpretations. Early interpreters seized on the idea that figurines were recurrently female and constructed the fanciful myth of a primordial Neolithic Goddess. Contemporary practice instead rejects interpretive leaps across contexts. Dr Lesure offers a middle path: a new framework for assessing the relevance of particular comparisons. He develops the argument in case studies that consider figurines from Paleolithic Europe, the Neolithic Near East and Formative Mesoamerica.

prehistoric art significance: *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India* Upinder Singh, 2008 A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India is the most comprehensive textbook yet for undergraduate and postgraduate students. It introduces students to original sources such as ancient texts, artefacts, inscriptions and coins, illustrating how historians construct history on their basis. Its clear and balanced explanation of concepts and historical debates enables students to independently evaluate evidence, arguments and theories. This remarkable textbook allows the reader to visualize and understand the rich and varied remains of India's ancient past, transforming the process of discovering that past into an exciting experience.

prehistoric art significance: *The Construction of Value in the Ancient World* John K. Papadopoulos, Gary Urton, 2012-12-31 Recipient of the Jo Anne Stolaroff Cotsen Prize Scholars from Aristotle to Marx and beyond have been fascinated by the question of what constitutes value. The Construction of Value in the Ancient World makes a significant contribution to this ongoing inquiry, bringing together in one comprehensive volume the perspectives of leading anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, linguists, philologists, and sociologists on how value was created, defined, and expressed in a number of ancient societies around the world. Based on the basic premise that value is a social construct defined by the cultural context in which it is situated, the volume explores four overarching but closely interrelated themes: place value, body value, object value, and number value. The questions raised and addressed are of central importance to archaeologists studying ancient civilizations: How can we understand the value that might have been accorded to materials, objects, people, places, and patterns of action by those who produced or used the things that compose the human material record? Taken as a whole, the contributions to this volume demonstrate how the concept of value lies at the intersection of individual and collective tastes, desires, sentiments, and attitudes that inform the ways people select, or give priority to, one thing over another.

prehistoric art significance: *The Meanings of Things* I. Hodder, 2013-11-12 This unique and fascinating book concentrates on the varying roles and functions that material culture may play in almost all aspects of the social fabric of a given culture. The contributors, from Africa, Australia and

Papua New Guinea, India, South America, the USA, and both Eastern and Western Europe, provide a rich variety of views and experience in a worldwide perspective. Several of the authors focus on essential points of principle and methodology that must be carefully considered before any particular approach to material culture is adopted. One of the many fundamental questions posed in the book is whether or not all material culture is equivalent to documents which can be 'read' and interpreted by the outside observer. If it is, what is the nature of the 'messages' or meanings conveyed in this way? The book also questions the extent to which acceptance, and subsequent diffusion, of a religious belief or symbol may be qualified by the status of the individuals concerned in transmitting the innovation, as well as by the stratification of the society involved. Several authors deal with 'works of art' and the most effective means of reaching an understanding of their past significance. In some chapters semiotics is seen as the most appropriate technique to apply to the decoding of the assumed rules and grammars of material culture expression.

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prehistoric art significance: *Theories of Art* Moshe Barasch, 2000 First published in 2001. Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis, an informa company.

prehistoric art significance: Modern Theories of Art 2 Moshe Barasch, 1998-03-01 In this volume, the third in his classic series of texts surveying the history of art theory, Moshe Barasch traces the hidden patterns and interlocking themes in the study of art, from Impressionism to Abstract Art. Barasch details the immense social changes in the creation, presentation, and reception of art which have set the history of art theory on a vertiginous new course: the decreased relevance of workshops and art schools; the replacement of the treatise by the critical review; and the interrelation of new modes of scientific inquiry with artistic theory and praxis. The consequent changes in the ways in which critics as well as artists conceptualized paintings and sculptures were radical, marked by an obsession with intense, immediate sensory experiences, psychological reflection on the effects of art, and a magnetic pull to the exotic and alien, making for the most exciting and fertile period in the history of art criticism.

prehistoric art significance: Tribes of the Ancient Southeast: Their Impact on the Land and Culture of America Pasquale De Marco, 2025-07-17 Dive into the captivating world of the indigenous peoples of the American Southeast in this comprehensive and engaging book. *Tribes of the Ancient Southeast: Their Impact on the Land and Culture of America* unveils the rich tapestry of cultures, traditions, and contributions of these resilient communities. From the lush forests of the Appalachians to the fertile plains of the Mississippi River Valley, this book takes readers on a journey through time, exploring the diverse ecosystems that shaped the lives of the region's indigenous inhabitants. Discover the sophisticated agricultural practices, intricate trade networks, and elaborate social structures that governed their daily lives. Delve into the vibrant cultures of the Cherokee, Natchez, Caddo, and other prominent tribes, gaining insights into their languages, beliefs, art forms, and political systems. Unravel the intricate ways in which these communities interacted with their environment, leaving an indelible mark on the land and shaping the cultural heritage of America. Witness the rise and fall of ancient civilizations, the clashes and alliances between rival tribes, and the enduring spirit of a people who, despite facing unimaginable challenges, have maintained their cultural identity and continue to thrive today. This book celebrates the resilience of the indigenous peoples of the Southeast, honoring their traditions and acknowledging their profound influence on the cultural heritage of America. With captivating narratives and in-depth analysis, *Tribes of the Ancient Southeast* sheds light on a pivotal chapter in American history, highlighting the contributions and struggles of the region's indigenous communities. It is a must-read for anyone interested in Native American history, anthropology, or the diverse cultural heritage of the United States. If you like this book, write a review!

prehistoric art significance: *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East* Karen Radner, Nadine Moeller, D. T. Potts, 2020-07-07 This groundbreaking, five-volume series offers a

comprehensive, fully illustrated history of Egypt and Western Asia (the Levant, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Iran), from the emergence of complex states to the conquest of Alexander the Great. Written by a highly diverse, international team of leading scholars, whose expertise brings to life the people, places, and times of the remote past, the volumes in this series focus firmly on the political and social histories of the states and communities of the ancient Near East. Individual chapters present the key textual and material sources underpinning the historical reconstruction, paying particular attention to the most recent archaeological finds and their impact on our historical understanding of the periods surveyed. Commencing with the domestication of plants and animals, and the foundation of the first permanent settlements in the region, Volume I contains ten chapters that provide a masterful survey of the earliest dynasties and territorial states in the ancient Near East, concluding with the rise of the Old Kingdom in Egypt and the Dynasty of Akkad in Mesopotamia. Politics, ideology, religion, art, crafts, economy, military developments, and the built environment are all examined. Uniquely, emphasis is placed upon elucidating both the internal dynamics of these states and communities, as well as their external relationships with their neighbors in the wider region. The result is a thoughtful, critical, and robust survey of the populations that laid the foundation for all future developments in the ancient Near East.

prehistoric art significance: Illinois Encyclopedia Caryn Hannan, 2008-01-01 ILLINOIS ENCYCLOPEDIA is the definitive reference work on Illinois ever published. The noted Illinois historian, Michael Meagher has written articles on Introduction to Illinois History, Early History of Illinois, and Illinois History. These articles cover the history of Illinois, from the early explorers to twenty-first century events. Other major sections in this reference work are Illinois Symbols and Designations, Geography and Topography of Illinois, Profiles of Illinois Governors, Chronology of Illinois Historic Events, Dictionary of Illinois Places, Illinois Constitution, Bibliography of Illinois Books, Pictorial Scenes of Illinois, State Executive Offices, State Agencies, Departments and Offices, Illinois Senators, Illinois Assembly Members, U.S. Senators and U.S. Congress members from Illinois, Directory of Illinois Historic Places and Index. ILLINOIS ENCYCLOPEDIA contains stunning photographs and portraits to compliment the expertly written text. Population charts are arranged alphabetically by city or town name, and by county. This allows students easy access to find population figures for their area of interest. Other population charts list all places in Illinois by largest populated places to least populated places by city or county. Directories contain information on elected state and federal officials along with their contact information including mail and email addresses, phone and fax numbers. Easy to use reference maps are included to find your elected state or federal officials. The Directory of State Services lists the head officials and full contact information on state agencies and departments, some of which were just newly created by the legislature. The Directory of Illinois Historic Places contains all the latest up to date information on every Illinois historic place. The Bibliography includes that latest books published on Illinois. A detailed Index makes the work thoroughly referential. ILLINOIS ENCYCLOPEDIA offers librarians, teachers and students a single source reference work that provides the answers to the most frequently asked questions about Illinois and its history.

prehistoric art significance: The Arts of the Grid Liora Bigon, Nava Shaked, 2021-10-04 This is the first collection of interdisciplinary scholarship to expand on gridded modalities, with a strong affinity to the arts. It seeks to inspire new avenues of research by exploring a horizon of gridded relationships among humans, between humans and the environment, and between human and non-human actors. By bringing together philosophical themes and applied practices, the volume traces a genealogy of the grid as an exercise in grasping its inherent complexity and incomplete quality. A collective effort by a group of researchers, practitioners, and designers, it promotes an understanding of gridded modalities as complex networks that interact with other networks, generating new meanings and reflecting changes in thought.

prehistoric art significance: Archaeology Notes for Assistant Professor UGC NTA NET Exam Mocktime Publication, 101-01-01 Syllabus: 1. Introduction to Archaeology: Definition; aims, scope and ethics of archaeology; history and growth of Archaeology, and History of Indian

archaeology; Relationship of archaeology with social and natural sciences. 2. Archaeological Data Management: Type and nature of archaeological data; Retrieval of archaeological data: Methods of explorations and excavations (Random and systematic prospections; subsurface investigations using modern techniques such as remote sensing, resistivity surveys); Recording and documentation. 3. Artefact Analysis and Interpretation: Methods of artefact analysis: categorization, classification and characterization; Methods of interpretation and related issues: Application of sociological and anthropological models: Ethnography and experimental replication studies; Traditional, Processual and Post-Processual approaches. 4. Reporting and Preservation: Preparation of archaeological reports; Conservation and preservation of archaeological remains/sites: Aims and Methods; Antiquarian laws. 5. Chronology and Dating Methods: Encompassing Relative dating: Cultural stratigraphy, biostratigraphy, typology, Fluorine, Nitrogen and Phosphate analysis; Soil analysis, and Chronometric methods: Radiocarbon (C14), Potassium/Argon, Fission track, Luminescence dating (TL and OSL), Dendrochronology, Palaeomagnetic dating Varve analysis, ESR dating, Obsidian hydration, Cosmogenic nuclides method of dating. 6. Introduction to Prehistory: Prehistoric beginning encompassing geological, biological and cultural dimensions of humans; Human origin and Geological time scale covering Late Tertiary (Miocene and Pliocene) and Quaternary Periods; Plio-Pleistocene boundary, Paleomagnetic records, Pleistocene and Holocene epochs. 7. Pleistocene Environment and Biostratigraphy: Major environment and climatic changes of Pleistocene; Pleistocene and Marine Isotopic Stages (MIS); Biostratigraphy of the Pleistocene, including Pleistocene flora and Fauna. 8. Human Evolution and Dispersal: Main stages of human evolution and important fossil records: Hominin ancestors of the Late Miocene, Pliocene and the Pleistocene, specifically Pre-Australopiths, Australopiths and Homo; alongside Hypotheses on modern human dispersal. 9. Prehistoric Lithic Technologies: The Cultural backdrop to prehistory: Evolution of stone implements and development of lithic technologies, including The Oldowan, Acheulian and the Flake and Blade based industries of the Stone Age. 10. Global Palaeolithic Developments and Art: Palaeolithic cultural development in the world context focusing on Africa, Europe and South East Asia and China; detailing Early Stone Age, Middle Stone Age and Late Stone Age of Africa; Lower Palaeolithic, Middle Palaeolithic and Upper Palaeolithic of Europe and West Asia; and Palaeolithic cultural developments in China and South East Asia, concluding with Prehistoric Art: antiquity, significance, distribution. 11. Indian Stone Age Geo-chronology and Key Sites: Geo-chronology and Stone Age cultures of India, exemplified by The Sohan Valley and the Potwar Plateau sites in the Sivalik hills, The Belan and Son valleys, Didwana dune 16R in Rajasthan, Kortlayar valley/Attirampakkam in Tamilnadu and Jwalapuram in Andhra Pradesh. 12. Indian Lower Palaeolithic Culture: Tool types and lithic technology; The Sohan industry and its antiquity; The Acheulian industry and its spread into major river valleys, with sites in the Narmada and the Sabarmati valleys, the Belan and the Son valley sites, sites in the Hunsgi and Baichabal valleys, sites in the Krishna and the Godavari valleys, sites in the Kortlayar valley; and sites associated with the Playas of Rajasthan. 13. Indian Middle Palaeolithic Culture: Culture and geographical spread; Tool types and lithic technology of the Middle Palaeolithic, specifically the prepared core techniques/Levallois technique. 14. Indian Upper Palaeolithic Culture and Art: The Upper Palaeolithic culture: Tool types and lithic technologies of the Upper Palaeolithic, including Blade and bone implements; its geographic distribution and major sites; and Prehistoric Art in the Indian context: Antiquity, significance and distribution. 15. Mesolithic and Early Neolithic in Wider Context: Mesolithic in Europe and Epi-Palaeolithic developments in West Asia; coupled with an understanding of Neolithic and Food Production, focusing on the Neolithic stage in West Asia and China. 16. Indian Mesolithic Culture and Adaptation: Mesolithic culture of the Indian subcontinent: Characteristic features; Tool types and micro-blade technology; regional variations in tool assemblages; Evidence of incipient stages of food production; and Patterns of ecological adaptation and distribution, including Sites in the alluvial plains, horseshoe lakes, coastal sites, sand-dune sites, sites in the plateaus and rock-shelter sites. 17. Early Neolithic Cultures of the Indian Subcontinent: Beginning with Early farming communities of Baluchistan: Mehrgarh and Kili-Gul-Muhammad; Neolithic

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