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E-mail: Eurasia@archaeology.nsc.ru

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A.V. Shalagina, A.I. Krivoshapkin, and K.A. Kolobova
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences, Pr. Akademika Lavrentieva 17, Novosibirsk, 630090, Russia
E-mail: aliona.shalagina@yandex.ru; shapkin@archaeology.nsc.ru; kolobovak@yandex.ru

TRUNCATED-FACETED PIECES IN THE PALEOLITHIC OF NORTHERN ASIA*

Truncated-faceted pieces have been reported from many Paleolithic industries of Eurasia and Africa. In the latest decade, this category of artifacts has also been identified as belonging to the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transitional and Early Upper Paleolithic industries of Northern Asia. The largest collection of such pieces in this region is associated with the Obi-Rakhmatian, primarily of the Paleolithic industry of the Obi-Rakhmat Grotto, Uzbekistan. A detailed analysis of Obi-Rakhmatian truncated-faceted pieces shows that despite unified morphometric characteristics, they could differ in function. A comparison of these pieces with similar artifacts from nearby areas reveals their importance as a cultural and chronological marker of the terminal Middle Paleolithic and early Upper Paleolithic industries in Northern Asia.

Keywords: *Terminal Middle Paleolithic, early Upper Paleolithic, Northern Asia, truncated-faceted pieces.*

Introduction

The issues of establishing reliable criteria for recognition of possible links between the compared assemblages are accompanied by other important issues in the study of evolutionary processes, migrations, and population interactions during the Paleolithic. Several approaches to establishing these criteria have been proposed in scientific literature (Vishnyatsky, 2004: 42; Anikovich, Anisyutkin, Vishnyatsky, 2007: 22–25; Derevianko, 2009: 6–8). One of the main approaches is the establishment of "index fossils" or "tool-markers" within the technocomplex (Rybin, 2000, 2014). Various tool-types (including specific carinated burins and end-scrapers, points with thinned bases, and others) can serve as tool-markers (Burins préhistoriques…, 2006: 23–35; Le Brun-Ricalens, 2006; Dinnis, 2008; Rybin, 2014). Truncated-faceted pieces are also included in the list of "tool-markers". These tools have been reported from various regions, including Northern Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, the Near East, the Caucasus, and the Russian Plain (Leakey, 1931: 99–100, 202, 216; McPherron, Dibble, 2000; Otte, 1980; Nishiaki, 1985; Lyubin, Dzhafarov, 1986; Nekhoroshev, 1999); and also in Northern Asia (Krivoshapkin, 2012; Rybin, Kolobova, 2005–2009). Such tools are quite typical of many Paleolithic industries, yet they lack clear typological definition, and often implements with different morphometric features are grouped into a single category.

The present paper is focused on comprehensive analysis of truncated-faceted pieces from the Obi-Rakhmatian technocomplexes. These assemblages

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contain numerous tools of this type, demonstrating standard metric features and typology, which allows us to regard them as chronological and cultural markers of the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transitional industries in Northern Asia.

Historiographical context

L. Leakey was the first to mention the tools with morphological features similar to those of the truncated-faceted pieces in his description of the Kenya Capsian Upper Paleolithic culture. Analyzing the artifacts from Gamble's Cave II, he identified a set of tools on blades with roughly prepared working edges that were perpendicular to the long axes of the spalls. On the basis of their presumed function, Leakey identified these tools as "sinew frayers", as he noticed that in some modern Kenyan tribes people processed animal sinews with similar tools, decomposing the sinews into fibers (Leakey, 1931: 99–100, 160–163). Later, M. Newcomer and F. Hivernel-Guerre analyzed this collection and identified the artifacts under discussion as cores, on the basis of the observed technological context. Small spalls from such cores could have been used for the manufacture of geometric microliths (Newcomer, Hivernel-Guerre, 1974).

The term "truncated-faceted pieces" was proposed in the course of study of Levantine Mousterian. B. Schroeder (1966) was the first to identify and describe these artifacts from the site of Jerf-Ajla in Syria. Later, they were also reported from other Mousterian sites in the region (Solecki R.S., Solecki R.A., 1970; Nishiaki, 1985; Crew, 1975). Rose and Ralph Solecki identified the truncated-faceted technique on the basis of artifact assemblage from the Nahr Ibrahim Cave Site, Lebanon (Fig. 1, *1*, *2*); this technique could be used for various purposes (creation of specific edge-form, preparation of hafts). In some cases, such pieces served as cores. According to this approach, researchers recognized six types of truncated-faceted pieces (Solecki R.S., Solecki R.A., 1970). Several possible interpretations of such artifacts (thinning technique for fastening in a haft, specific core-types) were proposed by Yoshihiro Nishiaki on the example of the artifact-collection from Keoue Cave, Lebanon. However, he precluded the possibility of using the truncated-faceted technology for the purpose of forming a serrated working edge (Nishiaki, 1985).

H. Dibble and S. McPherron examined collections of artifacts from the sites of Bisitun in Iran (Fig. 1, *3*, *4*),

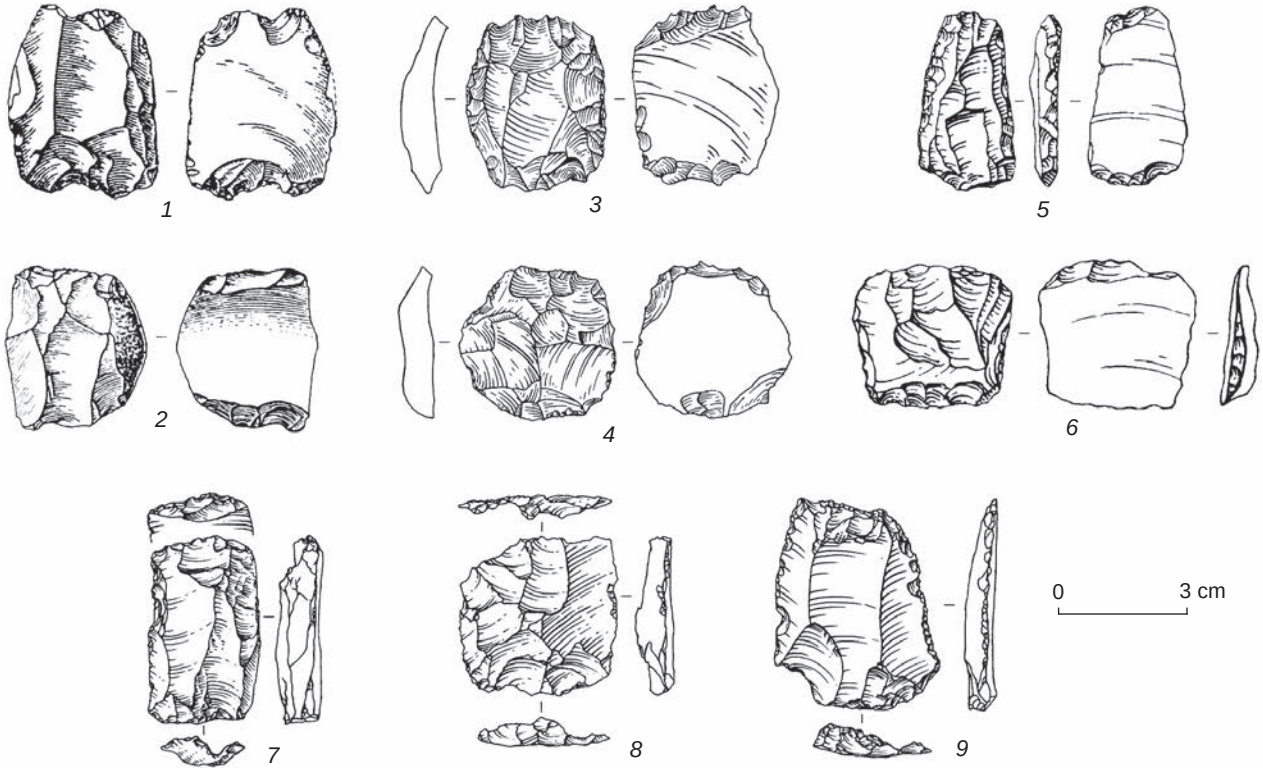

Fig. 1. Truncated-faceted pieces.
1, *2* – Nahr Ibrahim, Lebanon (after (Solecki R.S., Solecki R.A., 1970: 141, fig. 1)); *3*, *4* – Bisitun, Zagros (after (Dibble, 1984: 28, fig. 3)); *5*, *6* – Taghlar, Caucasus (after (Lyubin, Dzhafarov, 1986: 76, fig. 1)); *7–9* – Obi-Rakhmat, Uzbekistan.