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TRANSITIONAL MIDDLE TO UPPER PALEOLITHIC INDUSTRIES IN THE RUBAS VALLEY, COASTAL DAGESTAN*

The stratigraphy of the Rubas-1 Paleolithic site in coastal Dagestan is described, and the results of a detailed technical and typological analysis of lithics from the upper horizons, excavated from five test pits in 2006–2007, are outlined. The resource base is assessed. The results suggest that the assemblage dates to the period transitional between the Middle and the Upper Paleolithic. Industries of the Dagestan coast are compared with those of the Caucasus and the Russian Plain.

Keywords: *Caucasus, Dagestan, Middle Paleolithic, Initial Upper Paleolithic, primary reduction, stone tools, Levallois.*

Introduction

One of the major trends in the study of the Paleolithic Age is identification of specific features of the transition from Middle to Upper Paleolithic industries, associated with the cultural development of anatomically modern humans in Eurasia. Archaeological sites dating as far back as the late Middle-initial Upper Paleolithic are well-studied in Europe, the Levant, Central Asia, and other regions. In the Caucasus, which represents a kind of bridge between the European and Asian parts of the continent, little is known about the sites of this period; therefore the attention of researchers is mainly focused on issues relating to the initial peopling of this area, and to the local development of the Acheulean and Middle Paleolithic industries. The majority of archaeological sites dating to the late Middle-initial Upper Paleolithic

are located in the Southern Caucasus and along the Black Sea coast (Lyubin, 1989; Golovanova, Doronichev, 2003; Lyubin, Belyaeva, 2006; Pinhasi et al., 2012). As to northeastern Caucasus, only a few surface lithic assemblages were reported in Dagestan; these showed technical and typological characteristics typical of the Middle and Upper Paleolithic complexes (Kotovich, 1964). In the last decade, over 30 Paleolithic sites have been discovered in the basins of the Darvagchai and Rubas rivers, including some deeply stratified archaeological sites. Lithic industries from these localities represent all major milestones of the ancient Stone Age, providing a comprehensive picture of the development of early cultures in coastal Dagestan (Derevianko et al., 2012). Evidence recovered from the sites of Tinit-1 and Rubas-1 (upper assemblage) in the Rubas valley is characteristic of a watershed period between the Middle and Upper Paleolithic in this part of the Caucasus. This paper focuses on an analysis of the lithic industry from the latter site.

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Rubas-1 (upper assemblage)

Rubas-1 is situated on the right bank of the Rubas River, 3 km upstream from the village of Chulat (Tabasaransky District, the Republic of Dagestan, Russia). The site is localized in the body of a large block-type landslide, which currently appears as an extensive terrace-like bench with a smooth table-like surface and steep slopes. The top edge of the bench is located at a height of about 25–30 m above the bank line and 270 m above sea level.

The site yielded a composite section of Quaternary deposits up to 18 m thick. It revealed six basic lithological bodies containing three archaeological assemblages (Fig. 1) (Ibid.). The latest assemblage of Paleolithic finds (1303 spec.) was examined in 2006–2007 as a series of five test pits with a total area of 20 sq. m, covering the plot of about 1000 sq. m (Derevianko et al., 2007). A stratigraphic section of test pit 1 (12 sq. m) provides the most comprehensive data on lithology of the studied area.

Strata of loose sediments with the thickness of up to 6 m were exposed in the test pit 1. These strata revealed ten basic lithological layers, which can be integrated into three sets (Fig. 2, 3) (Derevianko et al., 2012).

Layer 1. Gray-brown sandy loam with inclusions of small-size rock debris and pebble, a modern day soil horizon. Thickness 0.1–0.2 m.

Layers 2–9. The thick strata of complex genesis, consisting mainly of light gray-brown loam with siltstone. The unit containing sub-aerial deposits includes horizons

of colluvial, proluvial, and deluvial origin, which appeared in the form of gravel-gruss, pebble-cobble material with light-brown sandy fill. In places, the strata were found to be broken by gravitational fractures. Thickness up to 4.0 m. A total of seven levels containing archaeological finds of Paleolithic appearance was recognized within the layers.

Layer 10. A thin layer of sand, containing interbeds and lenses of light-gray siltstone, with underlying gravel and pebble deposits of alluvial origin. Exposed thickness exceeds 1.0 m.

In general, the stratigraphic situation in other test pits appears to be similar to that recorded in test pit 1. The difference can be found in the exposed thickness of deposits and, accordingly, in the number and individual thicknesses of lithological bodies constituting a set of layers 2–9. In addition, at the top of the sections (the bottom of layer 2), test pits 3–5 revealed an interbed of gray-brown loam, which is likely to be a buried soil horizon. Both a stratigraphic sequence of geological bodies in test pits and their lithological characteristics suggest that they can be quite confidently correlated with each other, making it possible to compare the archaeological evidence associated with them.

The time-frame of the assemblages at issue is defined on the basis of geological data indicating that the culture-bearing deposits (layers 2–9) were formed during the Late Neopleistocene. In addition, it is very likely that paleosol, which was recorded at the top sections of the

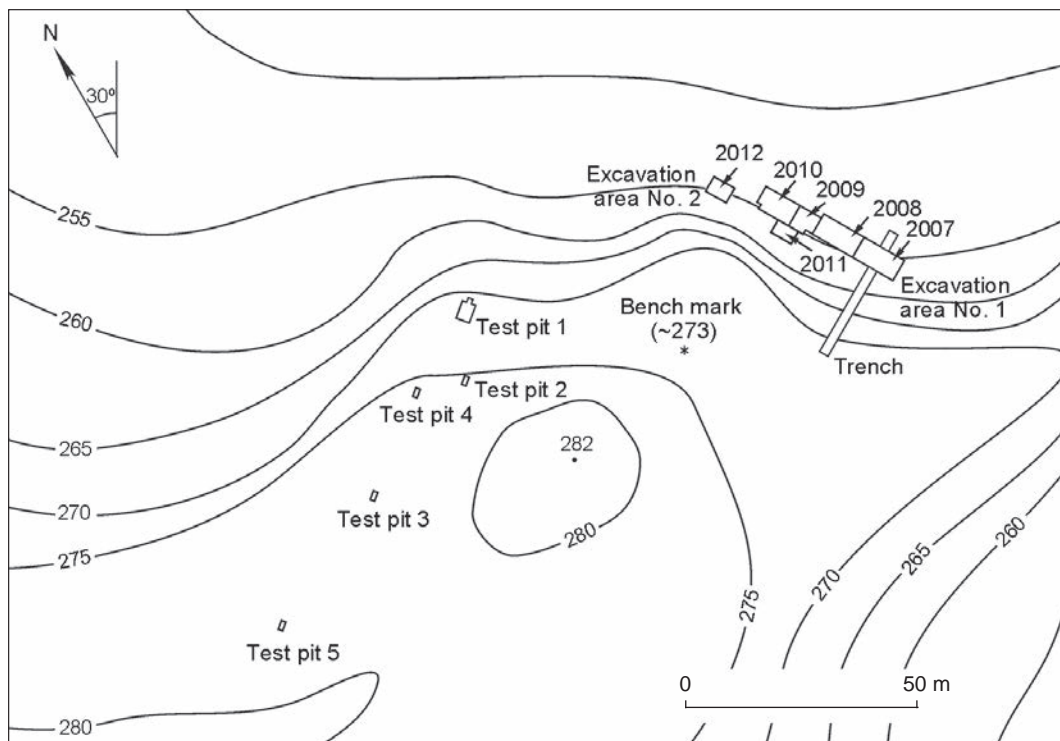


Fig. 1. Layout of the Rubas-1 site.

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