

Evidence of Pre-Pottery Neolithic in Saudi Arabia

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General view of area near Jubbah with some other distinctive projectile points found at site JQ-101.

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Pre-Pottery Neolithic assemblages are best known from the fertile areas of the Mediterranean Levant with most research focussed on the internal cultural dynamics of the 'core area' of what is known as the Fertile Crescent.

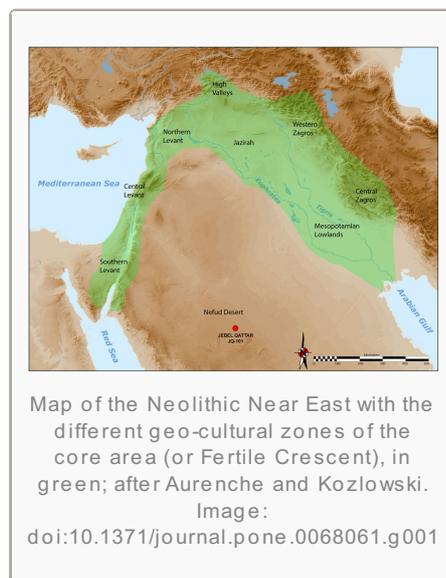
The development of the Neolithic in Southwest Asia has long been seen as a pivotal phase in human evolution and history; a cultural and economic 'revolution', which fundamentally transformed the relationship between humans and their environments, paving the way for population explosion, a shift towards sedentary settlement and a profound change in technology.

However there has been (for a variety of reasons) less research devoted towards understanding the interactions between the core and peripheral regions.

One such site is located at Jebel Qattar 101 (JQ-101), at Jubbah in the southern part of the Nefud Desert of northern Saudi Arabia and contains a large collection of stone tools, adjacent to an Early Holocene palaeolake.

Jebel Qattar lies around 500 kilometres beyond the previously identified geographic range of Pre-Pottery Neolithic cultures.

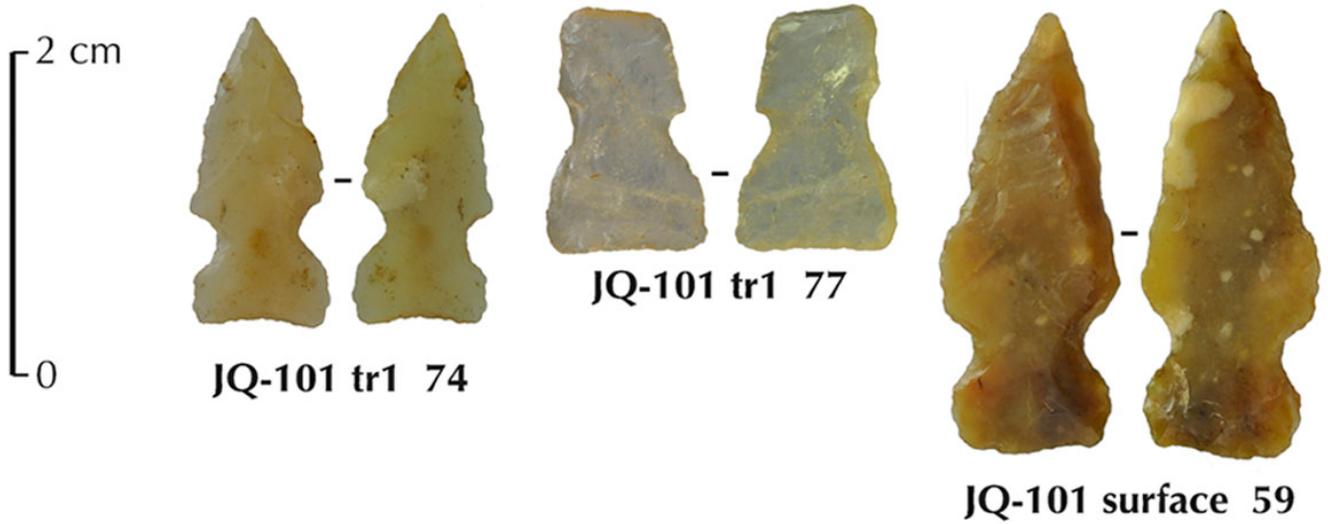
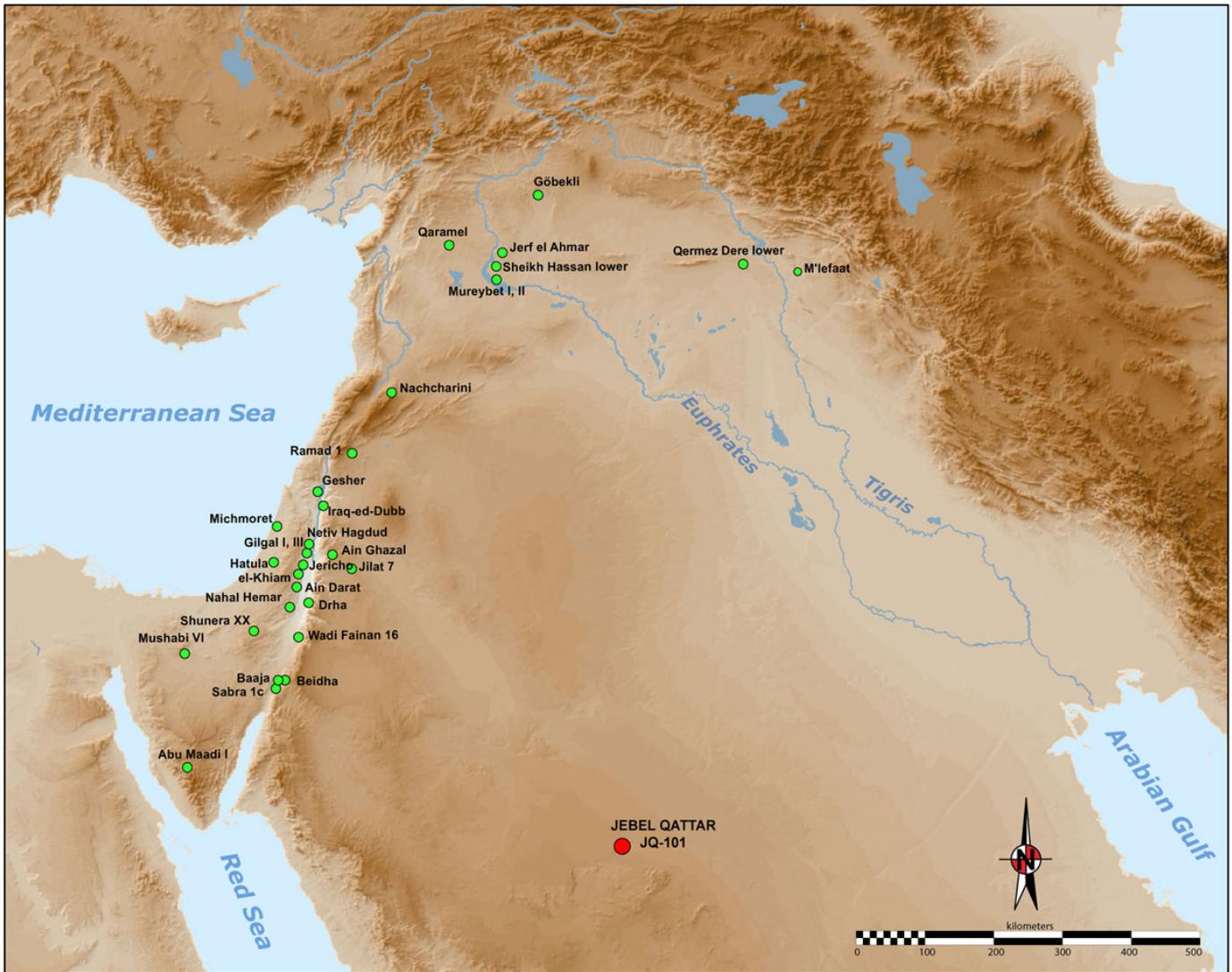
A close match to other technologies



The stone tool assemblage contains lithic types, including [El-Khiam](#) and [Helwan](#) projectile points, which are similar to those recorded in Pre-Pottery Neolithic A and Pre-Pottery Neolithic B assemblages in the Fertile Crescent.

The Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) dates to c. 10,300-9,600 BP with the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) at c. 9,600-8,600 BP.

The PPNA ranges over the Levant and the upper Mesopotamian region of the Fertile Crescent (often viewed as a “core area”), while the PPNB complex sites are located from central Anatolia to the Sinai (North-South) and from Cyprus to the Jazira (West-East).



Three El-Khiam points from JQ-101 beneath other sites with the distinctive point. Image: doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0068061.g009

Technological analysis of the typologically diagnostic Jebel Qattar 101 projectile points indicates a unique strategy to manufacture the final forms, thereby raising the possibility of either direct migration of Levantine groups or the assimilation of the cultural typology within mobile communities in Arabia.

The discovery of the Early Holocene site of Jebel Qattar suggests that the view of the geographic distribution and character of Pre-Pottery Neolithic cultures may be in need of revision.



General views of JQ-101 site. Image: doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0068061.g006

The absence of direct radiometric dating of surface artefacts from JQ-101 is tempered by the indisputably Levantine projectile point types and absolute dates on the neighbouring palaeolake (JQ-200).

The sedimentary sequence at JQ-200 demonstrates that a water body existed during the Early Holocene beneath the slopes of Jebel Qattar with an OSL age of 11.7 ± 0.9 ka (9.7 ± 0.9 ka BC)

The presence of these distinctive Levantine style points is a geographical extension to the south, the first time that they have been identified in the Nefud Desert of Saudi Arabia.

The recent identification of JQ-101 shows the great potential and high reward of further Neolithic research in Saudi Arabia, especially in the desert areas between the southern border of Jordan and the Jubbah basin. JQ-101 contributes to the growing number of new discoveries in Arabia, highlighting the significance of the archaeological and environmental records of the region. A key point to emerge here is the need to broaden Neolithic research beyond the borders of the Fertile Crescent.

Source: *PlosOne*

More Information

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