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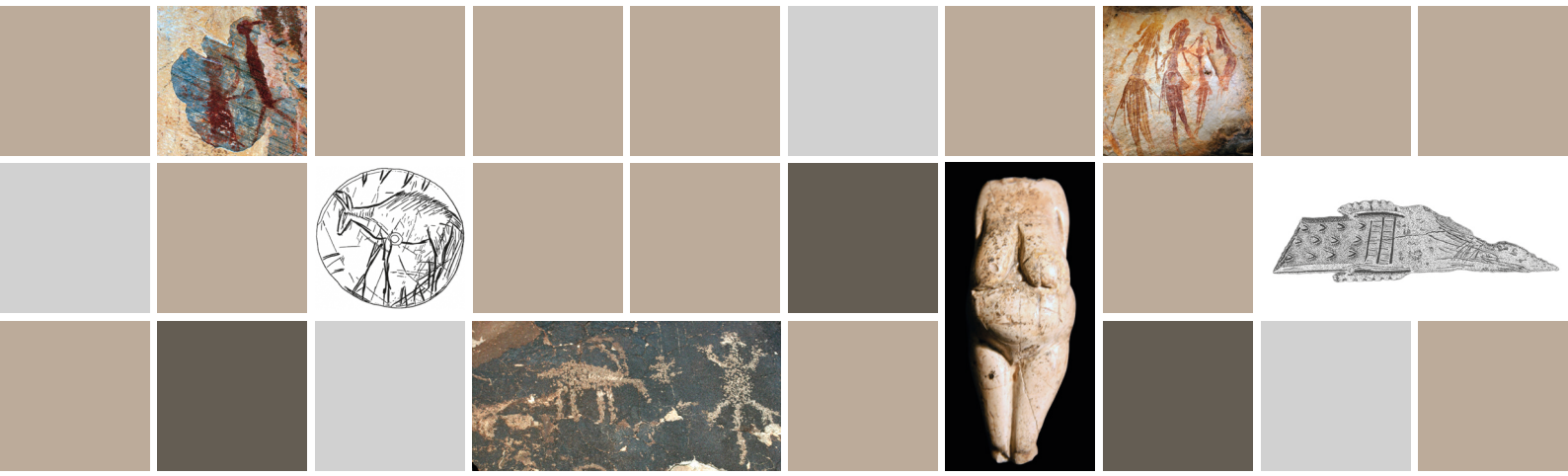

PALETHNOLOGY
Bilingual review of prehistory

LOWER PALAEOLITHIC PETROGLYPHS AND HAMMERSTONES OBTAINED FROM THE EXCAVATIONS AT DARAKI-CHATTAN CAVE (INDIA)

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Gist: Daraki-Chattan in the Chambal basin in central india is the richest known Pleistocene cupule site in the world. Here excavations were conducted by the Rock Art Society of India in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India under the EIP Project for five seasons from 2002 to 2006. The excavations yielded Lower Palaeolithic artefacts from throughout its sediment section. From the top humus and to some extent from the following brown soil layers we also found recent debris and microliths. These appear to be intrusions introduced by rainwater and trampling. The major activity area in front of the cave and in the shelter, as revealed by the concentration of the Lower Palaeolithic artefacts obtained in the excavations, appears to be the area covered by squares XD4- 5; XC4-5; XB3- 5; XA1, 3, 4 and 5; and A1, 4 and 5; in 11.5 m^2. It established that the site was in use mostly in the Lower Palaeolithic.

In the early phase of the Lower Palaeolithic, the cave was a tool manufacturing site. It yielded cobbles used as cores, flakes, unfinished tools (from XB5(4) at depth -161 cm from XB4, red lateritic soil), reused artefacts etc. A few artefacts from layer 3 upwards, particularly from the squares in the rock shelter and from the western part of the main trench were also re-utilised. In the upper part of the stratigraphy, XA4(4&3) and XA4(1) yielded a good number of fine Lower Palaeolithic

Slab pieces bearing cupules joined together, obtained from the excavation at Daraki-Chattan, layer 3. Lower Palaeolithic. 2002/09/22.

artefacts at depths of -20 to -40 cm from the surface. Lower Palaeolithic patinated chert flakes and chert artefacts also occur right from the base of the excavation to its uppermost horizon. They also include a patinated chert artefact from XA3(2), 64 cm from XA3, 45 cm from A3, at -127 cm depth from surface (-180 cm from A1); and a utilised and retouched knife-like artefact of a patinated Acheulian chert-flake from XA5(3), 44 cm from A6, 75 cm from A5, at -10 cm from the surface (-166 cm from A1).

The excavations at Daraki-Chattan have yielded definite evidence of human palaeoart creation from the Lower Palaeolithic. It is obtained in the form of 28 cupules on exfoliated rock slabs, two still lying in the trench, and ten hammer stones from different levels of the excavated sediments right from close to bedrock. Besides, a stone block bearing two linear petroglyphs was discovered from layer 3. These form the definite evidence of human palaeoart creation from the Lower Palaeolithic. Detailed study of the excavated material is continuing.

Thus, the present preliminary report of the excavations at Daraki-Chattan provides the unambiguous evidence of petroglyphs, mostly cupules, from archaeological occupation strata of Lower Palaeolithic age. It endorses the similar evidence from the Auditorium Cave at Bhimbetka. At Daraki-Chattan petroglyphs recovered from the excavations consist of a total of 28 cupules exfoliated from the cave wall, and two linear grooves. The lack of cupules on exfoliation scars on the cave walls implies that the remaining wall cupules are of ages broadly similar to those in the excavation. The actual age of the cupules must have been much greater than the time of their stratigraphic deposition, as they must have been exfoliated much later than the time of their production on the cave wall. The same relationship has been suggested for the cupules above ground in Auditorium Cave.

Recent research has shown that our understanding of art origins is rapidly changing. More than any other evidence presented before, the evidence produced by the EIP Project, especially from the excavations at Daraki-Chattan, has shown that we have misjudged the time depth of palaeoart and human cognition, creative ability and symbolism. The time has come to change our mindset. This evidence is so significant that it is set to affect not only our concepts of Pleistocene hominin development in southern Asia, but it will influence the way we view cognitive evolution generally.


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