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Palaeolithic studies in Russia: Retrospect and prospects[1]

Introduction

The last decade has seen a surge in interest in both the history of archaeological thought as a consequence of theoretical concepts (Trigger 1989) and the role of national research traditions and biases in Palaeolithic research (Clark 1991). It has been widely admitted that the Russian school of prehistoric archaeology occupies a particular place among main national archaeological communities (Davis 1983; Soffer 1983; Soffer 1985; Soffer / Praslov 1993). Its peculiar character was heavily influenced by the vastness of the territory of the former Soviet Union. This diversity allowed Palaeolithic archaeologists to study Late Pleistocene cultural manifestations from various culture areas within the boundaries of their own country. The sites of the East European Plain present a brilliant pattern of a European-like Upper Palaeolithic, while the data from the Caucasus and Central Asia show Near and Middle Eastern affinities. The Siberian and Far Eastern evidence allows us to trace close links with the Japanese, Chinese and New World sequences. The methodological developments of Russian scholars, like Semenov's use-wear analysis, the study of the Upper Palaeolithic dwelling structures in large horizontal exposures, etc., are widely admitted in the world.

1 First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge my debt to the Director of the Institute for the Material Culture History, St. Petersburg, Professor Eugene N. Nosov, and to my colleagues from the Palaeolithic Department of the Institute, especially to the late Professor Paul I. Boriskovsky, and to Zoia A. Abramova, Gennady P. Grigor'ev, Nicholas D. Praslov. I am particularly grateful to Professors Leo S. Klejn and Natalie B. Leonova. It is inevitable in a work of this sort that the author draws not only upon formal writing but also upon the informal conversations and interchanges with professional colleagues from many countries. I wish to express my deep gratitude to Olga Soffer, Françoise Audouze, Richard Davis, Lewis R. Binford, Jack L. Hofman, George C. Frison, Marcel Kornfeld, James G. Enloe, Harold Dibble, Catherine Perlès, Alain Schnapp, Jean-Paul Demoule, Pierre-Yves Demars, Ichiro Yamanaka, Hideaki Kimura, Seonbok Yi, Gerhard Bosinski, Geoffrey Bailey, Nicholas Barton, Nicolas Rolland, Paul Mellars and many others. It also should be noted that some of the ideas of the paper were first launched and discussed during my occasional lectures in the University of Paris-I and the University of Cambridge. For their constructive comments, I wish to thank the participants in these seminars. This research was supported by the Central European University Research Support Scheme (Grant no. 791/1995). Last but not least, I am deeply grateful to the organizers of the conference "Archaeologies East – Archaeologies West", especially to Peter F. Biehl, Alexander Gramsch, and Włodzimierz Rączkowski for their kind invitation to attend the meeting and to submit the paper.

Soviet archaeology, separated during several decades by a linguistic barrier and supplemented by the peculiar character of premises and goals, has its own unique history and we could not avoid it trying to analyze current debates. The paper is devoted to a brief developmental history of main theoretical and methodological approaches pioneered in Russia during the last 100 years. Their advancement and decline were shaped both by the external (ideological and socio-cultural) factors and the internal logic of archaeological inquiry. Special attention is paid to the comparative study of concepts that prevailed in Russian and Western archaeology in each stage of their historical development. New openness to and from Russia has provided a unique chance to discuss frankly theoretical underpinnings which were passed over in silence in the very recent past (Vasil'ev 1996). The paper also discusses the contemporary state of Russian Palaeolithic archaeology, focusing on pivotal issues that have provoked heated debate.

Two preliminary remarks need to be made. First, the term 'Russian archaeology' in the historical part of the paper covers the whole body of Russian-language archaeological publications, including contributions from colleagues worked on in other republics of the former Soviet Union. Second, to facilitate the use of the bibliography for interested scholars, where possible, I cite available translations of Russian sources into European languages instead the original publications.

Going its own way: a developmental history of Russian palaeolithic archaeology

As in other European countries, the dawn of Stone Age studies in Russia was associated with antiquarianism – the collection of stone tools by amateurs interested in the remote human past. The first discovery, the Pleistocene site at Irkutsk (Siberia) in 1871, was followed by a series of explorations in European Russia, the Caucasus and Crimea. Originating in the late 19th century within the framework of the evolutionary concept, Russian Palaeolithic archaeology soon passed into a formative phase (collection of evidence, development of field methods and typological glossary, first attempts to summarize scanty data). The first study of spatial distribution of remains was realized by Kashchenko (1901) as early as 1896 at the Tomskaia mammoth kill-site.

From the beginning, a tradition of close collaboration between archaeologists and natural scientists was established. Significant advances in geology (one of the first glacialist theories was put forward by Kropotkin as early as 1876) facilitated these studies. Dokuchaev, Feofilaktov and Nikitin studied the geology of the Palaeolithic sites in the late 19th century. In the early 20th century, Krishtafovich (1907) began the first program on comparative geological study of all Pleistocene occurrences known in European Russia and oriented toward the synthetical overview. This aim was later realized by Gromov (see below).

During these early days of research, general interpretations of prehistoric culture change was attempted within a rigid framework of unilinear evolutionism. As such, the ultimate research objective became the arrangement of assemblages along a temporal

ladder and the definition of successive stages of development. Meanwhile, the new tendencies in world prehistory of the beginning of 20th century (Breuil 1912) did not avoid Russia. The early writings of Efimenko (1915) show the tendency toward studies of local culture manifestations on the Russian Plain. At the same time, discoveries in Siberia initiated debates around the obvious discordance between composition of lithic assemblages and the geological age of sites. Savenkov (1892), the discoverer of the Afontova Gora sites compared the Siberian assemblages to the Final Pleistocene (what he called 'the age of reindeer') based on stratigraphical and paleontological evidence. He did so despite the co-occurrence of the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic tool types in lithic industry.

The period after the Revolution, the 1920s-early 1930s, was probably the most interesting period, a time when Russian prehistoric studies greatly matured. Apart from very active fieldwork realized in different portions of the country (Golomshtok 1938; Bonch-Osmolovsky / Gromov 1936) this period was marked by several important methodological innovations. Russian prehistory was dominated by the so-called 'paleoethnological school', which put emphasis on man-land relationships and was obviously stimulated by the British geographical approach to prehistory (Crawford 1921). The developments in field methods were exemplified by the study of spatial distribution of artifacts in cave sites (Bonch-Osmolovsky 1940) and a remarkable discovery of a domestic structure on the open-air site of Gagarino in 1927 (Zamiatnin 1934). Rudinsky (1947) was very active in experimenting with new techniques for fieldwork, which resulted in the first photographic plotting of artifacts in vertical view at Pushkari in 1933. New advances appeared in lithic analysis (technological approach, statistical classification; Bonch-Osmolovsky 1928; 1940) and in the interpretation of the archaeological record. In this respect it is worthwhile to mention that Efimenko (1928) identified local archaeological cultures in the Upper Palaeolithic of Eastern Europe roughly at the same time as Childe (1929) began to use the same terms for the Upper Palaeolithic culture phases. An official version of the history of archaeology in the Soviet Union tended to overestimate the impact of the adoption of Marxism in the early 1930s, thus passing silently over the achievements of the previous period. It should be added that leading scholars of the 1920s (Bonch-Osmolovsky, Rudinsky, Petrie) later suffered political repression and their work has yet to be analyzed. It is worth noting that many ideas put forward in this period foreshadowed the archaeological views which were to appear in the West in the 1960s with the advent of "New Archaeology" and settlement archaeology (Binford / Binford 1969; Leroi-Gourhan / Brézillon 1966).

An upsurge in Palaeolithic studies in the 1920s was accompanied by new achievements in Pleistocene geoarchaeology. In 1927, the Commission for Quaternary Research directed by Pavlov at the Academy of Sciences was founded. The following year, it joined the Association for Quaternary Research in Europe – a predecessor of the INQUA. In his posthumous monograph, Pavlov (1936) used the chronological framework adopted in Europe. According to it, the Chellean was correlated with Mindel-Riss, the Acheulian with final Riss and Riss-Würm, the Mousterian with final Riss-Würm, while Würm dated the different periods of the Upper Palaeolithic. Thus the geological background for Pleistocene cultures in Russia corresponded to

chronological vehicles accepted across the world. Later, the situation changed with the introduction of Gromov's scheme (see below).

During the time before and after the Revolution, the interdisciplinary approach was obviously stimulated by the development of Palaeolithic studies within the framework of general anthropology or paleoethnology, i. e. as part of the complex study of early man in his interaction with the environment. In these years, Bonch-Osmolovsky (1931) put forward the idea of the foundation of the 'Quaternary Institute', a special institution for practical co-operation between scholars of human and natural sciences (the idea has not yet been realized in Russia).

The early 1930s witnessed a radical shift in the organizational structure of research as institutes became concentrated in large centers. Research interests shifted to the problems of the study of Palaeolithic dwelling structures and habitation sites associated with the introduction of large-scale horizontal exposures of living floors (Efimenko 1958). Other innovations include the Semenov's (1964) method of use-wear studies of lithics, and the stadial approach to the generalization of Palaeolithic culture patterns (see below). This transition from a 'normal' science of the 1920s was heavily influenced by a number of external and internal factors, including the introduction of Marxist concepts, Marr's Theory of Stages (Alpatov 1995) and the dissatisfaction of young scholars by the narrow limits of taxonomy and culture history and a tendency toward the reconstruction of social systems of the past. At the same time, other important issues (man-land relationships, environmental studies) were regarded as not germane to Soviet archaeology interests and objectives.

From the 1930s until the early 1950s, Soviet Palaeolithic archaeology was dominated by what can be called a stadial model proposed by the State Academy for the Material Culture History, said to be a 'developed evolutionary model'. An increase of theoretical works can also be seen. According to the evolutionary model, culture change should be viewed as a passage through 'stages', with the Upper Palaeolithic being one of them. It is said to differ from the older and simpler 'classical' evolutionary models by making direct correlation between the cultural stages identified (presumably from assemblage composition and other indicators) and the 'progressive changes' in social life and economy. It should be pointed out that the focus on problems of culture change in socio-economic terms was advanced by Soviet archaeologists (Efimenko 1931; Boriskovsky 1932) as early as in the 1930s, long before the development of similar approaches in the West (Renfrew 1973). Within the framework of this model, Efimenko (1953) and Boriskovsky (1958) took charge of the subdivision of the Upper Palaeolithic for the European part of the USSR, while Sosnovsky (1934) and Okladnikov (1959) took up the Siberian Upper Palaeolithic. Another remarkable achievement of this period was Zamiatnin's (Zamiatnin 1953; 1954) concept of great culture areas of the Upper Palaeolithic.

The organizational re-structuring of sciences in the early 1930s, when all branches of archaeology were attached to history, led to the weakening of interdisciplinary research. This is especially true in the domain of early human palaeoecology, the study of interrelationship between culture development and environmental changes. Meanwhile the collaboration between scholars on a practical level was not interrupted. Gromov and Mirchink made major contributions to the study of the geology of Palaeolithic sites. The development of geoarchaeological studies was hampered in the 1930-

1950s by the appearance of original chronological frameworks accepted in Russia. The vehicle pioneered by Gromov (1948) was adopted and even dominated. Gromov believed in using archaeological assemblages as chronological markers and establishing the Quaternary stratigraphy, thus confusing archaeological and geological arguments. His scheme was essentially based on the acceptance of only one Quaternary glaciation with a maximal phase corresponding to Riss. Due to the misinterpretation of several key stratigraphic sequences and in keeping with the concepts of the late 19th century, he correlated the Lower Palaeolithic with Mindel and Mindel-Riss, the Mousterian – with the end of Mindel-Riss, and the early Riss, the Aurignacian – with the maximal (Riss) phase of the glaciation. The Solutrean and Magdalenian were referred to different phases of Riss and Würm.

The rapid accumulation of data in the 1950s (Beregovaia 1966) coincided with important changes in the methodological approach of Russian prehistorians. During the 1950s, Rogachev challenged the stadial models outlined above. From the excavation of multicomponent sites at Kostenki along the Don River, he established the discrepancy between the stadial model and the real variability in Upper Palaeolithic culture patterns. In his earlier works, he regarded assemblage variability as a reflection of particular "ethnographic" features of culture of separate bands or isolated population groups (Rogachev 1956). Later, he introduced the notion of 'local culture' to designate such variability (Rogachev 1957). In the 1960s, he defined assemblage variability as a reflection of tribal or ethnic communities, following the dominant view of the Soviet prehistory of the time (Rogachev 1964; Klein 1969; McBurney 1976). But later he rejected the connection between tribes or tribal unions and local archaeological cultures, as well as the idea of the reconstruction of 'real history' of the Palaeolithic. Thus, he said "prehistoric archaeology ... is obliged to study the social historical process only hypothetically and in a schematic way, adhered only to the fundamentals of the concrete-historical approach and do not attempt to describe the 'concrete history of the bands and tribes'" (Rogachev 1979, 4).

Rogachev's notion of 'local culture' approach was hotly debated during the 1950s and leading figures of Soviet archaeology opposed his views (Efimenko 1958; Boriskovsky 1957). However, his concept of 'local culture' was widely adopted during the 1960s and 70s for Palaeolithic research. This focus on identifying different archaeological cultures, eliciting their genetic ties to cultures that existed before and after them, was prevalent in Russia in the 1960-1980s (Grigor'ev 1965). The unwarranted emphasis on purely local features of Palaeolithic culture led to the consequent narrowing of research efforts; endless mosaics of regional configurations substituted for a coherent picture of culture development. Some dozens of 'local cultures' were identified among Palaeolithic of different territories and epochs (Boriskovsky 1984).

Of course, the research interests were not restricted to purely local spatio-temporal units and high-level archaeological entities were also discussed concerning problems of elaboration of periodization vehicles and world-wide comparative analysis of Palaeolithic culture patterns. In the 1960s-1980s, discussions focused on the provocative concept of the "Post-Mousterian", i. e. the survival of Middle Palaeolithic culture elements in Final Pleistocene industries beyond Europe and the Near East, as coined by Grigor'ev (1977). Various terminologies were also used by Grigor'ev, Liubin, Gladilin and others to define of broad culture units. Chronological segmenting of evidence, the

definition of Palaeolithic epochs also raised heated debate. Periodization problems have resurfaced in recent years after a long-term dominance of regional-oriented local culture approach (Vishniatsky 1999).

The 1960s witnessed the appearance of statistical Bordesian typology (Liubin 1965). Meanwhile, Korobkov (Korobkov / Mansurov 1972) and Sinitsyn (1977) maintained systems of lithic classification that varied from Bordes' and were essentially based on the identification of morphological details of tools rather than tool forms. The same years evidenced a growing interest in statistical classification and taxonomy (Suleimanov 1972; Gvozdover / Grigor'ev / Deopik / Leonova 1974; Medvedev 1975). The majority of debates were concentrated upon the "Levallois Problem" and core classification.

The next phase of the development of geoarchaeological studies in the late 1950s-early 1960s led to the critical re-examination of Gromov's scheme and the acceptance of chronological frameworks admitted in the world (Ivanova 1972). The introduction of radiocarbon dating and the retrieval of a large series of dates for Palaeolithic sites in European Russia and especially in Siberia (Kind 1974) played a crucial role in these changes. This period witnessed the appearance of synthetic monographs devoted to the chronology and palaeoecology of the Palaeolithic of the Russian Plain (Velichko 1961), Central Asia (Ranov / Nesmeianov 1973), Siberia and the Russian Far East (Tseitlin 1979), as well as overviews covering all the territory of the former USSR (Lazukov 1981; Velichko 1984). The early 1960s witnessed the formation of a contemporary structure of prehistoric research in Russia. A broad network of regional research centers appeared in place of the former centralized archaeological apparatus.

Still digging: New discoveries and achievements

Despite the times of hardship in Russian Palaeolithic studies, archaeologists are continuing to actively research. The process of interaction and co-operation between scholars from different countries has resulted in the establishment of several important fieldwork projects on the European Plain, in the North Caucasus, Siberia and the Russian Far East *(fig. 1)*. About ten years ago, economic troubles and a consequent decrease in support for academic research led some to question whether archaeology in Russia was still alive. Now one may be allowed to affirm that it is. A short and by no means exhaustive roster of recent research projects presented below attests to this fact.

Since most scholars who carried out early and current Palaeolithic research were from St. Petersburg, it seems appropriate to begin with their work. In the past, the Palaeolithic Department of the Institute for the Material Culture History carried out research in different parts of the Soviet Union, including the central and south-western parts of the Russian Plain, Caucasus, Crimea, the Ural, Siberia, and Central Asia. Its activities were pivotal in establishing the research traditions throughout the territory.

In our days, the fieldwork activity diminished and is now restricted mostly to the Russian Plain and Northern Caucasus. After a long break, the Kostenki expedition has renewed exploration of this key cluster of sites. Among other achievements in the

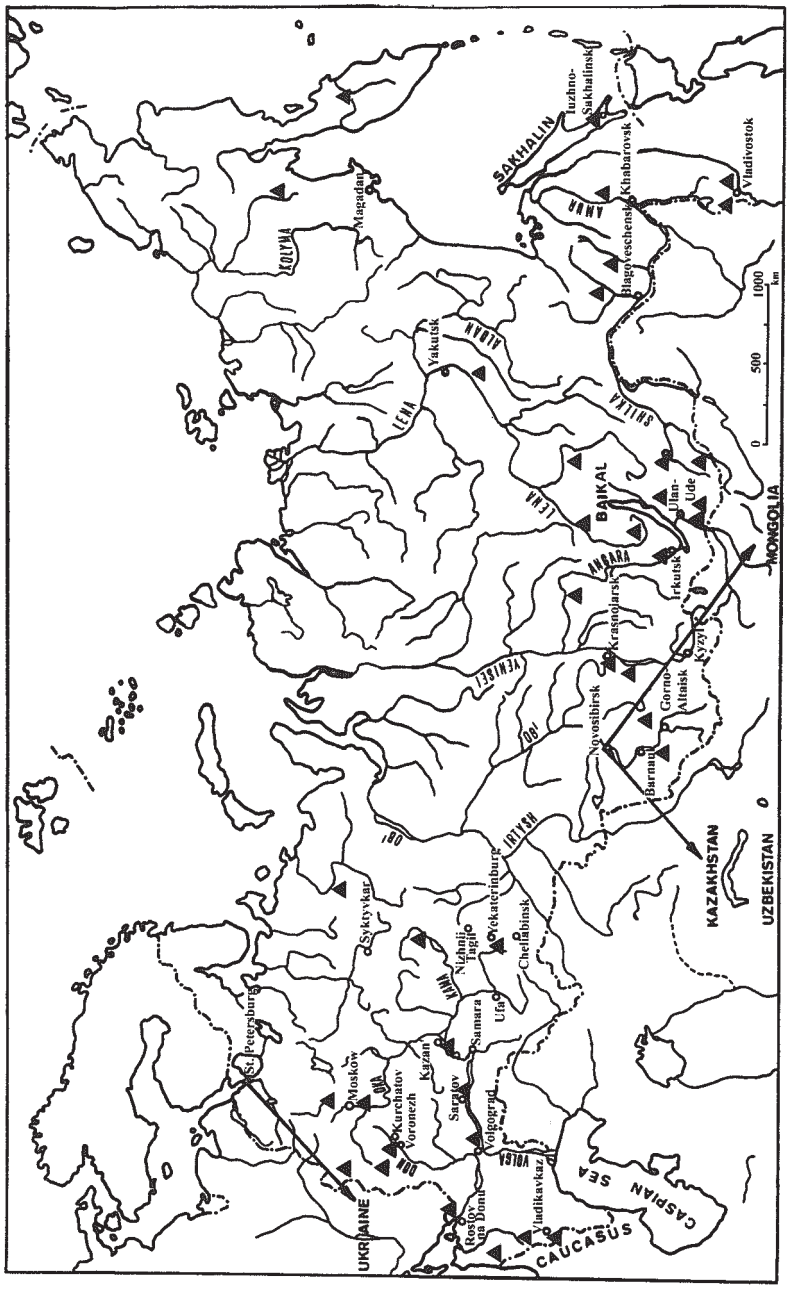

Fig. 1. Map of the main centres of current prehistoric studies and areas of intensive fieldwork in Russia.

study of the Upper Palaeolithic of the Central Russian Plain, a long-term campaign carried out by the joint team of scholars from Moscow and St. Petersburg at Avdeevo (Gvozdover 1995) and the field crew of St. Petersburg University at Pushkari are significant. In both cases, remarkable habitation structures have been unearthed. Further to north at the upper reaches of the Volga River several occurrences produced tanged points assemblages similar to West European patterns. These are of direct relevance to the problem of the Final Pleistocene colonization and migrations on the North European Plains after the deglaciation.

Moscow scholars are mainly concerned with the territory of the central portion of Russia and their efforts are concentrated on the study of the Eastern Gravettian site of Zaraiskaia not far from Moscow.

There are only few Palaeolithic archaeologists in European Russia beyond Moscow and St. Petersburg. Among these, long-term exploration of the Palaeolithic of the northeastern corner of European Russia by Pavlov from Syktyvkar is worth mentioning.

Today, the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography headquartered in Novosibirsk with a broad network of offshoot laboratories located in several cities in Siberia is the most active institution for research on a national scale. The Institute is now headed by a well-known Siberian archaeologist and academician Derevianko (1997), who successfully realized a number of large-scale campaigns. It is well-supplied and well-staffed to carry out large-scale expeditions, and is maintaining good relations with researchers of related fields of Quaternary study. An excellent research environment and a quick turnout of publications have attracted researchers from various parts of Russia. Recently the Institute began to publish the bilingual (Russian and English) quarterly *The Archaeology, Ethnography and Anthropology of Eurasia.*

The first major fieldwork campaign is the study of the Altai sites with particular interest in the question of the origin of Mousterian and Upper Palaeolithic there. For the fieldwork, Denisova Cave was chosen as its principal target since its deep stratigraphy could provide a principal reference for the region. During the process, a number of Mousterian and Upper Palaeolithic layers were revealed at various cave- and open-air localities. Such a site as Kara-Bom provides important clues to study the problem of the transition from Middle to Upper Palaeolithic and the nature of the earliest stages of the Upper Palaeolithic, dated here ca. 43.000 to 42.000 BP.

The institute also paid great attention to the Far East and other remote areas. The prehistory of the Pacific coastal region has been investigated by Vasil'evsky, and his teams also investigated a number of Palaeolithic localities in Primor'e (the Maritime Territory) and the Sakhalin Island. Now the campaign in southern Primor'e is conducted in collaboration with local scholars.

Beyond Russian territory, several important campaigns cover Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia), thus enlarging the field of study in southern and southwestern directions. A number of archaeological occurrences were recorded from the joint Russo-Mongolian (now American-Russo-Mongolian) expedition from various localities in Mongolia. A number of well-stratified sites were located, including cave localities.

The center for Eastern Siberian Palaeolithic research is now Irkutsk State University. The main efforts are concentrated on a new campaign of excavation at Mal'ta, this world-famous site which for a long time was considered a 'classical' example of a long-

term habitation site. New data revealed that we are dealing with an extremely complicated multicomponent site with a series of superimposed habitation horizons (Sitlivyi / Medvedev / Lipnina 1997).

Farther to east, at the Trans-Baikal, the main center of prehistoric research is located at Chita. In this region, Kirillov conducted excavations of deeply stratified sites known as the 'Sokhatino Cluster' within the Chita city limit. The most spectacular discovery was Palaeolithic soft stone lamps and vessels. Another crew, headed by Konstantinov, is engaged in large horizontal excavations of the Upper Palaeolithic sites along the Chikoi and Khilok River valleys. This work has resulted in the discovery of a large series of slab-lined domestic structures.

For a long time, the frozen grounds of Northeast Siberia remained scarcely investigated except for a few isolated incidents. This area is of crucial importance for the question of the peopling of the New World. However, since the 1960s the Prilenskaia expedition under the direction of Mochanov has been conducted and has resulted in many new and interesting finds (West 1996). Among them is the discovery and investigation of Diring in the Lena basin, which is believed by excavators to be one of the earliest early man sites on Earth. Even if we admit the thermoluminiscence dates ca. 300,000 BP, recently obtained by Waters, this site could give us clues for the very early human penetration in Northeastern Asia.

Research into the Pleistocene in Russia has always been hampered by difficulties in obtaining information. Despite the useful but outdated reviews on Russian Palaeolithic (Boriskovsky 1984), a large amount of data have yet to be evaluated. Moreover, in many cases raw data are only partially published and find their way into widely scattered literature some of which are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain even for Russian archaeologists. With this in mind, a publication of the roster of radiocarbon dates for the Palaeolithic occurrences in Russia (Sinitsyn / Praslov 1997) is notable.

What to do with all these stones? Research traditions vs. new tendencies

Many of the problems that Russian Palaeolithic researchers are facing are common around the world. Still, Russia's troubled socio-political history has made the situation worse. Such problems as insufficient financial support for fieldwork and laboratory study, the lack of personnel and scarcity of space for storage of collections are familiar to any archaeologist. But the lack of a well-established system for site protection and conservation seems to be a bigger problem in Russia in spite of the recent establishment of specialized centers for cultural heritage preservation in most main regions. Archaeological sites have been destroyed en masse by the gigantic scale of earthwork and construction. We may be allowed to console ourselves by saying that every cloud has a silver lining – that is, construction of large dams on great Siberian rivers, for instance, have resulted in identification of deeply-hidden Palaeolithic horizons that were previously inaccessible. As a result of the construction, quaternary beds were exposed.

Maybe we will hear news of the discovery of older and deeper sites as the construction continues. Still, the scale of destruction is as awe-inspiring as the vastness of the territory.

Now let us turn to the methodological problems in contemporary early man studies in Russia.

It is worthwhile to mention the achievements in the study of site formation processes, the natural transformation of the archaeological record. Considerable advances have been made by scholars from Irkutsk (Siberia). A surge of interest to this topic was influenced by a series of discoveries of Early Upper Palaeolithic, Middle and even Lower Palaeolithic sites located along the Angara and Lena Rivers, all of which are redeposited in different degrees (Medvedev / Savel'ev / Svinin 1990). Medvedev and Nesmeianov (1988) put forward a classificatory scheme for the identification of types of culture-bearing sediments, distinguishing between 'primary buried', 'reburied' (redeposited on the same geomorphological level), and 'redeposited' (transmitted to other geomoprphological levels) sites. Consequently, the horizons of 'residual artifact concentration' and 'secondary concentration' were discerned. Taking several Mousterian sites in Central Asia as a starting point, they demonstrated that in several cases these 'secondary' horizons were considered cultural layers.

Following this line of research, Leonova and Nesmeianov (1991) elaborated the classification of culture-bearing strata, identifying different periods of deposition and destruction of archaeological record during the habitation and after the abandonment of a site. Taking the Upper Palaeolithic site of Kamennaia Balka (Southern Russia) as an example, they demonstrated the possibilities to identify different habitation horizons within a single thick culture-bearing stratum. These units are characterized by different structures and they seem to reflect discrete occupation episodes.

The geoarchaeological observations of Sinitsyn (1990) on the processes of formation of pseudo-multicomponent sites at Kostenki as a result of the slope depositional episodes are of great interest. Generally speaking, the study of different types of disturbances of a cultural matrix is of prime importance for Russia, where a lot of Pleistocene sites are heavily destroyed by cryoturbation. The emphasis on the study of dwelling structures dominated in Russia during several decades. Occasionally it led to the identification of these huge cryoturbations as domestic units (Velichko / Grekhova / Gubonina 1977).

Contrary to a widespread belief, there are only few methodological innovations in the subsistence and settlement studies. Contributions devoted to the ecological settings of habitations, site catchment analysis and archaeozoology are rare in Russia. Some achievements in geoarchaeological studies involving culture-bearing strata, refitting studies and the spatial analysis of living floors (Leonova / Nesmeianov 1993) are significant. It seems that this line of inquiry is the weakest point in contemporary Russian Palaeolithic archaeology and there is much work to be done.

In the lithic analysis the traditional static view is gradually being substituted by more dynamic models oriented toward the study of the technology of stone knapping and tool manufacture, as well as reduction sequences (Giria 1997). Recent years have seen a growing tendency toward more behavioral models explaining the variability in artifact assemblages. The latter should take into account the role of factors such as raw material availability, technological processes in work, functional variability, etc. (Beliaeva 1994). In Russian archaeology, the relevance of such factors for an assessment

is acknowledged on a speculative level, but in reality a majority of researchers tend to regard their data set as complete. Similarities and differences therefore fully reflect 'cultural differences'.

Thus the prehistoric past of Russia is still interpreted within a framework of an outdated culture-historical approach. And its validity is increasingly being questioned. With more detailed study, more variability in assemblage compositions are recognized, not only at the inter-site level but also at the intra-site level. Obviously, such studies will reveal the real complexities of the data, which cannot be explained by the current models.

Between East and West

The last decade has witnessed a remarkable upsurge in international co-operation and information exchange. Apart from more frequent study trips, publications and conferences, there are a number of important on-going joint projects. Norwegian colleagues interested in the study of human dispersal in High Latitudes participated in fieldwork at the northeastern portion of European Russia. American archaeologists are taking part in field crews at the Russian Plain and Caucasus. Several scholars from the USA, Canada, Japan and South Korea are participating at the Altai project, while Belgian archaeologists and palaeogeographers are participating in fieldwork at Yenisei, Mal'ta and in the Trans-Baikal. Japanese and Korean scholars are paying much attention to the prehistory of adjacent areas of the Russian Far East. The process of interaction between national archaeological schools intrinsic to the modern epoch could well stimulate progress in Palaeolithic studies in Asia, matching recent methodological advances pioneered at the West with the rich Russian prehistoric record.

In spite of the diversity of approaches and gradual convergence with Western archaeology, a lot of differences yet exist. First and foremost, it is safe to say that Russian prehistory is more oriented toward artifact-studies than man-land relationship. However this bias does not result in the construction of standard typologies comparable with the European schemes nor to the putting in proper order the Russian glossary of terms relevant to lithics classification. If our colleagues who adhere to the anthropological school of thought are inclined toward a problem-oriented research shaped by the methodology of natural sciences, Russian prehistorians gravitate toward humanities. The site or region to be explored is regarded as main target for descriptive research. These are considered unique sources for the reconstruction of regional culture history, not as a laboratory for hypotheses testing. Hence, an absolute majority of literary sources in Russia are site reports and regional surveys while there are no more than a handful of problem-oriented monographs.

Conclusions

In its more than 100-year-old history, Russian prehistory studies have faced a complicated development. Originating in the late 19th century within the framework of the evolutionary concept, it reached maturity in the 1920s and even pioneered some interesting and provocative lines of inquiry. Crucial events of the early 1930s led to the radical shift of research interests to the problems of the study of Palaeolithic dwelling structures and habitation sites, functional interpretation of lithics and stadial approach to the generalization of the data at hand. This was strongly challenged in the 1950s by the particularistic local culture concept, which dominated in the 1960s-1980s.

In spite of the appearance of some intriguing lines of inquiry in recent years, Russian prehistorians in general tend to gravitate toward "mainstream" culture-historical archaeology with some reservations and modifications. Meanwhile, the Russian school of prehistory has made significant achievements, especially in wide-scale studies of Palaeolithic cultures. The high-quality data produced by leading academic research centers today can be useful for a wide circles of prehistorians, especially those who tend to see our domain within a broad anthropological framework.

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