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PALEOLITHIC ART OF UKRAINE

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ПАЛЕОЛІТИЧНЕ МИСТЕЦТВО УКРАЇНИ

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There is abundant evidence that the Paleolithic inhabitants belonged to the genus *Homo sapiens*, and the primitive art of these people is seen on many of the objects that have been excavated at archaeological sites in Europe, including the territory of modern Ukraine. Ukraine is blessed with an abundance of Paleolithic sites. The well-known settlements of Molodova, Dobranichivka, Gontsy, Kyiv-Kyrylivsk, Mezhirich, Mezin, Semenivka and others have been dated by ¹⁴C isotope analysis to between 27,000 and 12,000 BCE.

The most ancient examples of art in the Ukraine are associated with the Upper Paleolithic and are up to 25,000 years old (Molodova V, level 8). Objects made of mammoth bone and ivory are rare (the head of a figurine from level 8 Molodova 5, an anthropomorphic depiction on the “bâton de commandement” from level 7 at the same site, etc).

Among the unique finds from Upper Paleolithic settlement on the bank of the Desna River near Mezin village in the Chernihiv region were mammoth ivory phallic figurines and birds as well as bones painted with red ochre; a female statuette with a carved double pubic triangle and engraved chevrons; a mammoth ivory needle with an eye engraved with chevrons. This style of decoration is now referred to as “Mezin art”. Among the early finds was a 20,000-yr old ornamented bracelet engraved out of mammoth ivory, and a second bracelet was found in 1956. Both have a magnificent design which can be found to this day on the embroidery of Ukrainian costumes. This pattern predates and is similar to the famous Greek “meander” pattern.

A similar collection of art is known from Mezhyrich (graphic paintings, figurines, treasures, paintings of red ochre). At other sites such as Dobranichevka, Pushkari and Kyrylivska some isolated figurines made from mammoth ivory (Dobranichevka), graphic paintings (Kyrylivska), treasures (Pushkari) have been found. The middle Dnestr sites have poor examples of arts.

To conclude, the most ancient examples of art in the Ukraine are associated with the Upper Paleolithic and are up to 25,000 years old (Molodova V, level 8). Practically, all types of arts (paintings, graphic arts, figurines) are present at the group of sites in the middle Dnipro region. The most striking examples are known from Mezin (20,000 years old) where unusual forms of female figurines, treasures, sets of mammoth bones painted by red ochre have been found.