



The third Man Prehistory of Altai

1 July – 13 November 2017

National Museum of Prehistory

1, rue du musée

24 620 Les Eyzies-de-Tayac

This exhibition is organised by Rmn-Grand Palais and the National Museum of Prehistory (Les Eyzies-de-Tayac).

The expansion of modern humans in western Europe, associated with the start of the Upper Palaeolithic Period, is marked by the development of a specific culture of materials. It demonstrates a progression from the previous period, the Middle Palaeolithic, and its Neanderthal craftsmen. The difference is most remarkable in the symbolic field, with the exception of funeral practices. Symbolic manifestations are not entirely absent in the behaviours of Neanderthals, but they are limited and have nothing of the complexity and diversity seen in the Upper Palaeolithic.

In the vast expanses of the Altai region of eastern Siberia, the first known forms of symbolic expression are found from around 40,000 years ago, appearing at a time when three human lineages coexisted: not just Neanderthals and Modern humans, but also the Denisovans, only recently discovered through palaeogenetic data. A scenario of rapid replacement of an archaic human population by Modern humans, as previously established in Europe, does not apply here. The coexistence of at least three human lineages seems to have endured a long time, leading not just to a certain number of genetic exchanges, as revealed by palaeogenomic analysis, but most probably to cultural exchanges also.

The presence of items that use the Levallois technique in stonework that is characteristic to the Upper Palaeolithic in other aspects, suggests that certain ancient craft techniques endured until significantly later periods.

Using materials from Altai and the surrounding area, the exhibition demonstrates an progressive trajectory that is not just specific to this area, illustrating a large scale phenomenon at a continental level: the “out of Africa” process, perhaps initially occurring in the orient before affecting the western part of the globe, serving as a reference point for the prehistoric sciences.

The Denisova deposit has a central part to play in renewing our understanding from the various categories of remains found there, and more specifically of the previously unknown third human lineage.

A body of work has been developed using palaeogenetic techniques, in combination with other types of data to provide perspective (material culture and biological anthropology).

The industrial carving of stone and bone during the various phases of the southern Siberian Palaeolithic are illustrated by the collections of various deposits from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography (IAET SO RAN) and its museum, while the portable and decorative arts are complemented by 3D models of specimens kept in other Russian museums (virtual imagery also serves to support and complement the presentation of indices and archaeological remains that are too closely guarded to allow sufficient visibility).

Counterpoints are taken from the classical series from the collections of the National Museum of Prehistory, and from the Rhône valley, where archaeological remains anterior to the Upper Palaeolithic have been found that can help to illustrate a more complex cultural history than previously thought.

Some of the materials being presented at the exhibition has never been seen before or only recently published, a portion of which is from ongoing research by the Franco-Russian Artemir International Associated Laboratory.

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curator: Jacques Cleyet-Merle, General Heritage Curator, Director of the National Museum of Prehistory, Les Eyzies-de-Tayac.
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opening hours: June and September: 9:30 am to 6 pm, closed on Tuesdays
July and August: 9:30 am to 6 pm, daily
October to May: 9:30 am to 12:30 pm and 2 pm to 5:30 pm, closed on Tuesdays

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- exhibition catalogue

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