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SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE MIDDLE-UPPER PALAEOLITHIC TRANSITION IN THE BALKANS

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Abstract

In this work direct evidence is presented about spirituality in the late Middle and early Upper Palaeolithic in the Balkans: engraved and perforated objects of bone and artifacts of rock crystal but also all indicators that bear witness to cultural identity of Middle and Upper Palaeolithic communities and their interrelations. Within Neanderthal communities graphic expression, aesthetic feelings and high level of technical intelligence are ascertained. Development of the Upper Palaeolithic on local foundations and social integration of local communities occurred only after 40,000 years ago, by all appearances after contact with bearers of Upper Palaeolithic cultures. This is confirmed by exchange of raw materials at larger distances and emergence of leaf-shaped points in the Bohunician and Aurignacian. It is assumed that the Upper Palaeolithic in the Balkans spread along main natural communications and was followed by withdrawal of the Middle Palaeolithic population in the isolated mountainous regions of the peninsula. There are indications that between local communities and bearers of Upper Palaeolithic cultures existed not only economic and territorial, but also social and ideological competition based on the need of communities to establish and impose their own identity. This phenomenon could have influenced the establishment of stylistically discernible Upper Palaeolithic cultures (regardless of their bearers) and indirectly also the emergence of Upper Palaeolithic art.

Introduction

Changes of spirituality taking place at the Middle-Upper Palaeolithic transition are difficult to consider out of context of cultural and anthropological changes that had occurred in this period. Even more so just the attitude about the nature of the transition had decisive influence on understanding of cognitive abilities of the Neanderthal men, their creativity and symbolic thinking. As when Europe is concerned hypotheses about sudden population and cultural change at the transition from Middle to Upper Palaeolithic have priority over other explanations it is not surprising that among experts prevails an opinion that bearers of Middle Palaeolithic cultures had not been able to advance radically their technology, economy and social life. Many recognize the reasons for this in limited intellectual abilities of Neanderthals and in all specific aspects of their way of life. However, it remains unclear why intellectually superior *Homo sapiens sapiens* needed many tens of thousands of years to develop Upper Palaeolithic technology and offer convincing evidence about his cognitive and artistic potential. It is common knowledge that in Europe culturally differentiated technocomplexes and the distinct creative explosion confirmed by Aurignacian figurines and parietal art of Chauvet (Hahn 1977; Clottes 1996) occurred only 34.000-32.000 years ago.

Early occurrence of figurative parietal and mobiliary art certainly had its background so it could be assumed that the period from 43,000 to 34,000 years ago is of crucial importance for understanding its provenance. There is no need to remind particularly that just at this period in many parts of Europe could be observed a chronological overlap between Neanderthals and modern humans, or that the Balkan peninsula is one of the areas where this coexistence lasted longest. Against that background, the question can be raised of whether there were contacts and influences between Neanderthals and anatomically modern humans, the nature of their relations and to what degree their mutual interaction had an effect on culture development and changes in the way of life of human communities in this period. This is the very reason why in the course of study of the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic transition in the Balkans (fig. 1), we take into account not only direct but also indirect evidence of spiritual-

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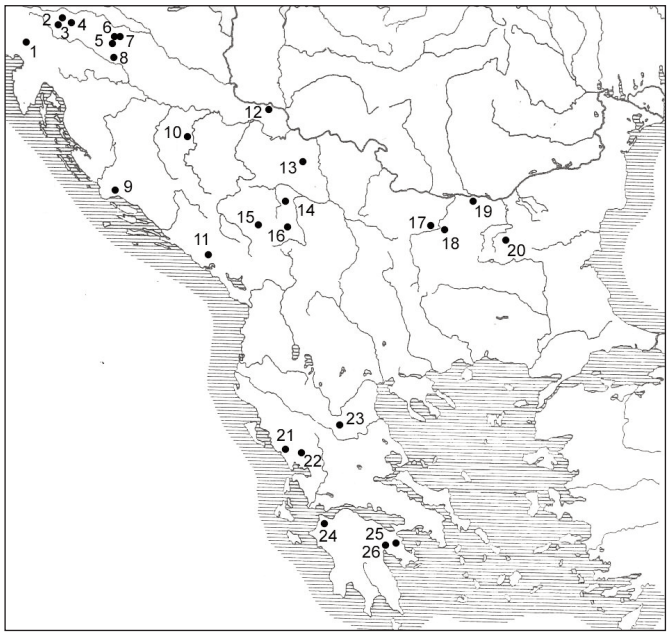

Figure 1. Middle Palaeolithic and Upper Palaeolithic sites in the Balkans, mentioned in the text. 1, Divje Babe I; 2, Mokriška Jama; 3, Potocka Zijalka; 4, Mornova Zijalka; 5, Krapina; 6, Velika Pecina; 7, Vindija; 8, Veternica; 9, Mujina Pecina; 10, Kamen; 11, Crvena Stijena; 12, Petrovaradin fortress; 13, Risovaca; 14, Hadži Prodanova Pecina; 15, Mališina Stijena; 16, Smolucka Pecina; 17, Samuilitsa II; 18, Temnata; 19, Muselievo; 20, Bacho Kiro; 21, Morfi; 22, Kokkinopilos; 23, Theopetra; 24, Elaiochori; 25, Klisoura; 26,

ity: those that are manifest in cultural identity, tradition and different forms of exchange.

Evidence of spirituality in the Middle Palaeolithic

The most reliable confirmations about graphic expression in the Middle Palaeolithic have been encountered at sites in Bulgaria. In layer VI of sector TD of Temnata Dupka, dated about 50,000 b.p., a stone of quadrangular shape decorated on two sides with engraved parallel lines was found (Crémades 2000), while in layer 12 of Bacho Kiro, dating from before 47,000 b.p., had been found a bone with an engraved motif of zigzag lines. It has already been indicated that it was a relatively complex motif characteristic for the late phases of the Upper Palaeolithic (Marshack 1982). In contrast to common parallel incisions and other motives encountered on objects of bone and stone from this period, the zigzag pattern could have diverse symbolic meanings.

The possibility that there was also musical expression in the south European Palaeolithic had been for a long time associated with the find of a perforated cave bear mandible from the Aurignacian layer at Potočka Zijalka (Brodar & Osole 1979) and perforated bones, which could have possibly be used as musical instruments are also confirmed at sites in neighboring areas (Basler 1979). However, a few years ago in Slovenia, one much more credible find was discovered, the well-known flute from Divje Babe I in Slovenia (Turk *et al*. 1997). A flute made of a cave bear femur was found in a Mousterian layer assumed to be more than 45,000 years old. The flute has at least two holes and by its shape and manufacture technique it resembles specimens from the later period whose intentionality of manufacture and purpose is not disputable. Still, opinions about whether holes were perforated on purpose and was it really a musical instrument differ (d'Errico *et al*. 1998; Otte 2000). It seems that assumption about animal inflicted perforations on the bone from Divlje Babe I (d'Errico *et al*. 1998) is more difficult to prove than the assumption that these holes were produced as a result of human activity.

It should be borne in mind that traces of gnawing, pitting and scoring on the bone surface do not prove by themselves that the bone could not have been used for the making of a musical instrument – as this is the case of cultural choice, which should not be rejected *a priori* (about this see also Otte 2000). Also, the technology of hole making that had been eventually used in the Middle Palaeolithic should not be judged against the evidence of perforations on the objects from a much later time as are the bone pipes from Geißenklösterle and Isturitz (d'Errico *et al*. 2003). It is well-known that technology of bone-working developed gradually as is confirmed by simple awls from Blombos and Arcy-sur-Cure (Henshilwood *et al*. 2001; d'Errico *et al*. 2003).

The fact that gnawed bones could have been used for production of various objects (or that damage occurred later – which is difficult to ascertain on the basis of few negatives on the edge of the aperture) is confirmed by the almost forgotten ibex phalanx from the Middle Palaeolithic layer XII at Crvena Stijena dated to 40,777±900 b.p. (Basler 1975a and b). In contrast to two phalanxes from horizon Xc (Upper Palaeolithic) that have holes, which are almost certainly the result of animal activities (Mihailović 1999), this heavily gnawed phalanx is at one end perforated in its entire width (fig. 2). The apertures on both sides of the bone are of same shape and size (8 x 11 mm) and their edge is partially jagged (suggesting that

Figure 2. Perforated phalanx (Capra ibex) from layer XII of Crvena Stijena

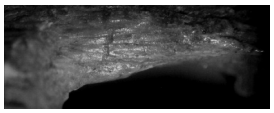

Figure 3. Perforated phalanx from layer XII of Crvena Stijena. Détail.

the bone was perforated from the outside in both directions) and partially flattened - at right and blunts angle in relation to the bone surface. Preliminary analyses performed on this bone (V. Dimitrijević and D. Mihailović) revealed that at the flattened spots, there are traces of work parallel to the aperture edge (fig. 3). This is the reason why we think that holes on the phalanx are man-made although we are more inclined to interpret this object as a pendant and not a whistle.

About the spirituality in the Middle Palaeolithic, in addition to engraved and perforated objects, there is also the distribution of rare minerals, crystals and fossils. When rare minerals are concerned, it should be said that objects of quartz crystals were encountered at the Palaeolithic site Hadži Prodanova Pećina in western Serbia (Mihailović & Mihailović in press). Near the top of the Middle Palaeolithic layer were found sidescrapers, retouched flakes and quartz implements in close association with numerous remains of cave bear and also one sidescraper of pure rock crystal (fig. 4). This artifact was not found in any specific context but the fact that in the same layer a quartz crystal was discovered (fig. 5), which could not have utilitarian function, might indicates a special attitude to this mineral. It is known that quartz crystals had been collected since the Lower Palaeolithic (Bednarik 1995) and that tools made of this raw material occur in the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic (Reher & Frison 1991; Walker 2003).

Direct evidence about the spiritual life of Neanderthals in the Balkans, although sparse, reflects all the dilemmas already present in the explanation of this type of finds. Graphic expression, aesthetic feelings and symbolism are confirmed with certainty and there are strong indications for musical expression. On the other hand, evidence about religion is still controversial although D. Gorjanović Kramberger a century ago suggested the possibility of cannibalism (Basler 1979). More recent investigations of this phenomenon indicate that in Krapina (Russel 1987) and Vindija (Malez 1985) was practiced post mortem manipulation of remains of Neanderthals in contrast to the so-called cave bear cult in Veternica and Mornova Zjalka (Malez 1983) for which there is no reliable proof and which could to a great extent be explained as a result of taphonomic processes (Pacher 2002). Nevertheless, account of spiritual life of the Neanderthal men could not be complete without studying other aspects of their spirituality – consciousness of cultural identity, role of tradition and finds suggesting cultural influences and direct contacts between communities.

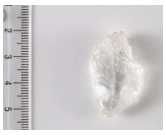

Figure 4. Rock crystal implement from Hadži Prodanova Pećina.

Figure 5. Quartz crystal from Hadži Prodanova Pećina.

Spirituality and cultural identity

As other indicators are missing, we can assess the cultural identity of Palaeolithic communities usually only according to the style of production of artifacts and homogeneity of industries within more restricted spatial and chronological limits. Of course, when the Middle Palaeolithic is concerned, the issue is not only whether Neanderthal communities were aware of their identity, which is mostly challenged but also what consequences to their culture and way of life could had been inflicted by contact with bearers of Upper Palaeolithic

cultures. Finally, from the aspect of studying spirituality and the cognitive potential of Neanderthals, of no lesser importance is the question whether Neanderthals were able to independently realize cultural transformation (towards Upper Palaeolithic) or if they have almost in all cases had been influenced by bearers of Upper Palaeolithic cultures.

The Carpathian basin characterized by great complexity when spatial and chronological relations between certain cultural facies of Middle and Early Upper Palaeolithic are concerned, is of particular significance for studying these themes. It is generally considered that late Middle Palaeolithic industries with leaf-shaped points originated from the earlier Micoquian tradition, the presence of which has not yet been confirmed in the southern regions of Pannonia. New finds acquired during this year's investigations at Petrovaradin fortress by Novi Sad (Serbia) suggest, however, somewhat different conclusions (Mihailović in press).

In the lowest layer at Petrovaradin, above the virgin rock, was collected, for the time being, a rather poor Middle Palaeolithic industry including a massive bifacial side-scraper with back, which resembles the tools characteristic for the Micoquian of Central Europe (fig. 6). However, in the superimposed layer, a Middle Palaeolithic industry with pseudo-Levallois flakes (mostly without faceted platform), transversal scrapers, quartz tools and numerous products of chipping has been confirmed. The cultural and chronological position of these finds is still being assessed. Nevertheless, the presence of a bifacial sidescraper in the lower layer indicates that in south Pannonia could be observed an earlier substratum, which represents the basis for the emergence of industries with leaf-shaped points in the larger segment of central Europe. On the basis of this, as well as some other indicators (quartz and Charentian component), it can be assumed that finds from Petrovaradin suggest a certain degree of cultural unity in the Middle Palaeolithic of the Carpathian basin.

In contrast to the larger part of central and eastern Europe where development of industries with leaf-shaped points could be well observed in the Middle as well as in the Upper Palaeolithic, the situation in the Balkans is different. Middle Palaeolithic industries with leaf-shaped points are confirmed with certainty only in Bulgaria, at the sites of Muselievo, Samuilitsa II and Temnata (Haesaerts & Sirakova 1979; Sirakov 1983; Gatsov *et al*. 1990; Ivanova & Sirakova 1995) while they appear in small quantity and mostly uncertain stratigraphic and cultural context on many sites in various regions of the Balkans: in Slovenia (Divje Babe I), Croatia (Vindija), Bosnia (Kamen), Serbia (Risovača – figs. 7 et 8), Montenegro (in the vicinity of Nikšić) and in Greece (Kokkinopilos, Morfi, Elaiochori, Kephalari, Theopetra) (Brodar 1999; Malez 1979; Gavela 1969; Vušović-Lučić 1996; Darlas 1994; Panagopoulou 1999). In the Middle Palaeolithic the leaf-shaped points mostly occur in industries characterized by the Levallois technique of flaking. Also,

Figure 6. Bifacially retouched sidescraper from lower layer at Petrovaradin fortress.

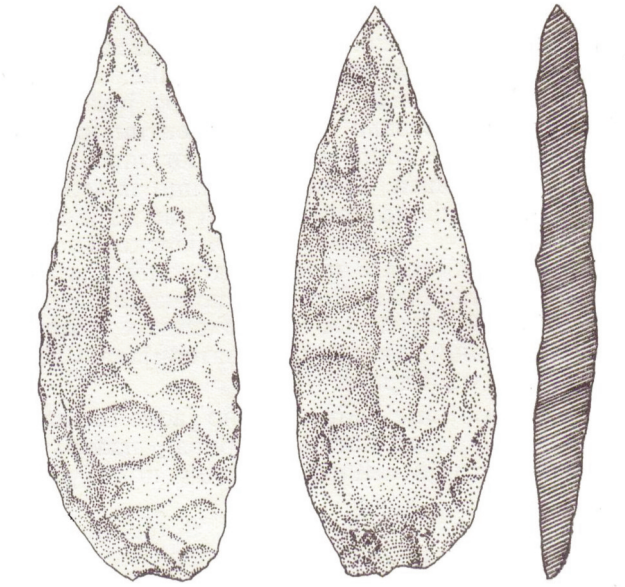

Figure 7. Leaf-shaped point from Risovaca (after Gavela 1969).

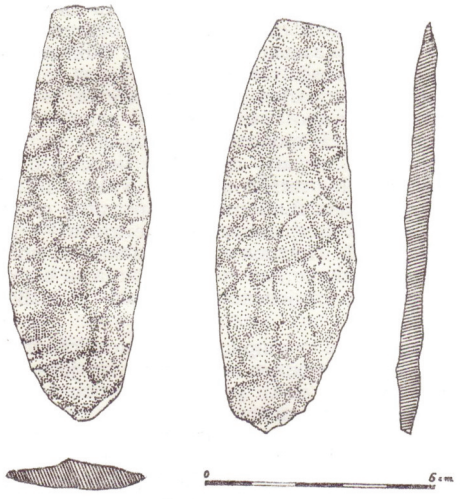

Figure 8. Leaf-shaped point from Risovaca (after Gavela 1969).

there is the opinion that their appearance in the south of the Balkans could be associated only with the phase of Middle-Upper Palaeolithic transition or with the very beginning of Upper Palaeolithic (Darlas 1994).

For the time being there are not enough elements to draw the conclusion that Middle Palaeolithic industries with leaf-shaped points in the areas to the south of Sava and Danube (except in Bulgaria) occur as a differentiated cultural facies. It was probably a question of the spreading of a certain type of implements related perhaps to entirely specific hunting activities (Hopkinson 2003). However, with the emergence of the Upper Palaeolithic, the symbolic character and social role of this type of tools became much more conspicuous. It is evident, namely, at least in Central Europe, that leaf-shaped points became a product, which because of its practical, aesthetic or symbolic characteristics, had been distributed from a limited area and there were specialized workshops for their production (Svoboda 1988). Tools of this type have been encountered in the Aurignacian, culture associated with emergence of modern humans as well as in the Bohunician, which originated from Middle Palaeolithic foundations the bearer of which was probably Neanderthals (Oliva 1984, 1990; Svoboda 1990; Valoch 1995). It speaks sufficiently about the fact that influences between populations were not of one-way character, but also that the local population succeeded in realizing cultural transformation, establishing contacts, expanding social networks within a wider geographic area (also confirmed also by exchange of raw materials within a larger distance) and imposing of their style at least for some time.

There is no similar evidence in the central and western part of the Balkan peninsula before the beginning of the advanced Upper Palaeolithic when there emerged cultures with a distinguished style of tool production and many elements indicating internal stylistic and technological development. The Middle Palaeolithic of this region is characterized by a regional tradition lasting thousands of years: in northwestern Croatia based on Charentian and typical Mousterian, in north Bosnia and Bulgaria based on typical Mousterian with a more or less distinct Levallois component (Ivanova 1979; Sirakov 1983; Montet White *et al*. 1986) and in the littoral hinterland based on Pontinian and Typical Mousterian with a certain number of Charentian elements (Ivanova 1979; Darlas 1994). Yet, everything indicates that this regional tradition is of technological character and that it does not satisfy criteria that could suggest the existence of cultural identity. This essentially uniform picture of development in the Middle Palaeolithic of the Balkans changed after 40,000 years ago when changes in the settlement system of Middle Palaeolithic communities could be registered as well as the more frequent occurrence of Upper Palaeolithic types of implements.

Cultural interactions in the period of transition

Results of recent investigations and analyses offer the possibility for different explanations of the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic transition in the Balkans. In Temnata, a Middle Palaeolithic industry with the elements of transition from Levalloisian to Upper Palaeolithic chipping technique has been discovered (Drobniwicz *et al*. 2000a). The question has been raised of technological continuity between Middle and Upper Palaeolithic not only in the cave Bacho Kiro (Tsanova & Bordes 2003) but also in the entire eastern Balkans (Tsonev 1999). Absolute dates acquired for the remains of Neanderthals from Vindija (Smith *et al*. 1999) indicate a long coexistence of Neanderthals and modern humans in Hrvatsko Zagorje and the assumption was stated that Neanderthals were responsible for Aurignacian-like assemblages at the sites of Vindija, Velika Pećina, Divje Babe and Mokriška Jama (Karavanić & Smith 1998; Straus 1999; Ahern *et al*. 2004). Finally, in Klisoura cave in Peloponnesos, there is an industry related to the Uluzzian, that is considered to be a possible confirmation for the distribution of 'Upper Palaeolithic package' in the area of north Mediterranean even independently of the distribution of the Aurignacian (Kouzumelis *et al*. 2001).

In spite of new interpretations, which emphasize more and more the role of Middle Palaeolithic populations in the emergence of Upper Palaeolithic in the Balkans, we think that for the time being there is not enough evidence to confirm the assumption that Upper Palaeolithic had been established in the Balkans on the Middle Palaeolithic foundations without any other influence. The reason for this is the fact that there is chronological overlapping of the earliest Upper Palaeolithic industries in the Balkans (Bacho Kiro 11, Temnata TD-I layer 4) and in the Danube basin (Geißenklösterle, Willendorf II) with almost all industries of the transitional type in Central and Southeast Europe (Bohunician, Szeletian, Uluzzian) (Djindjan *et al*. 1999; Drobniewicz *et al*. 2000b). The only exception is the transitional industry from Temnata, horizon VI in trench TD II dated in the period around 50,000 years bp (Ferrier 2000).

An attempt to bestow a transitional character to the industry from level 11 of Bacho Kiro in such a way to relate it to the Levallois technique and to classify all fragments of retouched blades with pointed tip as Mousterian points does not seem justified (Tsanova & Bordes 2003). On one hand, the complete technological and typological structure of the assemblage from level 11 clearly indicates its Upper Palaeolithic character (Kozłowski *et al*. 1982). On the other hand, even according to selected illustrations, it is the impression that this assemblage does not include typical Levallois flakes and points of triangular shape with broad faceted platform. In contrast to Bacho Kiro, the Levallois technique is well represented in the transitional industry of Temnata that, besides Middle Palaeolithic ones, also includes many Upper Palaeolithic elements in the technology of flaking as well as in the repertoire of tools (Drobniwicz *et al*. 2000a).

The assumptions that Neanderthals are responsible for establishing Aurignacian-like or Olschewian assemblages at the sites in Slovenia and Hrvatsko Zagorje (Karavanić & Smith 1998; Karavanić 2000; Ahern *et al*. 2004) is also hard to accept because it was the period when already developed

Aurignacian industries and even remains of modern humans occurred in central Europe (Conard & Bolus 2003). Concretely, where level G1 of Vindija is concerned, there have already been stated many problems related to disturbed layers, spatial distribution of finds, cultural heterogenity of assemblage and different dates obtained for them (Smith *et al*. 1999; Zilhao & d'Errico 2000). On the other hand, it should be taken into account that Vindija, Velika Pećina, Divje Babe I and Mokriška Jama have very few finds with no more than 10-15 tools within each layer (Brodar & Osole 1979; Malez 1979; Karavanić & Smith 1998; Brodar 1999). All this seriously compromises the possibility of definite cultural attribution of these assemblages, which could be associated with the Aurignacian mainly on the basis of bone points, and especially the claim that they were produced by Neanderthals.

The Upper Palaeolithic types of tools occur, except at the sites in the northwestern Balkans, also in rather small ratio at the Middle Palaeolithic sites in central and southwestern Balkans. Among published finds from layers 3b13-3b16 of Mališina Stijena, there are few Upper Palaeolithic types of tools: two endscrapers (one of them typical carinated), one burin and two retouched blades (Radovanović 1986). Smolućka Pećina (according to the drawings of finds) yielded a couple of endscrapers (Kaluđerović 1985), while in level XII of Crvena Stijena we have been able to identify one carinated endscraper and a few retouched blades. Nevertheless, the complete assemblage from these sites unambiguously indicates their Middle Palaeolithic character.

The occurrence of Upper Palaeolithic elements in final horizons of many Middle Palaeolithic sites in the Balkans suggests that there were contacts between Middle Palaeolithic and Upper Palaeolithic communities. Where the region of central and southwestern Balkans is concerned, it should be said that Mališina Stijena, Crvena Stijena and Smolućka Pećina are located in the same area – southwestern Serbia and Montenegro (Crvena Stijena in the immediate Adriatic hinterland), that all three are situated in the mountainous zone (at an altitude higher than 500 m) and that they have been dated to approximately same period: Mališina Stijena and Smolućka Pećina in the period before 38,000 b.p. (Hedges *et al*. 1990), and Crvena Stijena to 40,777$\pm$900 b.p. (Basler 1975a). Taking into account these facts, but also the situation in other Balkan regions we have already suggested the possibility that the distribution of the Upper Palaeolithic in the Balkans had been running along main natural communications - the river valleys - and along the coast and that it was followed by the topographic retreat and geographical isolation of Middle Palaeolithic communities in this area (Mihailović 1998; Mihailović 1999).

Even though for such an assumption there is still not enough evidence mainly because of the poor state of investigation of the entire region the following is evident: a) mountainous areas were not been in the previous period intensively inhabited by Middle Palaeolithic populations, which mainly remained in the lowlands and lower hilly terrain up to 500 m (Rajkovača 1987; Bailey 1999); b) evidence for abandoning sites in the coastal zone like Crvena Stijena (Basler 1975a) and Mujina Pećina (Rink *et al*. 2002) seems to be somewhat earlier (40-42,000 years b.p.) compared to the sites in north Montenegro and southwest Serbia (more than 38,000 years b.p.); c) the beginnings of the Upper Palaeolithic in the coastal area and the Danube basin have been dated rather early i.e. in the period before 38,000 years b.p. Therefore, it is obvious that, at least in the most general sense, there was simultaneity of Middle and Upper Palaeolithic in the wider area of the central and eastern Balkans while the theory of the spreading of Upper Palaeolithic along main natural communications has also confirmation in assumptions about the existence of the Danube corridor (Conard & Bolus 2003), and the 'Upper Palaeolithic package' from Klisoura (Kouzumelis *et al*. 2001).

The fact that there are no Middle Palaeolithic sites later than 38,000 years b.p. in the central and eastern Balkans suggests that the Upper Palaeolithic in this region spread very fast while evidence that habitations were abandoned even in the areas where there are no traces of habitation in the beginning of the early Upper Palaeolithic (coastal area and hinterland) suggests that among the bearers of Middle Palaeolithic and Upper Palaeolithic cultures existed not only competition in resource exploitation but also territorial (basically social) competition. This is perhaps also the reason why it is so difficult to find evidence about coexistence of Neanderthals and modern humans within more restricted geographical regions.

Conclusion

Evidence of spirituality and cultural manifestations of Neanderthal populations by the end of Middle and in the beginning of Upper Palaeolithic rather compromise the opinions that this species is characterized by cultural stagnation, lack of cultural identity and incapability to achieve more complex forms of social organization and artistic expression. In the period between 45,000 and 32,000 b.p., members of this species succeeded in cultural transformation, developing of a social network including exchange of information, raw materials and goods and imposing leaf-shaped points as authentic symbol of their identity.

Nevertheless, there is no reliable proof that transformation of the Middle Palaeolithic occurred in southeast Europe before the emergence of *Homo sapiens sapiens* and his material culture. The eventual confirmation of this could be only the finds from layer VI in trench TD-VI at Temnata (industry of transitional type and engraved stone) and perforated bones from Divje Babe I and Crvena Stijena. We have already mentioned different opinions about most of these finds.

Where the Balkan Peninsula is concerned, there is contradictory information and assumptions about cultural influences and cultural transformation, changing of populations and cohabitation. Everything so far suggests that the

Upper Palaeolithic in this area had been spreading fast followed by withdrawal of Middle Palaeolithic populations in inaccessible and geographically isolated regions of central and western Balkans. There is also an impression that Middle Palaeolithic and Upper Palaeolithic communities were territorially separated, but maintained mutual contacts parallel to the advancement of Upper Palaeolithic cultures.

Finds from the sites in Hrvatsko Zagorje and Slovenia (Vindija, Velika Pećina, Divje Babe), southwestern Serbia (Smolućka Pećina) and Montenegro (Mališina Stijena, Crvena Stijena) could bear witness to social and cultural interactions in this period. However, while the presence of typical Upper Palaeolithic artifacts in Middle Palaeolithic context could be explained as a result of cultural influences, it is not simple to explain poor assemblages with Aurignacian bone points from the sites in Slovenia and Croatia. In order to reach more decisive conclusions about them, it is necessary to investigate sites with more abundant finds that would offer more information about cultural development in this area.

Regardless of the poor state of investigation, it is surprising that there is an almost complete absence of artistic and decorative objects in the beginning of Upper Palaeolithic in the Balkans. Perforated teeth and bone pendants with a groove were found at Bacho Kiro in layer 11 and a 'diadem' of rib bone with holes and lateral cuts in layer 9 (Kozłowski *et al*. 1982). According to the colonization theory and early finds of beads and pendants from Ksar 'Akil and Üçagizli (Kuhn *et al*. 1998), it could be assumed that the earliest and most convincing testimonies about spiritual life of contemporary people in Europe occur just in this area. That these expectations are not unfounded is confirmed by the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic where limits of distribution of Anatolian and Near Eastern influences in the central Europe and the Balkans can be very well observed in the distribution of figurines and painted pottery (King & Underhill 2002). But, in contrast to the Early Neolithic, the first indubitable confirmations about artistic expression in the Upper Palaeolithic of Europe are encountered in somewhat more distant areas: in the Upper Danube basin at Geißenklösterle, Vogelherd and Hohlenstein Stadel (Bolus & Conard 2001; Conard & Bolus 2003).

For these reasons we are open to the assumption that emergence of art could have been influenced by other factors as well. It is obvious that in the background of acculturation and driving Neanderthals out of their indigenous regions and competition for resources and territory the specific process of social and ideological integration based on striving of communities to create and impose their identity were under way (Otte 1999; Kuhn *et al*. 2001; Conard & Bolus 2003). We think that, at least in Europe, this conflict had a decisive impact on establishing stylistically distinguishable Upper Palaeolithic technocomplexes - regardless of which population was their bearer. This more than belated emergence of Aurignacian and modern people as suggested by some authors (Zilhao & d'Errico 2000) could have been the reason why they did not appear earlier.

When studying social circumstances, which could have resulted in the emergence of Upper Palaeolithic art, we must take into account that contacts and influences between communities on both sides of the border separating different cultural entities could have encompassed a larger territory and hence could have lasted a longer time. Within this context, we think that temporal coexistence or interstratification of Middle and Upper Palaeolithic at sites in certain areas does not necessarily represent an indispensable prerequisite for accepting of the competition hypothesis (Conard & Bolus 2003). Finally it should be borne in mind that the earliest artistic manifestations in central Europe appear in already completely developed form and that they could have been preceded by various forms of graphic or musical expression of which for the time being we do not have enough information.

The impression of discontinuity at the transition from Middle to Upper Palaeolithic but also between initial and somewhat later phase of the early Upper Palaeolithic (around 34-33 millennia b.p.) is additionally reinforced by the fact that from the very beginning in Upper Palaeolithic parietal and mobiliary art appear figurative representations and there is no need to explain that richness of spiritual life and art could not be judged only by its iconic character (Bednarik 1993). However, there is no doubt that occurrence of figurative art opens a vast space for symbolic manipulation – illustration of myths, rituals and religious ideas as well as objectification not so much of individual (as in the previous period) but of collective ideas and conceptions. Within that context this art could bear witness to the existence of specific historical conscience (expressed in the myths – Heler 1984) and to the spiritual identity of communities and the history of places where they lived.

The emergence of Upper Palaeolithic art, however, almost symbolically announced the end of an epoch in which the contemporaries of anatomically modern humans had shown an ability to achieve cultural transformation and reach a considerable level of social and cultural integration. However, in their belated achievements lie the main reasons for their disappearance, the cause of which should be looked for in the somewhat earlier period when bearers of Middle Palaeolithic cultures accepted new technology and implements and all the values and messages represented by them.

Translated by Mirjana Vukmanović

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