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Upper Paleolithic–
Paleo-Indian Adaptations

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From Kostenki to Clovis

Upper Paleolithic– Paleo-Indian Adaptations

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Foreword

From the American Side

I went to the USSR for the first time in 1982 to attend the 11th meeting of the International Union for Quaternary research (INQUA) held at the Moscow State University. At that time relations between our two countries were anything but congenial and many restrictions were placed on our viewing the archaeological and paleontological collections and laboratory facilities. This was not the ideal climate for the free exchange of ideas needed for meaningful research. However, it was obvious to us that the strained relations did not extend to scientific discussions between scholars. We left that meeting well aware that if the problems of prehistoric Old World–New World relationships were to be resolved, it would eventually require cooperative research efforts within the world community of archaeologists.

At that time, the pre-Clovis problem in New World archaeology was foremost in the minds of many North American researchers: tool technology and assemblages were being studied as a possible means of establishing cultural relationships across the Bering Strait, Clovis sites and mammoth kills were being looked at with new ideas for interpretation, and New World researchers realized that to resolve these questions they had to become familiar with the archaeological record of northeast Asia.

A chance meeting of the writer with Olga Soffer in 1983 led to serious discussions of the sites on the Russian or East European Plain. At about the same time, the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) decided to intensify efforts to appear less provincial by encouraging more Old World attendance at its annual meetings. Since 1985 was the 50th anniversary of the SAA, invitations were sent to all foreign countries and a number of symposia organized on the subject of Old World records, including one on Pleistocene hunter–gatherers.

By this time there also developed a more favorable climate for research exchanges between the United States and the USSR, and we submitted a proposal to the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) for an exchange between Soviet and American archaeologists focusing on Upper Paleolithic–Paleo-Indian adaptations. The first stage was to be a visit to the USSR by ten American archaeologists with strong interests and long experience in the North American Paleo-Indian studies. I was surprised and pleased that the proposal was favorably received, and Olga Soffer and I went to Moscow and Leningrad

in September 1988 to finalize arrangements for the following summer. Our 1988 reception in the USSR was very different from that in 1982, and, along with making arrangements for the 1989 visit, we were able to look at a number of significant archaeological and zoological collections housed both in Moscow and Leningrad.

The 1989 visit can only be described as an unqualified success. The symposium went well, but the Upper Paleolithic site visits were outstanding. Moments never to be forgotten include the first view of the mammoth bone structures at the sites of Kostenki and Iudinovo, the bison bone bed at Amvrosievka, and the reindeer site of Kosoutsy. The final treat was to view the original artifacts from the Sungir burials that were in a repository in the city of Vladimir. In addition, we were able to view, photograph, and even handle a number of outstanding Upper Paleolithic site collections in various museums in a number of different cities.

The American contingent, along with one British archaeologist, concluded the visit with the feeling that we had seen the best of Upper Paleolithic archaeology in the USSR. We departed a little more humble than when we arrived, realizing that the Soviet archaeologists were doing outstanding work. We could immediately perceive the need for further exchanges and especially cooperative efforts in the field, in laboratory analysis, and in interpretation in order to extract the greatest possible information from the archaeological data base of both the United States and the USSR.

This process, as evidenced by this volume, has now begun, and all that remains is to hope sincerely that it will continuously grow through time.

GEORGE FRISON

Foreword

From the Russian Side

The history of humanity shows that ancient cultures were especially successful when they were interacting with different traditions and when such contacts were used creatively for the benefit of both. Thus, there is all the reason for scholars studying ancient cultures to continue this fine tradition—something which, alas, is not always feasible in our troubled world.

We at the Institute of the History of Material Culture (IIMK), Russian Academy of Sciences, have always tried to develop collaboration both inside our country and with foreign scholars. Scholarship vitally needs exchange of information, exchange of scholars, and exchange of ideas. Although it is quite true that new ideas arise infrequently, it is equally true that new aspects of extant ideas are also capable of yielding productive results. Such multiple perspectives allow all of us to overcome various barriers, both political and psychological.

Soviet–American collaboration in archaeology began in 1979, when a group of Soviet archaeologists visited the United States with a proposal for joint research project on the ancient civilizations of the Near East. The first Soviet–American archaeological symposium on this theme was held in 1981 at Harvard University. The second took place in Samarkand in 1983. During the third symposium on the same subject, held in 1986 at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., some Soviet and American archaeologists decided to expand the topic of joint research to include problems of Late Pleistocene adaptations, specifically, the Upper Paleolithic of Eastern Europe and the Paleo-Indian of the New World. Since both regions were then occupied by hunter–gatherers, who exploited analogous megafauna, we felt that such a comparative look could reveal valuable cross-cultural patterning useful for theory building. This decision was followed by concerted bilateral efforts at overcoming a series of prerequisite bureaucratic hurdles—a process made infinitely easier by the efforts of Robert McC Adams—and the first fruits of this effort are before you.

During our joint meeting on Upper Paleolithic–Paleo-Indian adaptations in Lenin-grad in 1989, Soviet scholars learned firsthand research results achieved by their North American colleagues, while we, in turn, showed our North Americans visitors seminal East

European Paleolithic sites. All of this went hand in hand with personal contacts and informal meetings, both crucial for true collaboration.

Even at this early stage of collaboration, we can note two tendencies. The first is that the study of extensive collections permits us to move from global and superglobal conclusions to concrete analyses. Second, we are confronted with significant variability in past cultures. Here we witness adaptations in their concrete diversities, both cultural and economic. Instead of a generalized monochromatic picture of ancient megafauna hunters, American scholars are emphasizing the diversity of procurement strategies employed by different groups. The same diversity is observed in Russia, where, for example, edgewear studies on materials from different sites and cultures call for the same conclusions. It is this kind of approach to both the general and the specific in their dialectic unity that must characterize our research today. This, clearly, is one of the directions for collaborative research to take.

I offer our thanks both to the unsinkable energies of colleagues responsible for organizing the symposium and to those who painstakingly prepared the excavations at Upper Paleolithic sites for on-site visits during the symposium.

Finally, I extend my sincere hope that collaborative research by scholars interested in Late Pleistocene adaptations, such as ancestral collective hunts on megafauna, will yield real and significant results.

VADIM MIKHAILOVICH MASSON

Acknowledgments

Putting together a volume such as this one, consisting of papers presented at an international symposium, clearly reflects the efforts of a great number of individuals and institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. First and foremost, we wish to acknowledge our debt to our co-organizers of the symposium on Upper Paleolithic–Paleo-Indian Adaptations: Vadim Mikhailovich Masson and George Frison. The symposium itself was a project of the ACLS–AN SSSR Bilateral Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences, subcommission on history and archaeology. We thank them and their executive agency IREX for their encouragement and support. We are especially indebted to Robert McC Adams for coming to this project's rescue at the eleventh hour when only a Central Asia folk tale and his willingness to believe it could save it. We owe a great deal to Sergei Astakhov and William James for their help with the symposium. We thank Dena Dincauze for providing us with the volume's title, Innui Choi for her editorial assistance, and Helen Sullivan of the University of Illinois Slavic Library for invaluable help with references and bibliographies. We wish to thank our tireless and everpatient editor, Eliot Werner, for cheerfully putting up with all the hassles that this bicontinental endeavor entailed. And finally, we send our thanks to the “Bryansk nightingales” for their unforgettable efforts!

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