

PASTORAL NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT BEHAVIOUR IN THE CENTRAL RIFT VALLEY OF KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study looked at Pastoral Neolithic settlement behaviour in the Central Rift Valley of Kenya. The research focused on four key prehistoric sites, that is, Hyrax Hill, Crescent Island, Gamble's Cave and Njoro River Cave. The main objective of the research was to establish the adaptive strategies that the Pastoral Neolithic people used to cope with their habitat. Specifically, the study intended to identify the factors that influenced the settlement of prehistoric communities in the study area. The study also examined the nature and significance of the spatio-temporal organization of the Pastoral Neolithic communities in the area. The research was guided by three theories, that is, systems ecological theory, settlement pattern theory, and community area theory.

Data were collected using survey aided by GIS technology, mapping, photography and sketch drawings. Non-cultural materials like water points, pasture, rainfall variation and distribution, as well as landscape were analysed in regard to how they influenced settlement and supported pastoral economy. The findings are presented in the form of tables, plates and sketch drawings. Cultural materials like pottery and lithic tools were analysed in terms of their presumed function, methods and style of manufacture and the raw material used.

The study findings indicate that Pastoral Neolithic activities in the Central Rift were largely determined by the environment. Pastoral Neolithic communities were involved in many socio-economic activities as indicated by the sites. The findings also suggest a people who had complex socio-economic networks and used their technical skills to adapt to the environment.

In conclusion, the research indicates that environmental resources like pasture, water, and well drained soils that support pastoral economies played a key role in the nature and choice of settlements. Other factors included altitude, landscape, and security. Apart from animal herding, Pastoral Neolithic communities were engaged in diverse activities ranging from stone tool manufacture, pottery making and hunting. The study recommends further studies in this subject to understand other issues like mobility, livestock diversity, plant communities as well as productivity and disease since these affect the total lifestyles of pastoralists.