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EVIDENCE OF AN EPHEMERAL EPIPALAEOLITHIC SITE IN THE CRIMEAN FOOTHILLS: FROM THE HISTORY OF FIELD RESEARCH IN CRIMEA IN 1990

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Abstract

This paper presents materials from one of the Palaeolithic sites discovered by the author in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Crimea. The Hamak-Koba sediment pack was once tested, and some archaeological materials were recovered. These are few but rather informative and have been published for the first time now. Judging by the available data, Hamak-Koba is a short-term site of a mobile group of hunters. The remains of shells of the land snail Helix vulgaris, which were probably consumed as food, may indicate the Epipalaeolithic or Mesolithic age of the site and probably exclude the winter season of its visitation. The technical and typological features of the stone artefacts found, including blades with indications of intensive use and burnt endscrapers, are consistent with the assumption of the site's age therefore positioned somewhere between the Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene. An undisturbed horizon with artefacts and hearth remains was discovered during the test pitting. It also turned out that a significant part of the shelter is practically devoid of culture-bearing deposits. The locality suggests one of the points visited by early hunters while travelling through the exploited territory in search of resources. This version is supported by the features of the stone artefacts, which show signs of special selection and therefore belong to a part of a mobile toolkit, traces of intensive wear on them, and the location of the site in a rock shelter near convenient access to a plateau providing dominating heights and good observation points, although far from water sources.

Keywords: Epipalaeolithic, South-Western Crimea, ephemeral cave site

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ПРО ЕФЕМЕРНУ ЕПІПАЛЕОЛІТИЧНУ СТОЯНКУ В КРИМСЬКОМУ ПЕРЕДГІР'Ї: З ІСТОРІЇ ПОЛЬОВИХ ДОСЛІДЖЕНЬ У КРИМУ 1990 РОКУ

Вадим Степанчук*

Анотація

Ця робота має на меті публікацію матеріалів одного з палеолітичних місцезнаходжень, відкритих автором під час розвідувальних робіт на півострові Крим наприкінці 1980-х – на початку 1990-х рр. Пам'ятка, про яку надається інформація, Гамак-Коба, свого часу була прошурфована, виявлені при цьому матеріальні залишки, хоч і не дуже чисельні, є достатньо інформативними, але й досі не були введені в науковий обіг.

Судячи з наявних даних, Гамак-Коба є короткочасною стоянкою мобільної групи мисливців. Залишки черепашок наземних равликів Helix vulgaris, які, ймовірно, були спожиті в їжу, можуть слугувати вказівкою на епіпалеолітичний або мезолітичний вік стоянки та, вірогідно, виключають зимовий сезон її відвідання. Припущенню про вік пам'ятки та її характер не суперечать техніко-типологічні особливості знайдених кам'яних артефактів, серед яких є пластинки із слідами інтенсивного використання по м'якому (м'ясо, шкіра) та твердому (сухе дерево) матеріалу та перепалені у вогні фрагментовані скребачки.

У процесі тестового шурфування було виявлено непорушений горизонт з артефактами та рештками вогнища. З'ясувалося також, що значна частина навісу вже практично позбавлена культуровмісних відкладів. Проте публікація матеріалів місцезнаходження і привернення до нього уваги фахівців має сенс. Пам'ятка розташована високо над рівнем поперечної обводненої долини, безпосередньо під скельним уступом, далеко від місць прориву річок через другу гряду гір, тобто поза зоною, з якою пов'язується більшість палеолітичних та мезолітичних пам'яток півострову. Таким чином, місцезнаходження свідчить про один з пунктів, відвіданих давніми мисливцями наприкінці плейстоцену або початку голоцену, під час мандрів експлуатованою територією в пошуках ресурсів життєзабезпечення. На користь такої версії свідчать нечисленність культурних решток, особливості кам'яних артефактів, що демонструють ознаки належності до мобільного набору інструментів, сліди інтенсивної спрацьованості на них, розташування скельного укриття поблизу зручного виходу на плато, хоча й далеко від джерел постачання водою.

Ключові слова: епіпалеоліт, Південно-Західний Крим, ефемерна печерна стоянка

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INTRODUCTION

This work aims at the publication of materials from one of the Paleolithic sites discovered by the author, who worked as part of the Crimean Palaeolithic expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine during his exploration work on the Crimean Peninsula in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The presented site, Hamak-Koba, appears to be of the Epipalaeolithic or Mesolithic period, one of the final phases of the Stone Age on the territory of Crimea. The site was only pitted, and the material remains found are not very rich. In the process of test pitting, it turned out that a significant part of the shelter is practically devoid of culture-bearing deposits. However, it would be worthwhile publishing the information and materials of the locality and attracting specialist attention to it. The value of the locality lies in the fact that it evidenced the movement of hunters in the foothill area of the site. Hamak-Koba is located far from the areas where the rivers cut through the second mountain range, i.e. outside the zone to which most of the multi-layered Mesolithic sites are associated. Thus, the site is evidence of one of the locations visited by ancient hunters during their wanderings through the exploited area in search of resources.

HISTORY OF DISCOVERY

The Hamak-Koba location was discovered during prospecting in 1990 in southwestern Crimea. From the formal point of view, in that year, the work on the Paleolithic of Crimea was carried out by joint efforts of two expeditions, namely the one of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR (Head Dr Yu.G. Kolosov) and the one of the Research and Production cooperative 'Arheolog' at IA AS of the Ukrainian SSR (Head Mr. V.P. Chabai). However, the basic amount of financing for field works was provided by the RPC 'Arheolog'[1], while the funding from the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine was cut to a minimum. The most extensive excavations of that field season were conducted at the multilayered Middle Paleolithic site of Kabazi V, localised and partially investigated by the Crimean Paleolithic Expedition of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 1986[2]. In 1989 the site was subjected to predatory excavation by unknown persons. Limited excavations of 1990 were also conducted at Skalistoye 1[3], one of the open-air Late Paleolithic workshops found in river Bodrak valley[4] and new wholly buried

[1] Чабай В.П., Степанчук В.Н., Евтушенко А.И. Отчет о полевых исследованиях Крымской палеолитической экспедиции НПК "Археолог" в 1990 г. Київ, 1990. Науковий архів ІА НАНУ, ф. е., 1990/182.

[2] Колосов Ю.Г., Степанчук В.Н., Чабай В.П. Отчет о работе Крымской палеолитической экспедиции в 1986 г. Київ, 1986. Науковий архів ІА НАНУ, ф. е., 1986/29-а.

[3] Колосов Ю.Г., Степанчук В.Н., Чабай В.П., Павличенко А.П. Отчет Крымской палеолитической экспедиции за 1989 г. Київ, 1989. Науковий архів ІА НАНУ, ф. е., 1989/1; Колосов Ю.Г., Степанчук В.Н., Чабай В.П. Палеолит Крыма. Поздний палеолит Крыма. Вып. I и II. Киев: Институт археологии АНУ, 1990.

[4] Колосов Ю.Г. Про перспективність дослідження пізньопалеолітичних пам'яток Криму. *Археологія.* 1991. № 1. С. 3-10.

multilayered Mousterian site, named after G.A. Bonch-Osmolovsky[5], both discovered by the author's prospecting team in the years 1987 and 1988, respectively. After the author and Yu.G. Kolosov's excavations at the site of G.A. Bonch-Osmolovsky, and in parallel with V.P. Chabai, A.I. Evtushenko, and A.P. Pavlichenko's works at Kabazi V and Skalistoye 1, the author's prospecting team traditionally conducted targeted searches for new Stone Age sites on the peninsula. Besides, the prospecting team monitored the preservation of the most important Palaeolithic sites, as, since 1988, there have been several cases of registering the plundering pits at known Stone Age sites. Compared with previous seasons, in the year 1990, the scope of exploratory works was considerably reduced. In total, the exploration routes took nine working days[6].

Bakhchisarai site, Siuren I and II, Staroselie, Shan-Koba, Kachinskiy shelter, Alimovskiy shelter, Vodopadny Grotto and Shaitan-Koba were inspected as part of the monitoring programme. Additional material was collected on the slope below Kabazi 1, on the recently discovered Alma 1, Balakly 1 and Balakly III workshop, to add to the existing collections. A systematic collection of materials was attempted at a limited area of the workshop on Mylnaya Mountain south of the Kabazi plateau. In the process of prospecting, new localities were identified which yielded Stone Age material: Levadki Plateau, Forester's Hut near Vodopadny Grotto, Plateau near Vodopadny Grotto, Skalistoye 3, Beregovoye, Hamak-Koba, Kabazi Plateau, locality 100 m NE of the G.A. Bonch-Osmolovsky site, finds on forest road from Kremiannaya Mountain to Skalistoye village. Of these newly discovered localities, Hamak-Koba, a site 100 m to the NE of GABO, and several grottoes and shelters in Levadki tract were sounded, with no evidence of Stone Age occupation. In addition to the author, employees of the Crimean Expedition of the RPC 'Arheolog' V.L. Baranovsky and A.N. Morozov took part in the search routes and pitting of new localities.

Location and characteristics of the locality

The Hamak Koba, which gets its name from the remains of specific equipment in the rock walls, provisionally served for hammock fastening, is a south-west orientated grotto. It is situated on the left-hand side of a large gully, at the mouth of which the locally well-known Serpent's Cave is on its right-hand side (Fig. 1). The grotto is actually related to the Tash-Djargan tract, where Teshkli Koba, well known for its round opening in the vault, is located. The Hamak-Koba rock refuge is formed in a massif of limestone. The height of the chamber above the valley floor is at least 70 m. The size of the rock shelter is 11 meters long

[5] Колосов Ю.Г., Степанчук В.М., Чабай В.П. Нові мусть'єрські стоянки Південно-Західного Криму. *Археологія.* 1988. Вип. 64, С. 34-45; Колосов Ю.Г., Степанчук В.Н., Чабай В.П. Мустьерская стоянка им. Г.А. Бонч-Осмоловского. *Российская Археология.* 1993. № 3, С. 119–129; Stepanchuk V.N. Le Moustérien Charentien à pièces foliacées de GABO, Sud-Ouest de la Crimée, Ukraine. *PALEO.* 1996. № 8. P. 225–241.

[6] Чабай В.П., Степанчук В.Н., Евтушенко А.И. Отчет о полевых исследованиях Крымской палеолитической экспедиции НПК "Археолог" в 1990 г. Київ, Науковий архів ІА НАНУ, ф. е., 1990/182.

Fig. 1. View of the rock massif with Hamak-Koba from the South-West, from the Serpent's Cave. The inset scheme shows the site's location on a Crimea map[7]

Рис. 1. Вигляд скельного масиву з Гамак-Кобою з південного заходу, від Зміїної печери. На врізці показано розташування стоянки на карті Криму

and 10-12 meters deep. The height of the ceiling, on average, is from 3 to 3.5 m; at the entrance, it approaches 5 to 6 m. The shelter is asymmetrically quadrangular (sub-rhomboid) in shape.

While inspecting the rock refuge chamber and the adjacent slope, the patinated basal part of a regular narrow flint blade with a parallel dorsal pattern was picked up on the surface, 6 m below the entrance (Fig. 2: 8). A standard 1x1m test pit was placed in the cavern about 2–2.5 m from the drip line of the overhang to search for extant culturally-bearing deposits in its central part. However, it turned out that the sediment pack at the installation spot was minimal and consisted mainly of a modern, so-called kizyac layer overlying the remains of loamy sediments. The comparatively recent kizyac (from Turkish *tezek*, i.e. dry dung) layer constitutes the remains of animal faeces accumulated during multiple stays of sheep flocks. The underlying loamy sediment thickness increased towards the entrance, and thus, the test pit was extended toward the drip line. Eventually, the pit reached a total area of 3×1 m. The trench was backfilled after the testing was completed.

The test pit revealed the following stratigraphic sequence: beneath the 10–15 cm kizyac layer lies a light brown loam containing numerous limestone rubbles, the thickness of which increases from 5 cm in the north-eastern corner of the pit to 60 cm in its south-western corner. In the lower part of the light brown loam in the SW pit area, several flint blades were found (Fig. 2: 1–3), as well as whole and fragments of shells of land snails (Fig. 2: 6). Due to the typical appearance of dirty yellowish and whitish shells with brown

[7] Picture source: Wikipedia. URL: https://bit.ly/46HnaBF

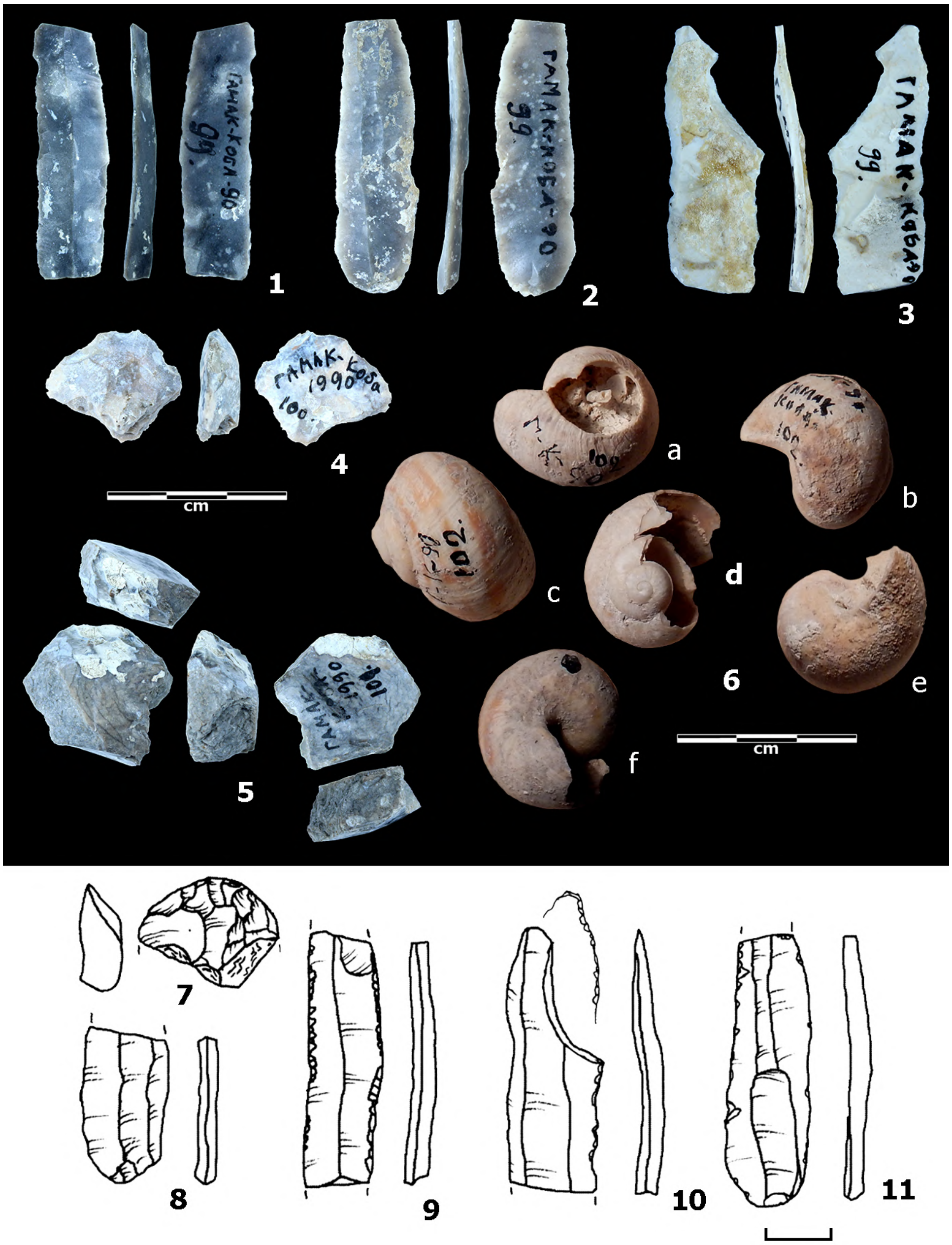

Fig. 2: Finds from Hamak-Koba. Flint artefacts, photos and drawings (1-5; 7-11) and pictures of paired aspects of three shells of the land snail *Helix vulgaris* (6 ab, cd, ef).

Рис. 2: Знахідки з Гамак-Коби. Крем'яні артефакти, фотографії та малюнки (1-5; 7-11) і фото різних аспектів трьох черепашок сухопутного равлика *Helix vulgaris* (6 ab, cd, ef).

bands, these should be remains of specie close to *Helix vulgaris* Rossmässler, 1839. A hearth's traces, a dark-coloured layer of heat-impacted loam up to 10–15 cm thick, were found at the level of the finds of lithic artefacts but close to the drip line. Only a periphery of the likely hearth was investigated. Several fragments of *Helix* shells, a heavily burnt fragment of endscraper, and another burnt fragment of endscraper-like tool made of flake or massive blade were found in its filling (Fig. 2: 4, 5).

The available evidence suggests that the culture-bearing sediments were preserved in the area in front of the grotto and, in part, under the limestone roof. Judging by the sharp transition between the loam and kizyac layers, the sediments in the niche have been mostly thrown away. It cannot be ruled out that the grotto deposits have been removed (cleaned out) to a depth of approximately 1 meter. We can judge this very cautiously based on the slight difference in the degree of corrosion of the rock walls of the chamber. A similar pattern can be observed in many caves in Crimea. The medieval population of the peninsula intensively raised sheep and adapted many caves for economic purposes, increasing their volume where possible, including by cleaning them from sediments.

Characteristics of lithic artefacts recovered

The finds include several blades, a fragment of an endscraper and a fragment of a flint piece, most probably also used as an endscraper. The used raw material is high-quality fine-grained flint of various shades, predominantly grey with lighter-coloured irregular spot inclusions. Such flints are characteristic of the nearby outcrops of siliceous raw materials. Items made of such raw materials are widespread in materials from sites of Mousterian, Upper Palaeolithic and Epipalaeolithic ages, identified in the valleys of the Alma and Bodrak rivers and Kholodnaya Balka[8]. There are rich outcrops of this raw material in the valley of the Bodrak River, in the vicinity of the village of Skalistoe, 10 km in a straight line to the southwest of the Hamak-Koba site. In particular, the rich outcrops on Mount Kremiannaya, south of the Skalistoe, deliver fine-grained grey, dark grey, and white Turonian flints. However, accessible primary flint deposits are localized throughout the foothills from Sevastopol to Simferopol. Redeposited flints are found in the alluvium of all the rivers that cut through the second ridge of mountains in this area[9].

Artefact 1 (Fig. 2: 1, 9; 3). Large medial fragment. Raw material grey with light grey irregular inclusions, poorly translucent fine-grained high-quality flint. On all surfaces, micro patches of calcareous sediments are preserved. Object length >42.84 mm, width 12.14 mm, thickness 4.37 mm. The terminal and basal parts may have been removed intentionally, with the momentum of the removing force directed from the dorsal surface to the ventral surface at an angle of about 90 degrees. The blade is primarily two-faced in

[8] Колосов Ю.Г., Степанчук В.М., Чабай В.П. Нові мусть'єрські стоянки Південно-Західного Криму. *Археологія.* 1988. № 64. С. 34–45; Колосов Ю.Г., Степанчук В.Н., Чабай В.П. Мустьерская стоянка им. Г.А. Бонч-Осмоловского. *Российская Археология.* 1993. № 3. С. 119–129; Колосов Ю.Г., Степанчук В.Н., Чабай В.П. Ранний палеолит Крыма. Киев: Наукова Думка, 1993.
[9] Муратов М.В. Геология Крымского полуострова. Москва: Недра, 1973.

cross-section. The dorsal pattern is mainly subparallel, but a fragment of opposed directed subparallel removal is preserved in the distal part. The left edge is slightly concave; the right one is slightly convex, and the piece's profile is slightly convex. Artefact shows no deliberate retouching but possesses intense macro wear along longitudinal edges (Fig. 3). The ends, which are areas of likely intentional removal of the proximal and distal parts of the blade, are virtually intact. Both long edges display bifacially positioned, mainly aligned discontinuous perpendicular small and medium scars. In some contrast, the ventral surface of the right edge is characterised by isolated discontinuous oblique scars. Bending initiations and feather terminations prevail; there are half-moon, semi-circular and trapezoidal scars. To judge by the reference data presented[10], this blade could be used for processing medium-hard material (like dry wood) and also soft animal material (meat, hide).

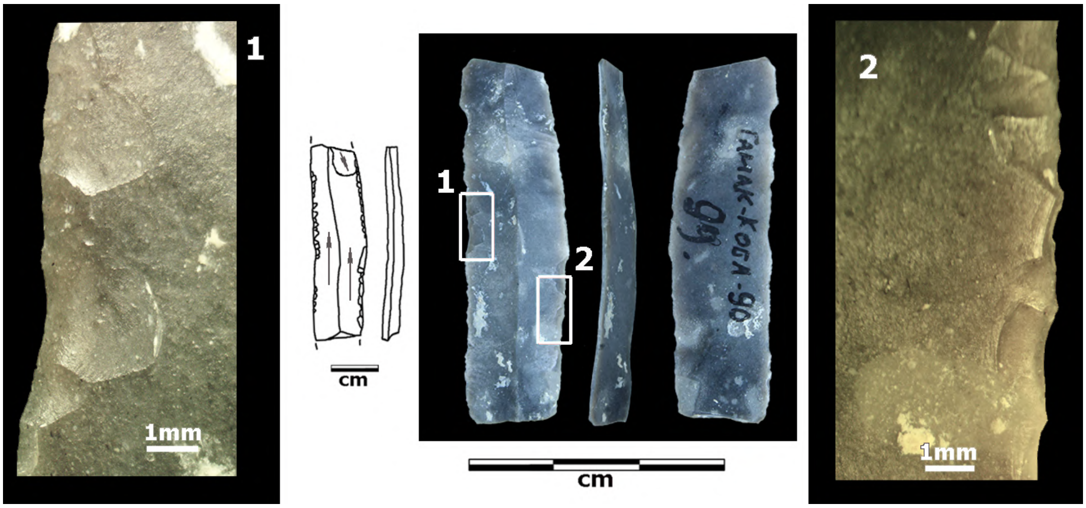

Fig. 3. Hamak-Koba, medial blade fragment showing continuous use-wear along the left and right edges. Two edge areas of the dorsal aspect are magnified, presenting shallow small to medium bending feathered and hinged scars.
Рис. 3. Гамак-Коба, медіальний фрагмент пластинки, що демонструє значні сліди використання вздовж лівого та правого країв. Дві крайові ділянки дорсальної сторони збільшені, демонструючи неглибокі дрібні та середні вигнуті пірчасті та шарнірні негативи.

Artefact 2 (Fig. 2: 2, 11; 4). Practically a whole piece, but the distal part is missing. Grey with brownish hue, light grey irregular inclusions, well translucent quality fine-grained flint. Length >45.65 mm, width 14.09 mm, thickness 3.39 mm. A cross-section is three-faced.

[10] Claud É., Thiébaut C., Coudenneau A., Deschamps M., Mourre V., Brenet M., Chacón-Navarro M.G., Colonge D., Lemorini C., Maury S., Servelle C., Venditti F. Le référentiel des outils lithiques. In: Thiébaut C., Claud É., Costamagno S. (dir.) *L'acquisition et le traitement des matières végétales et animales par les néandertaliens: quelles modalités et quelles stratégies?* 2019. Palethnologie 10.

The dorsal pattern is unipolar parallel. The terminal part of the blade may also have been removed intentionally, with the power impulse directed from the dorsal surface to the ventral one, with an angle of about 90 degrees.

There are use-wear along both longitudinal edges (Fig. 4). The right edge shows bifacial isolated discontinuous oblique and perpendicular half-moon, triangular, trapezoidal, often semi-abrupt small scars. The left edge displays several patterns. Bifacial isolated discontinuous, slightly oblique semi-circular, half-moon, trapezoidal scarring with bending initiations and feathered terminations prevails (Fig. 4: 1, 2). There is also a dorsal zone with discontinuous superposed perpendicular shallow angle triangular, trapezoid, and half-moon small and medium scars. Another edge zone locates on the proximal ventral surface and is characterized by aligned continuous, very small scars of half-moon morphology, bending initiations and feathered terminations (Fig. 4: 3). This last zone probably presents a deliberately prepared edge, while other damage could suggest processing soft animal material (meat, hide) and contact with hard material (like bone). The transversal end also shows macro wear in the form of very small superficial scarring (Fig. 4), likely resulting from pressure due to the contact with medium-hard to hard material. Some likely wear shines are also visible in this area (Fig. 4: 1).

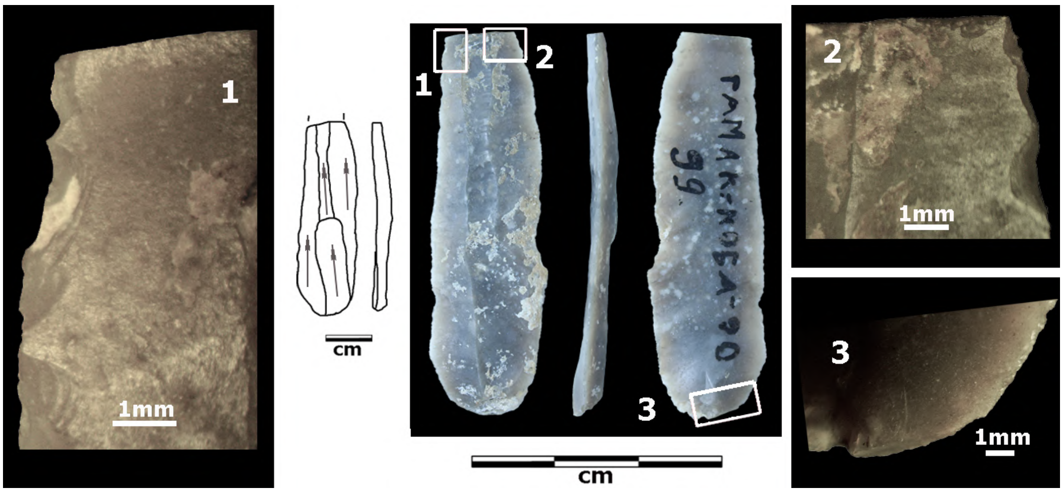

Fig. 4. Hamak-Koba, blade with a missing distal end, as well as continuous use-wear along the left and right edges. Distal fracture displays post-fracture micro-wear and possibly polish.
Magnified are two zones (1, 2) on the contact between longitudinal and transversal (trimmed or broken) edges and a zone with likely intentional micro-retouch (3).

Рис. 4. Гамак-Коба, пластинка з відсутнім дистальним кінцем, а також безперервним зносом від використання вздовж лівого і правого країв. На дистальному зламі помітний мікрознос після злому і, можливо, полірування.
Збільшено дві зони (1, 2) на контакті між поздовжнім і поперечним (видаленим або зламаним) краями і зону з імовірним навмисним мікроретушуванням (3).

Artefact 3 (Fig. 2: 3, 10). Blade of milky-white fine-grained opaque flint, zoned with brown-stained spots. The basal part is missing. The terminal part also demonstrates light damage. Object length >45.05 mm, width 16.03 mm, thickness 3.1 mm. A cross-section is three-faced. The dorsal pattern is unipolar parallel and sub-convergent in distal area, profile is slightly convex and twisted. The longitudinal edges have continued fine retouching that does not alter the contour of the blank. The retouched edges are alternatively positioned: the left edge on the ventral side and the right edge on the dorsal side. Both edges also show macro wear in the form of small isolated, mainly dorsally located scars. The base fracture interrupts the negatives of the retouching of the right edge. The proximal end displays a combination of micro-fractures whose nature is not clear.

Artefact 4 (Fig. 2: 8). Currently is not presented in the collection. Represents a basal fragment of a regular blade. Dimensions according to the drawing from the field report are length >24.0 mm, width 13.5 mm, and thickness 3.0 mm. The cross-section is three-faced, a dorsal pattern is parallel, and the artefact profile is straight. No data of use wear along the edges of the piece is available.

Artefact 5 (Fig. 2: 4, 7). Fragment of a massive flake (or large blade with a two-faced dorsal plan) with current dimensions of 18.28×22.77×6.47 mm. It has a strongly convex endscraper edge, up to 28 mm long, with a sharpened edge between 45 and 60 degrees. Badly burned, the surface is covered with cracks, and some of the edges are completely destroyed. The initial raw material is fine-grained grey flint, and the colouring is not restored; due to heating, it has acquired secondary zoning and colour.

Artefact 6 (Fig. 2: 5). Fragment of a massive flake (perhaps a large flake with intentionally cut edges?). Dimensions 23.49×24.47×12.27 mm. The raw material is fine grey-brown flint with calcareous inclusions. Also intensely burnt, the surfaces are covered with cracks, part of the edges are completely destroyed, and there are small potlid flakes' scars. The piece has a strongly convex scraper edge with a length of >12 mm; a sharpness angle varying from 45 to 60 degrees.

The composition and features of the finds allow us to draw some preliminary conclusions. The finds are composed only of items with evident wear or secondary treatment. Close technical parameters characterise the blades; originally, they were regular standardised items with dimensions of around 50×15×3 mm. Although they seem to be manufactured in a controlled single-platform unidirectional splitting process, the high degree of closeness in their metric parameters and morphology suggests deliberate intentionality in their selection. The nature of the macro wear on the blades indicates their active use in processing soft animal material (meat, hide) and associated occasional contact with hard material (like bone) and processing medium-hard material such as dry wood, possibly bone. It remains unclear whether blades were used as inserts or held directly in hand. Note that the recovered pieces show no indisputable signs of projectile wear.

In the set of finds, there are also endscrapers with a sharpened working edge, possibly indicating work with leather-hide-wood. The high degree of alteration of the structure of the rock material of the endscrapers as a result of heating suggests their prolonged presence in the immediate vicinity or directly at the epicentre of the temperature anomaly. In other words, these items were most likely intentionally placed in the fire. The specific features of the set of stone tools, namely the unification of the recovered lithic artefacts and their intensive wear, the limited range of types (blades and endscrapers only) with the absence of flakes and chips, allow us to attribute them to a part of the mobile set of instruments. This assumption is consistent with the nonstandard location of the monument and supports the theory that a small group of hunters briefly occupied the rock shelter. The *Helix* shell finds are most likely associated with flint items from a mobile package of stone tools. This point is supported by their recovery at the same stratigraphic level as the flints. They were deposited in the same sediments, and their surfaces were sometimes partially covered with calcite crust. Some whole shells show presumed signs of heating (Fig. 2: 6b), and some fragments of shell walls were found directly in the hearth horizon. Suppose we accept the simultaneity of accumulating stone items and land snail shells as remnants of consumed food. In that case, we can cautiously limit the time of the visit to the refuge to the time of active *Helix* life, i.e. the spring-summer-autumn period.

Conclusion

Judging by the available evidence, Hamak-Koba represents a short-term stay of a limited group of hunters. The presence of remains of land snail shells, likely used as food, may indicate an Epipalaeolithic or Mesolithic age, as this kind of evidence is reported for other Crimean sites of that age[11]. The features of recovered lithic artefacts do not contradict this assumption. It means the chronological position of the site somewhere between the Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene. We can presume that a layer with human activity remains still survived in the area in front of the grotto and partially under the overhang. The areas near the drip line of the area outside the rock roof appear the most promising for further research. The presence of organic residues, such as snail shells and sooty charcoal materials identified in the hearth horizon, suggests the possibility of obtaining an absolute date of the visitation episode.

The peculiarity of the Hamak-Koba locality lies in its setting at a considerable distance from known water sources. The vast majority of known Late Palaeolithic, Epipaleolithic or Mesolithic sites in Crimea are located directly near water flows or sources[12]. In contrast, Hamak-Koba is located comparatively high in the Crimean Mountains (about 510 above sea level). According to Google Earth data, its altitude above the valley with the nearest water sources is up to 100 metres.

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[11] Бибиков С.Н. Об использовании улиток Helix в позднепалеолитическое время. *Материалы и исследования по археологии СССР.* 1941. № 2. С. 141-142; Колосов Ю.Г. Раскопки пещеры Кара-Коба в Крыму. *Краткие сообщения института археологии АН Украины.* 1960. № 10. С. 17–22.

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The use of this rock refuge as a temporary shelter point could be explained by the visiting season; in winter, the snow could have been used as an alternative water supply and ensure a long stay. However, this is opposed by the finds of land snails, the discovery of which in the hearth rather indicates the summer-autumn season of the site. Therefore, it is more reasonable to assume that Hamak-Koba represents a very short-term hunting stop not far from the convenient access to the cuesta surface of the second ridge of the Crimean Mountains.

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