Human Animal Relationships in Archaeology
World Views of Hunter-gatherers in Northern Europe

Animal representations and artefacts made from animal remains

Working with the Siberian ethnographic collection from Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences

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Kunstkamera’s Siberian ethnographic collection

In February 2017 Maja Pasarić visited Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg. She examined artefacts collected in association with ethnographically observed hunter-gatherer groups from Siberia including zoomorphic objects and artefacts manufactured on animal remains.

Kunstkamera’s Siberian collection ranks among the world’s best ethnographical collections, housing over 700 collections and 29,000 objects in total. The Siberian ethnographical collection began forming within the first years of Museum’s history, in the mid-18th century, and grew significantly in the following eras. Russian ethnographic research in Siberia reached its peak in the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century which intensified collecting activities and acquired outstanding assets for the Kunstkamera’s collections.

Material culture, archaeology and ethnographic artefacts

The need to focus on ethnographic work to investigate how living people use animal remains as raw material and ornaments has been stressed by archaeologists. The study of

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences (Kunstkamera) located on the bank of the Neva River in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Photo Maja Pasarić©
Project presentation

The project Human-Animal Relationships in Archaeology. World Views of Hunter-gatherers in Northern Europe (HARA) and the preliminary results of the analysis of the objects from the Siberian collection were presented at Kunstkamera on February 16, 2017. The seminar was held as a part of an ongoing Northern Anthropological Seminars Series organised by Vladimir Davydov, Head of Siberian Ethnography Department, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology opened for public attendance.

Ethnographic material culture collections can also inform our understandings of the role of bone, antler and tooth artefacts as well as animal representations in symbolic systems, expressions of identity and different aspects of social interactions: all of which are difficult to comprehend from archaeological materials alone.

One of the HARA project’s goals is to examine ways in which hunter-gatherers have interacted with animal remains and animal representations and how these interactions are reflected and constructed in the material culture. The aim of the analyses involving the ethnographic material from the Siberian collection, Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography was to gain insights that inform new ways of examining the archaeological record and enable the development of novel perspective. Objects manufactured on animal remains and animal iconography from Siberia were studied macroscopically together with the museum documents containing information on their purpose and function in culture, and their attribution with regard to the ethnic group.

Around 70 artefacts related to the hunter-gatherer people from the most eastern parts of Siberia such as Nanai, Nivhs, Ulchi, Orochi and others were examined. The objects are
Wooden figurine of a boar and a figurine of a turtle. Both animal representations were manufactured when women faced health issues during periods of pregnancy. MAE Collection 5530, N 29, 33. Photo Maja Pasarić ©
The objects are part of the collections gathered at the end of 19th and the very beginning of 20th centuries.

**Animal remains and wooden animal representations**

Objects made from animal remains were manufactured on bone, antler, teeth and claws while animal skin and fur were integral parts of animal figurines. The analysis revealed interesting associations between certain objects and particular members of hunter-gatherer communities, such as children or women and the decisions behind the processes of object manufacturing. In addition to environmental conditions, belief systems can significantly influence the choice of materials for manufacturing various groups of objects. While ornaments would be made from animal remains, wood stands out as the main material used for manufacturing animal figurines.
Further information:
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References:
Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. Siberian Collections 36, 138, 5530

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Wooden representation of a seal with a human figure, MAE Collection 36, N 120. Photo Maja Pasarić ©

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