
Diversity of cultural traditions in Kapova Cave (the Southern Urals, Russia)

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Abstract

Kapova cave is located in the Southern Urals in Russia. The cave consists of the system of halls, galleries and corridors at three hypsometrical levels, the lowest of which is occupied by the river Shulgan. Wall paintings of Upper Paleolithic time are preserved on the second and the third levels. They are represented by figures of mammoths, horses, rhinoceros, bison, fish, camel, zooantropomorph and geometrical signs. Radiocarbon dating of archaeological layers showed the interval between 13930 ± 300 (GIN-4853) and 16010 ± 100 (KN-5023) BP. Archaeological excavations have revealed traces of short-term human activity in the cave, which were expressed in symbolic and daily practices.

Some artefacts were made of raw materials, deposits of which aren't located in the Ural region. Shells of mollusks with pierced halls, perforations or without it were found at the lower level of the cave. These shells originated from Pliocene deposits of the Lower Volga and Caspian region, that is situated on distance about 450 km from Kapova cave. The painting of camel in the Chamber of Chaos confirms this direction of people's connections. This picture doesn't have analogues in caves of Franco-Cantabrian region, but has similarities with figure of camel in Ignatievskaya cave (the Southern Urals) and maybe Mongolian cave Khoit Tsenkher despite of another image style.

There are group of finds in the cave, made of serpentinite and jasper, whose nearest deposits are located in Trans-Urals region on distance 70 – 150 km. Barrel-shaped beads, pendants and small cup from the lower level were made of serpentinite. Moreover, several serpentinite pebbles were found during excavations on the upper level of the cave. It confirms the correlation between groups of people, who visited both levels of the cave and carried out substantively different activities there, including creation of meaningfully various paintings. The part of stone tools was made of grey or greenish-brown jasper. Some of them have traces of utilization. The whole stone industry of Kapova cave has features of the Ural Upper Paleolithic culture with prints of earlier Eastern European traditions.

Thus, Kapova cave can be considered as regional sanctuary, which was visited by related groups of hunter-gatherers. They brought to cave different things, for example, tools and ornaments, made of raw materials, deposits of which aren't located nearby the cave. Special attention should be paid to geographical Volga-Caspian direction, because Mesolithic population of the Southern Urals came exactly from this region.

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Keywords: Kapova cave, the Southern Urals, Upper Palaeolithic, parietal art, cultural traditions, long distance social networks, raw material