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PLEISTOCENE ART OF THE WORLD

Short articles
CATALOGING OF KAPOVA CAVE ROCK ART

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Our team prepares the first catalogue of the ancient paintings of Kapova cave to be published. This edition is not just a list of the images, but it aims at summing up 50 years of studies in Kapova cave.

We accept as a general idea that the book should only consist of facts. There should be no interpretations, no private opinions, even if those of famous specialists. We understand it seems hardly possible for some reason or other. But at least we are going to exclude from the book all the unproved hypotheses and theories, all the thinking about “what is painted there” and “what the painting could mean”. We do not deny the necessity of interpretations and attempts to understand rock art subjects. We just believe that any interpretation and any theory should be based on a strong factual foundation. If we don’t have such factual basis published, there could be no theories suggested. This book is an attempt to create such a basis.
The second point we pay attention to is that we invite to take a part in the publication any researcher who has any factual – not speculative – information about Kapova cave. Thus our book is not going to be a work having one author or a “scientific editor”, I mean it is not a book that has a general idea, which often becomes a kind of blinkers and makes other ideas and points of view impossible. Every author will have his own part of investigation and his own place in the book. And every section can be led by an editor or a leader.

Now let’s envision my part of the job – cataloging Kapova cave paintings, with some methods differing from other similar attempts. The first one is about selecting the material to be described. I think that being remiss in so doing is the first of the ways to render the whole enterprise useless for investigation. In my opinion, researching a site should start with the most detailed description of each picture. And each one must be described in its wider context of the wall, of the hall and of the cave.

It is impossible to date all the spots of pigment in a cave by using a direct dating method. And if we keep the method of direct dating aside, the only criterion we have to know for sure that an image is not Pleistocene is when we have an inscription in some modern language. If not, I am not certain any picture or spot of pigment should be taken out of the description.

And there are some examples of the opposite. Some pictures look like ochre painting when you use your bare eyes. Anyone – especially an investigator with insufficient experience but a strong desire to discover something – could think it to be an ancient picture, but digitally processed, those pictures turn out to be modern inscriptions. I think that such samples must be included into the catalogue at least to prevent future researchers from discovering them in their turn and being mislaid.

And of course, all this holds for any spot of pigment that cannot be ascribed to the present. For example, there are lots of ochre paintings in the cave which cannot still be read. But they have their position in the cave and their location itself could be meaningful for future investigation. So, we have to describe them.

It is not an easy question to deal with the third dimension in our cave, as there is no real sculpture such as the ones in Le Tuc-d’Audoubert. But many natural forms have sometimes been worked up for some purposes. And those showing traces of human interference – with ochre remains or being worked up, look like being part of the painted context and should be embodied in our list.

To visualize the paintings we are working with digital methods. Some of the results can be printed, others cannot. That is why we mean to prepare an electronic version of the catalogue on a CD.