
An engraved shale pendant from Star Carr, UK: An indicator of cultural connection?

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Abstract

The paper focuses on an engraved shale pendant recovered from the Early Mesolithic (9300-8500 cal BC) site of Star Carr, UK. The pendant, initially published in 2016, has been analysed using a raft of techniques, including SEM, microwear analysis, residue analysis, light microscopy, RTI, 3D scanning, and experimental replication (Milner et al. 2016). This paper summarizes the findings of analysis before considering the object in the wider context of artistic expression in the Mesolithic of the UK. The pendant is found to be unique, with no other art objects showing engraving of a similar type in the UK. This includes at Star Carr itself, where other engraved objects, notably barbed points, are stylistically distinct. However, the shale pendant may, in some respects, represent an interesting point of potential connectivity with other regions of Europe, in particular Denmark where engraved amber pendants have been recovered. Yet, amber pendants recovered from Star Carr demonstrate no evidence of engraving and no shale beads or pendants have been recovered from Denmark or other Scandinavian countries. The specific engraving is similar, whilst the materials used as a support for these engravings are dissimilar. A picture emerges of points of continuity and discontinuity between regions in terms of personal adornment and artistic expression. The study highlights that in trying to analyze artistic expression across regions, the study of engravings benefits from the incorporation of a wider raft of factors, including variations in material, production strategies and tools used, contexts of use and extent of use, and deposition in exploring the question of cultural connectivity.

Bibliography

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