
On the question when the Shigir Idol was made

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Abstract

The 5m high idol from Shigir peatbog in the Trans-Urals is the oldest and largest anthropomorphic wooden sculpture in the world; it is a unique work of art, and it is a valuable source for the reconstruction of material culture and worldviews of the Stone Age population of Northern Eurasia. The history of its study goes back more than 100 years, but a number of issues such as the place and conditions of its discovery, the time of its creation, periods of exposure etc. remain controversial. The paper will analyse and evaluate various sources of information including archival materials with information on the place and time of discovery and on the nature of the accompanying materials, and the results of a recent comprehensive study conducted by Russian and German archaeologists and scientists in 2014.

Attention will focus in particular on the analysis of the new AMS radiocarbon dates of the 2014 study, which are ranging from the end of the Pleistocene at ca. 10,500 to the Late Mesolithic period at ca. 6,000 cal BC. These dates clearly differ significantly among themselves and also compared to dates obtained in by conventional radiocarbon dating.

Palaeogeographical and archaeological data from the Trans-Urals do not support an early, 10,500 to 10,000 cal BC age of the Shigir Idol, but rather correspond to later ages also covered by some AMS 14C age ranges from the set obtained in 2014. Therefore, it is necessary to continue research of Mesolithic monuments of the Urals region, to study the paleoclimate, and to determine the age and character of the primary processes of peat formation in the Ural peatlands, as one option to gain information on the age of the idol is to date microremains of peat that are preserved in apparently early cracks of the wooden sculpture.

Keywords: Trans, Urals, Early Mesolithic, Shigir idol, anthropomorphic image, wooden sculpture, 14C dating

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