

A very brief history about the art of inferior paleolithic

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ABSTRACT: During the period of the spreading of Homo erectus in Africa in all the inhabited regions of Europe, the adaptation to the new environment and climate conditions asked for new tools. New cultures added to the previous "gravel culture" (Proto Paleolithic), their tools improved. Artificially created shelters appeared, under rocks in free air, once fire was discovered man was no longer dependent on nature. Figurative "art" was not a true form of art yet, but it was about the premises of its appearance, the symmetry and harmony of some tools represent a proof of the aesthetic pleasure felt by our ancestors. The examples of intervention on some rock fragments (the statue from Berekhat Ram) proves that natural forms inflamed the imagination of human beings capable of thinking. Regarding ornaments – regular incisions were found on objects

KEYWORDS: homo erectus; sinanthrop; hominid; flint abri;

Introduction

Prehistory is the only evolution phase through which the entire humanity has passed.

Its lower limits is marked by the appearance of man and one's evolutionary jump regarding human condition – anthropogenesis –, and also by the emergence and development of social organization, thinking, language, beliefs and religious practices and also art. To be more specific: sociogeny. Probably, we do not have our origins directly in Homo habilis. But he is the one that created the first settlements and the first tools. Shelters have made the difference between survival up to that point, by natural selection – and the onwards ability to face some adverse conditions. Regarding tools, they appeared as a result of the need to control the environment, they have marked the separation from animality. They are a typical example of knowledge used for obtaining a useful object.

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The superior limit is represented by the so-called "jump into civilisation" – in which, politically speaking – race relationships leave room for superior structures –, but culturally speaking – the first writing systems are invented.

Regarding the lastly mentioned aspect, of defining a period before the written documentation, the term *prehistory* does not apply to those peoples (from Oceanic America, Central and South Africa) that have known the so-called „Neolithic revolution“, but who have lived, up to the appearance of navigators, outside the so-called History. In this respect, a more appropriate name and characterization would be: a Prehistory combined with ethnography (*Janson, 1986, p. 34*). These peoples did not evolve together with "historical" civilisations: they have preserved their traditions, they have remained organized in villages and tribes and they used the stone for tools and weapons.

Generally speaking, in order to classify Prehistory, the criterion which is used is the level of intervention on the materials used for making tools. Thus, the economic level is the one which was the basis of biological evolution, the economic revolution of each historical epoch gave birth to the evolution of culture and civilisation (*Childe, 1966, pp. 54-56*).

Stone Age is the period that did not have a very clear beginning, once the first tracks of conscious hominid activity were found, in manufacturing tools. Their tools are the ones that give us, the nowadays living one, the proofs about the spring of man on Earth and one's adaptation to the changing environment conditions. Therefore, about one's survival.

For Lower Paleolithic, the representative species is *Homo erectus*. He leaves "the African cradle", migrating north, his spreading area was in all the inhabitable regions back then of the Old World, so also in Eurasia, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but rivers and oceans stopped his advancement to America, Australia, Japan and the Pacific Islands (*Marseille & Laneyrie-Dagen, 1994, p. 14*).

The physical features of the man belonging to the Chellean civilisation announce the ones of the modern man. Probably some of the man of the glaciation Riss will give birth to the Neanderthals, others – to *Homo sapiens* – there are not sure evidence on this phenomenon.

A representative (a version) of *Homo erectus* was "the man from Pekin" (*Sinanthropus Pekinensis*) (600 000 years before) (*Roberts & Westad, 2018, p. 116*), whose partial skeleton was discovered together with tools made of stones from Zhoukoudian (Chou-kou-tien) (near Beijing). The skull of this synanthrope has a flattened braincase calotte, the bones of the forehead are gibbous (there is a sticking-out crest above the eyes), the forehead is clogged and the brain is twice bigger than the ones of *Australopithecus*, having a capacity of 1 075ml (just like the one of monkeys), involving a bigger brain (thus a modification of the dimensions of female's pelvis in order to be able to give birth to children having a bigger head); the cheek bones are protruding, dull chin,

regular teeth (similar to the ones of the modern man), just like the dimension and form of the muscles of arms (the usage of hands made them develop themselves). The tools found near him was a hunter, but the remains of ashes – a proof that he used fire (*Cruceru, 1987, pp. 69-70*). Thus, the tracks of Neanderthaliens existed in all 3 hydrographic basins of China (The Yellow River, Yangtze and The River of Pearls) (*Roberts & Westad, 2018, p. 115*).

The adaptation to the new environment and climate conditions (it was colder) in this period (in Africa: the appearance of fruits that were edible during the entire year; in the North: sufficient vegetal food) will be done by culture: it grows the importance of hunters when vegetal food becomes less and less, afterwards man covered his body with clothes adequate to the body, the usage of fire (for the time being coming from the sources offered by nature: produced by lightening, from volcanic lava, by lighting natural gases) – then maintained and used for food preparation). A great evolutionary step, especially on the liberty of movement of man, it was the conquest of fire (the first traces of fire usage appeared around 400 000 B.C., afterwards, there was a step by step spreading, people learned to use it for illumination, heating, the making of more performant tools – but they also learned to transport it at distance from the source) (*Marseille & Laneyrie-Dagen, 1994, p. 15*). The usage of fire had as consequence the change of diet, which involved the need of diversifying tools.

Thus, according to what we have seen, the first tools made by man were tools and weapons (*Childe, 1966, p. 67*). Step by step, man began to choose the most suitable rocks and he started to process them in a more experimented way.

The tools of riprap culture (from Protopleolithic) are accompanied now by two series of tools, made by hitting a silex block on a stone *anvil* (*Cottrell, 1962, p. 33*).

The first series is the one of the tools made from the technique called « lamellar »: tools « of nucleus » – or using the technique « bifacial » (used on the « nucleus », such as « handmade axes », having the shape of a pear, the basis being globular, kept in a savage state, without traces of hitting – for breaking – and a sharp edge – for carving) (*Cottrell, 1962, p. 33*) (of the Complex Abbevillo-Acheulean) (terms coming from the sites Abeville and St. Acheul, France) (previously, instead of the term Abbevillian, it was used the term Chellean). The Abbevillian culture is considered the first phase of civilisation, more important, from Acheulleene, and it is described in Meridional India, Syria, Palestina, in the entire African continent, in Spain, France, England, but this technique will be restricted to the south, in order to spread north, depending on climate conditions.

The Abbevillian Culture (Chellean) (after the city Chelles, Seine-en-Marne, Northern France) is characterized by the stone axe of large dimensions and carved on both faces. The first tools that we know as having been made by human hand are silex pieces of different dimensions (10-15cm), having the form of elongated almond ("the hand axe"), made by hitting the stone on both faces, having an extremity with a cap, the

other being sinuous (the middle is a little gibbous). Tools made of ivory or bone were not found.

For the **Acheulean Culture** (after the village Saint-Acheul, the suburb Amiens, Northern France), what is characteristic is the small axe, handcrafted with more accuracy, retouching offered it a geometric shape; the edge (which was previously rounded) becomes linear. This industry is a particular case of the Abbevillian culture. The causes are not known, but probably the climate's cooling led to the usage of some tools of approximately the same shapes, still more varied: lanceolate, sometimes too elongated, and also oval, rounded, discoidal, but especially having a bigger accuracy of technique, and also having a second purpose: if the Chelleean axe was destined to hitting, the Acheulean one could also cut. The bifacials are accompanied by chips – fragments detached from the nucleus of the rock – sometimes chips are predominant, in other situations – they are just chips (*Dunan, 1960, p. 8*). Well, these chips are also used: for enchainment or for scouring.

In some regions, the passage from Acheulian to the Middle Paleolithic was progressive: the bifacials disappeared, the carving technique became overgeneralized, splintering started to develop and to generalize. Thus, the Levalloisian industry is associated with the Musterian one (from Middle Paleolithic).

Therefore, the other series of tools, existent in other areas of the world, is the one of « chip » tools (tools of varied shapes, worked from chips away from the nucleus): they are specific to **Clactonian and Levalloisian cultures** (terms coming from the sites Levallois Perret, France, and Clacton on Sea, Essex, England). It is described in Europe and septentrional Asia, at the North of the Alps Mountains, in the Balkans, Caucasus, Hindukush and Himalaya, but during the time of the glaciations, this technique will spread in England, France, Syria, even in Africa (*Childe, 1966, p. 70*). There were found even weapons to be thrown at distance: the wooden spears having the point hardened in fire discovered in Leheringen (Germany) and Clacton-on-Sea (Essex, England).

Settlement and lodging

The Paleolithic, in general, is marked by the slow evolution of the process of anthropogenesis. Man appears from the beginning of the Paleolithic, by the detachment of the first hominids from the animal life.

This first period, the Lower Paleolithic, registers the evolution from the occupation of the territory – to its inhabitation. Hunting has a major importance regarding the expansion of the territory to be explored. New settlements appear, the community enlarges and acquires new needs, such as language – which appears out of the necessity of transmitting knowledge useful for survival.

As far as settlements are concerned, we notice the gradual usage of natural shelters, followed by their set-up and then even the spring of artificially-created shelters.

Human groups that continued to be gregarious were not yet very coherent or very stable, their area of movement was very limited (*Miclea & Florescu, 1980, p. 12*). As far as settlements and inhabitation are concerned, ever since the Early Paleolithic, the ancestors of people also found shelter in caves, but also in open air, under the rocks, on the fill terraces of rivers. Bedstones are proofs of knowledge and mastering of fire by people. For the time being, we are talking about its usage, but the overtones are enormous. First of all, we are talking about the existence of this exclusively human act, which differentiates man from animal, making him capable to offer a practical application to an element that he was capable to extract from the context, being aware of its importance for the progress of the life that he will improve from many points of view: it allowed him to have freedom of movement, but also to obtain extra time, protection against wild beasts, the diversification of food (by boiling, microbes were destroyed, but food that was inedible in a raw state became good food), heat and light (consequently, new natural shelters were occupied), progress in the technology of obtaining some higher quality tools and weapons (javelins' burning). These are only physical benefits. Moreover, fire exerted a great psychological force: its maintenance contributed to the creation of rudimentary organizational structures of the society back then, because, by its centredness, it boosted the cohesion of communities (based on kinship): a bedstone gathered the community around it. Therefore, material benefits are completed by the interest for tradition and then for culture. The importance of the individual grows. The community itself is more and more based on stable family union (mother, father, children), the period of nursing and raising children grows bigger and bigger, being adapted to the need to increase the time for preparing the child's abilities for survival.

Consequently, the discovery and usage of fire (not yet its production!) were important factors (because, up to that moment, man had been completely dependent on nature) in the appearance of the first spaces of inhabitation in free air, under the rocks (abri). But man also lived in caves, during colder periods, in huts which were not deep inside the caves: in these parts, which were more secluded (in lateral spaces or in the deep end of the cave), cultural acts took place. An example is Altamira Cave from the North of Spain where, in the partially broken-down vestibule, there are proofs which show that a tribe of hunters lived there (*Bernardini, 2006, p. 19*); or the Cave Del Castillo, near Santander. In the south of France: in Terra Amata – near Nisa, settlements were composed of huts having a branch structure, the basis being strengthened and marked with stones; probably, it existed a cope made of animal leathers; inside, near a bedstone, there were oval shaped *workshops* where stone was carved in order to make tools. Or the skeleton of huts was made of bones and deer horns, being covered also by animal skins, for example in France, in Lazaret, huts with two rooms and places for sleeping were found. These are settlements with quasipermanent inhabitation. Other examples are the cave from Pontnewydd that shelters the oldest settlement on rocks (225 000 B.C.) from Wales

(Grigorescu, 1989, p. 17), or caves from the Province Capo and the Province Transvaal (Africa), the cave from Um Qatafa (the Close East) (Curcinschi Vorona, 1982, p. 16).

Figurative "Art"

Not in this period did other vestiges appear (except for tools) to complete the ensemble of cultures with information about the recomposition of the life of human groups but, compared to the ones that were part of the *culture of riprap*, the activity of Lower Paleolithic people was more constant and specialized.

An evolution is recorded also regarding tools. The tools of previous epochs (conventionally called Abbevillian, Acheulean, Clactonian, Levalloisian) slowly become more numerous and they are characterized by a more careful carving of the surface of the boulder. They become specialized, being produced through more evolved splintering techniques, through which two categories of tools are obtained: small axes and chips. Moreover, it is the Paleolithic phase during which progress was made towards the appearance of the first forms of directed effort inside collectivities (Miclea & Florescu, 1980, p. 12).

Though we can not detect yet a preoccupation for beauty, it continues to be remarkable the harmonizing between usefulness and ergonomics, the purity and expressiveness of forms are the origins of aesthetic qualities which appeared later on, all the more so as the purpose of each made object was a utilitarian one. It is the merit of these tools which were more and more improved that they stored in them the qualities of form, out of which emerged the form for form, for itself, detached from its utilitarian role, the future work of art corresponded to a spiritual necessity. Therefore, we see that functionality makes room for aesthetic judgement. About art, we will speak when we notice previous preparation of these interventions that have as a temporary result a sensitivity of form or of the contour. For the time being, there is a continuous development of the production technique – just like in the case of a hand axe found in West Tofts, Norfolk (England) (200 000 – 100 000 B.C.) (Bell, 2007, p. 1). Of course, usefulness is the key word, but beauty is an inherent part of the sphere of the usefulness, it itself (the beautiful) needs to satisfy important spiritual needs of man. Anyway, they do not have a lack of value – at least it represents illustrative documents of an epoch, landmarks in the evolution of the culture of humanity, if they are not indeed examples of manifestation for the one interested in the development of human creativity along millennia. Moreover, culture does not only mean values, but also creativity – it is the one that allows qualitative jumps. Thus, only by working his tools and weapons, primitive man discovered analogies and symbolism, the world that he imagined was always enriched in contact with these handmade objects. The repetitive gesture of hands itself will be translated visually through the rhythm of decorations.

From the same period, of the Lower Paleolithic, another example intrigues its

age. 280 000 – 250 000 B.C. was the period of inhabiting the Israeli site Berekhat Ram, where it was discovered a famous fragment of volcanic pozzolano that suggests, synthetically but also convincing, a feminine silhouette. The tracks of impact crystal on its surface are proofs that a seen being was intentionally created. In this case, we no longer speak about a genetically transmitted behaviour coming from the animal world, but the border between nature that helped, through its forms that have stirred imagination and fantasy, and the artistic creation which, in this case, is judged. Animals can not spontaneously produce forms and images (eventually guided, but this type of activity is not specific to the animal world). And, in general, an animal does not develop aesthetic activities.

Regarding ornaments, series of regular incisions were found on forms: for example, in Bilzingsleben, Germany; Stránská-Píská, Czech Republic), but not all researchers accept them as decorative ornaments.

Therefore, in the Lower Paleolithic, we can not yet talk about Art having the present meaning of the word, but the symmetry and harmony of forms of some tools are proofs that aesthetic pleasure existed at our ancestor when producing them.

Conclusions

Ever since Paleolithic times, this human feature of being able to think appears – man starts to mentally use symbols, without making use of the concrete experience of the surrounding world. It is amazing how our ancestors were capable of making a series of actions that can not be done by animals. (...Neither animals, nor modern primitive men, nor children, they were compared with our ancestors and their Art). The mental development of prehistoric men proves that they had the ability to use abstract thinking, imagination, originality, being preoccupied by the connections between shapes and colours, in order to avoid hazard).

There is no borderline between Art and reality and, maybe, not all researchers agree on the creative genius of the hunters-pickers from Paleolithic times. Only practical purposes can not explain their large variety nor their originality and refinement of some of them. Of course, regarding “art for art’s sake”, it is not the case regarding these objects, but about freedom and courage, about the pleasure felt while elaborating them, all these prove that it was an aim the pleasure of seeing them looked at and, also, admired... The same intention oriented him also towards ornamental Art: to decorate these tools, they are themselves the first proofs of human dexterity), to make up jewels (from the same natural materials): necklaces made from shells, animal teeth, bracelets made of ivory. And us, the people from today, need to take into account – while judging a work of art, no matter the time – the moment, context, it is in close connection with the time and place where it comes from. The artistic work reveals itself in front of our nowadays eyes, but its language is the one of the period and the area where it was made, having the common style of those specific creations.

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