Stone tools from burial complexes of Ekven burial ground (Chukotka, Russia) in the light of traceological analysis

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Résumé

Elucidation of the functions of ancient tools and methods of using household and votive objects is most promising when applying traceological analysis in close combination with experimental and ethnographic data. At the same time, in addition to a thorough microscopic analysis, it is necessary to correctly observe the procedure for experimental work, as well as to select ethnographic information that is closest to the ancient artefacts under study.
The numerous grave goods from the Ekven burial ground located in the north of the Chukotka Peninsula (1 millennium BC) include knives of a crescent and elongated shape made of slate rocks. Such tools are known in the inventory of the indigenous peoples of the Bering Sea under the names "pekul" among the Chukchi and "ulu" among the Eskimos. Ethnographic data indicate that "women's knives" were used in various operations for processing hides, "men's knives" – for skinning animal carcasses. The conducted traceological analysis of archaeological artefacts showed well-pronounced use-wear traces on surfaces of most of the tools. Among them are knives for cutting meat, tools for scraping and cutting skins. Combined tools were found, different parts of which were used in different operations. For example, part of a blade of one of the knives was used for scraping skin, while the other was used as a knife. In addition to use-wear features, technological traces have been preserved on the surfaces of the knives, which helped to understand the methods of their manufacture. Experiments made it possible to characterize all stages of this process: selection of raw materials for its primary processing, shaping, abrasive surface treatment, blade sharpening, fixation in a bone handle with glue. Experimental tools have proven to be effective in the work.
Thus, the studies carried out have shown that the knives from the Ekven burial ground have intensive use-wear traces, which indicates their application in everyday life. The functional features of each tool were determined, and the reconstruction of the process of their manufacture brought new information, insufficiently characterized in ethnographic sources.

Mots-Clés: Chukotka, Ekven burial ground (1 millennium BC), stone knives, experimental and traceological analysis

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