

EIR Science & Technology

35,000 Years Ago, Man Was An Explorer and an Artist!

Archeological discoveries in Siberia, Germany, and Austria reshape our scientific understanding of when human civilization emerged. Dino de Paoli reports.

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Two new exciting discoveries have forced those without prejudice, to rethink when and where modern culture appeared, why man explores his environment, and why human beings engage themselves in artistic compositions. Here we will look at the implications of two scientific announcements regarding human culture around 40,000 to 30,000 years ago, when a thick sheet of ice still covered half of what is today Germany, France, and North America (**Figure 1**).

A modern utilitarian materialist could not even conceive that our prehistoric ancestors would have decided to suffer the cold in Siberia instead of sunbathing in the Red Sea. The same materialist would also assume that if humans were really so crazy to choose living under such harsh conditions, they would have time only “to struggle for survival.” Under survival conditions, the priority is supposed to be the attempt to satisfy material needs; “spiritual” needs have no place there. Art is considered only as a relaxation after one’s stomach is full.

Forget the utilitarian materialists, and let’s see what man was doing in those cold prehistoric days.

“Humans in the Arctic Before the Last Glacial Maximum” is the title of an article published in *Science* magazine, Jan. 2, 2004, by a group of Russian scientists led by Prof. Vladimir Pitulko of the Russian Academy of Science of St. Petersburg. The article reveals: “A newly discovered Paleolithic site on the Yana River, Siberia, at 71°N, lies well above the Arctic Circle, and dates 27,000 radiocarbon years before present [about 30,000 calendar years ago], during glacial times. This age is twice that of other known



FIGURE 1. The Ice Age. *Glaciers from 40,000 to 30,000 years ago, when much of the Northern Hemisphere was ice.*



FIGURE 2. The Yana Site in Siberia, Above the Arctic Circle



FIGURE 3. The Bering Land-Bridge. The Bering Straits area before inundation, around 11,000 years ago.

occupations in any Arctic region.”

Before going any further, we have to stress an important detail.

The Great Circles

The Yana site is only 100 km from the Laptev Sea, and its 71°N location is well above the Arctic Circle (**Figure 2**). Before Yana, the oldest known human presence above the Arctic Circle was a site in Berelekh 70°N (in east Siberia), dated 14,000 years ago. Why is the Arctic Circle so relevant? With it, one indicates an imaginary circle around the Earth, located approximately at 66.5°N. But it is not just an “imaginary” thing; it represents a very specific physical effect.

The Earth rotates with an inclination of about 23.5°. This creates an area around the poles where for one day or more each year, the Sun does not set (around June 21) or rise (around Dec. 21). In the case of the North Pole, the circular southern limit of this area (the Arctic Circle) is located at 66.5° ($90 - 23.5 = 66.5$). The length of continuous day or night increases northward from one day on the Arctic Circle to six months at the North Pole. This means, that in Yana, people experience approximately one month of continuous night or continuous day.

One can speculate about the implications of this: The settlers in this area had to experience the “shock” of the complete disappearance of the Sun, but they also could see that this was a recurring cycle and, more important, they had the advantage of being able to observe the *complete rotation* of the stars, and the Moon (in Winter) and the Sun (in Summer). The observation, by settlers within the Arctic Circle, of complete spherical rotations could have had great implications both for their “myths,” and for a rudimentary conception of astronomy and geometry.

What I say is considered speculation, only because the dominant prejudice today is that such “primitive” human beings had neither time nor intellectual and spiritual powers for such activity. That this is a prejudice, I have shown in a previous article,¹ and I will also treat it briefly below, when we will talk about art.

It is also worth remembering here that the Indian independence leader Bal Gandaghar Tilak, in his book *Arctic Home*

in the Vedas (1903), had already noticed that the ancient Vedic texts demonstrate knowledge of solar astronomical phenomena only observable north of the Arctic Circle. Tilak only considered settlers and periods around 6-8,000 years ago, but the arguments are, in principle, valid also for Yana, although the site is four times older.

There is really only one issue: Were such 30,000-year-old human beings able to look above their heads and inside themselves? I think, yes, and there are many proofs for this, but let me proceed, for the moment, with our story.

Towards America?

The importance of assigning higher intelligence to such human beings is also relevant for the next subject. The authors of the Yana article stress: “This site shows that people adapted to this harsh, high latitude, Late Pleistocene environment much earlier than previously thought,” and “East Siberia was thus thought to have been colonized no earlier than 20,000 to 22,000 years ago. Some researchers believe the harsh glacial environment prevented human occupation of western Beringia until after the last Glacial Maximum, about 18,000 years ago.”

“Western Beringia” is the western side of a vast area joining eastern Russia and Alaska. During the Ice Age (from 1.9 million to 11,000 years ago), the ocean levels rose and fell many times in relation to the freezing of seawater and melting of the ice. During the periods of maximum cold (approximately 50,000 to 40,000; 30,000 to 18,000; and 16,000 to 12,000 years ago), the ocean levels were more than 100 meters (333 feet) lower than today, and therefore the shallow seas now separating Asia from North America (the Bering Strait) disappeared, creating a wide grassland steppe, linking the two continents through the “Bering Land-Bridge.”

As the authors stress, the environment there, 30,000 years ago, “had shifted from open, flood-plain meadows to tundra. This part of Asia was never covered with large ice sheets. But average temperatures were colder than are those of today.” Under such conditions, the “Bering Bridge” offered the possibility for plants, animals, and humans to cross in both directions before the area was definitely inundated 11,000 years ago, when the ice melted (**Figure 3**).

1. “First Americans” *Neue Solidarität*, June 25, 2003.

This brings up again the issue of the colonization of the American continent. The standard theory of the colonization of America is based on the “Clovis hypothesis,” which holds that America’s first colonizers were the Clovis peoples, who crossed by foot from Siberia into North America around 11,000 years ago. This theory has been cast into doubt by discoveries of prior human civilizations made in Chile and elsewhere in the Americas, yet it is still considered to be an untouchable dogma.

The presence of human beings in the Beringia region much before 11,000 years ago reopens the debate. The authors of the above article themselves imply that there are similarities between some artifacts at Yana and those used by the Clovis culture. If true, then the question is: Why did these Arctic peoples wait for 16,000 years before crossing the land-bridge, when they had the necessary means to do it long before then?

An Advanced Technical Culture

Quoting again the authors of the *Science* article: “Artifacts at the site include a rare rhinoceros foreshaft, other mammoth foreshafts, and a wide variety of tools and flakes.” The artifacts reveal a clever and advanced technique, they write: One of the researchers found “a carefully worked foreshaft, with bevel ends, made from the horn of a woolly rhinoceros. . . . Foreshafts permitted hunters to replace broken points quickly, then hurl the spear again—a great advantage when facing big game.” Similar instruments, of a younger period and made from ivory, have also been found in North America. In Yana, the settlers also used ivory, and “two foreshafts of mammoth ivory,” in combination with artifacts from bones of other animals, were recovered.

Other tools, the authors write, were made from “flinty slate, granite, and quartz. Slate and granite occur in the riverbed. The quartz came from elsewhere. The stone industry comprises unifacial and bifacial flaking of pebbles and quartz.”

Some of the tools are very nice-looking, and probably had only artistic value. Some sensitive soul may protest, that in such difficult conditions nobody would produce “useless” artistic objects. Nevertheless, the existence of artistic activities is not only plausible, but it is a “fact” which we will discuss below. In any case, that the people in Yana used some form of “art” seems to be confirmed by the authors themselves, who report the presence at the site of “small pieces of red ocher.” Red ocher is the basic material used to paint on rock in prehistoric caves all over the world! The same ocher can also be used to color objects and bodies.

Before we go to the second archaeological discovery, we note that the world has to accept the conclusion of the authors: “It is now a fact that humans extended deep into the Arctic during colder Pleistocene times.” Their conclusion sheds light on the first unsolved puzzle of human history: Why did man



FIGURE 4. Water Bird

colonize such remote areas? There are many theses; the most untenable for me is the hypothesis that there was “pressure caused by population growth.” I have already discussed this in a previous article,² and therefore here I would like to answer simply with, “Why not?” Why should they not have explored those regions? Why would some of us today like to go to such an inhospitable, dry, and cold planet as Mars?

Ancient Art on the Danube

On Dec. 18, 2003, several German newspapers carried the headline: “Discovered—Mankind’s Oldest Work of Art.” These headlines echoed in more popular terms a scientific article in *Nature* magazine titled, “Paleolithic Ivory Sculptures from Southwestern Germany and the Origins of Figurative Art.”

To quote from one news report:

“In the cave known as the Fels Cave near the town of Schelklingen in the Swabian Alps, archaeologists from the University of Tübingen have discovered three small sculpted figures made of mammoth tusk ivory. According to reports by one of the leaders of the research team, Prof. Nicholas Conard, these objects represent a horse head, an aquatic bird, and a lion-man. The age of the find has now been determined by radiocarbon dating, as more than 30,000 years old. Thus they are among mankind’s oldest works of art.”

Photos of some of the objects can be seen here. **Figure 4** is a water bird—absolutely the oldest human representation of a bird. **Figure 5** is a beautiful horse head.

Objects with these same themes, and also 30,000 years old, had already been found in nearby caves. In Vogelherd, for example, there is a horse sculpture from the Vogelherd cave (**Figure 6**).

A researcher in Tübingen states the obvious: “The area of the upper Danube, including the caves of the Swabian Alps, was a center of cultural development of modern man. It is in this area, in four caves: Hohle Fels, Vogelherd, Hohlenstein-Stadel, and Geissenklösterle, that, so far, 18 ivory figures have been found which belong to the oldest traditions of mankind’s

2. The woolly rhinoceros evolved in northeastern Asia and became extinct around 10,000 years ago. It was massive, covered with a thick coat of hair, and had two large horns. It is painted in many caves, for example, in France’s Chauvet cave, 32,000 years ago.

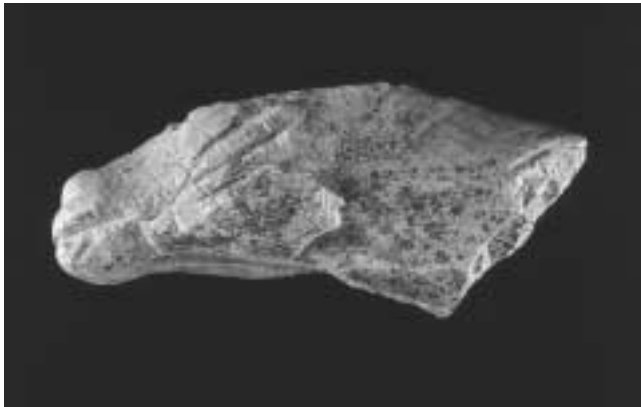


FIGURE 5. Horse Head From Hohle Fels

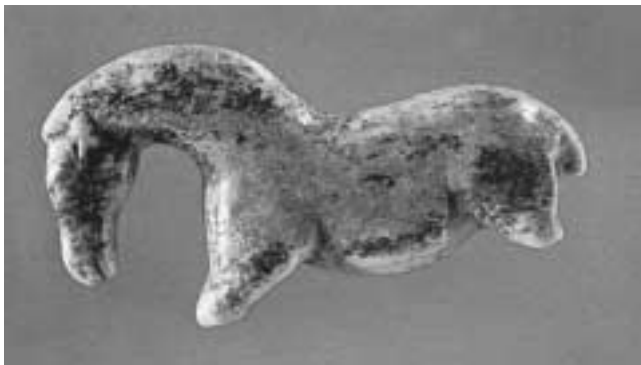


FIGURE 6. Horse From Vogelherd Cave

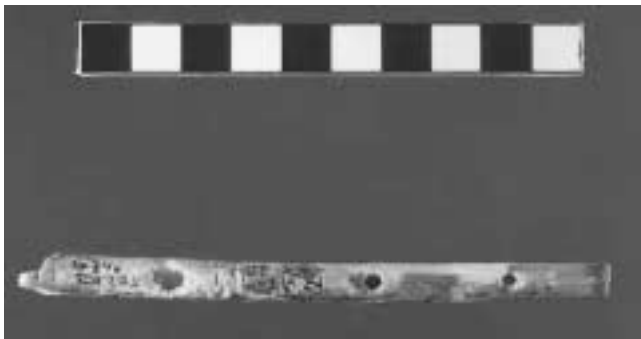


FIGURE 7. Bone Flute

figurative art. Further finds from these caves are old stone age musical instruments [see **Figure 7**, a bone flute], jewelry, and tools.”³

But artistic objects approximately 30,000 years old have also been found in Austria and other countries, and even in Siberia (although not with the same density as in South Ger-

3. There is currently an exhibit in Blaubeuren, Germany (until April) where some of these objects can be viewed.



FIGURE 8. The Venus of Galbenberg

many)! In Siberia, the head of a bear carved onto the vertebra of a woolly rhinoceros was found, near Tolbaga along the Khilok River, together with artifacts, also 30,000 years old. In Galgenberg (near Stratzing, Austria), the famous “Venus from Galgenberg” was found, a very nice piece of stone art, probably representing a woman, about 28,000 B.C. (**Figure 8**).

In southern France, to mention just one site among many, old paintings have been found in the Chauvet Cave, dating 32,000 years ago, which represent, among other things, the woolly rhinoceros, whose horns were used in Siberia to carve weapons and artistic objects.

The artistic and exploratory activities selected for description here should be enough of a proof of the artistic and technical inventiveness that our ancestors had and used around 30,000 years ago. I cannot judge whether these activities were the result of one culture, but surely, along the border of the ice, from France to Siberia (to limit myself to northern Europe), the same quality of human mind was at work. Without entering into any theoretical debate about aesthetics, there is no doubt that such objects and paintings are pieces of art in the strict sense of the word. This fact, this use of art, when “material needs” would have seemed to have the absolute priority, tells us more about the worth and meaning of “spirituality” than any modern treatise about aesthetics.

As especially the objects depicting the man/animal tell us, these human beings had become conscious of the fundamental paradox of human nature: Man’s essence is the paradox of a being who, at the same time, is “nature” and “transcending nature.” Spiritual needs, the creative powers, had become conscious to these people, and they were communicating this in a language that is still understandable to us today. It is the recognition and the feeding of that spiritual power which, in my opinion, is the engine driving these peoples to explore and colonize new regions, to master new technologies, and to gain new knowledge about the rotating Sun, Moon, and stars.