

300,000-year-old stone tools found in Saudi Arabian desert could shed light on human migration out of Africa

Stone tools unearthed in Saudi Arabia's inhospitable Nefud Desert indicate that members of our genus *Homo* had ventured beyond the familiar borders of Africa and the Levant sometime between 300,000 and 500,000 years ago. And according to climate data captured in the bones of animals found at the site, the environment they moved into may not have been that different from the one they left behind in East Africa. That may help anthropologists better understand the role of environment—and the ability to adapt to challenging new landscapes—in shaping human evolution and global expansion.

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Ancient environmental records in the bones that lay alongside the long-discarded tools suggest that the Nefud was a very different place at the time.

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The fossilized animals at Ti's al Ghadah may have something to say on the subject, because the ratios of certain isotopes in their tooth enamel preserve information about the plants they ate and the climate they grew in. Roberts and his colleagues used those chemical signatures to reconstruct an ancient environment that looked surprisingly like the humid savanna of modern East Africa.

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That means that, during the early pulses of migration out of Africa, the Middle Pleistocene pioneers wouldn't have faced the challenge of adapting to life in today's hot, arid desert.

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