



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Quaternary International

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/quaint

Palaeolithic Caucasus: Paleoanthropological Panorama

Sergey Vasilyev^{a,*}, Hizri Amir Khanov^b^a Institute of Ethnology Russian Academy of Sciences, 32a Leninsky Prospect, Moscow, 119991, Russian Federation^b Institute of Archaeology Russian Academy of Sciences, 19 Dmitry Ulyanov Str, 117036, Russian Federation

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 March 2017

Received in revised form

15 September 2017

Accepted 20 September 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Caucasus

Palaeolithic

Paleoanthropology

Evolution

Genus Homo

ABSTRACT

The article gives an analytical overview of paleoanthropological finds from Palaeolithic Caucasus. Archaeological studies show that in the Early Pleistocene, the region was extensively inhabited. The path of the first settlers ran along the Western Caspian and possibly the Eastern Black Sea regions. This way was probably a transit on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a natural refuge where natural resources allowed people to exist for a relatively long time. Further evolutionary process, according to the paleoanthropological remains, was associated with Western Asia, as well as with Western Europe. However, the emergence of *Homo sapiens* in the Caucasus was most likely due to the migration of sapiens forms from the African continent around 100 thousand years ago.

© 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

The Caucasus is one of the richest regions of the world in respect to the monuments of the Palaeolithic Era. This can be explained by its geographical position on the border between West Asia and South-Eastern Europe, the diversity of the natural environment, the richness of its mineral, animal, plant and water resources. Greater Caucasus mountain range is the basis of the territory. Greater Caucasus range extends diagonally in the direction of NW - SE from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea. Its length is about 1100 km; the maximum width is approximately 180 km. The highest peaks of the Caucasus exceed 5000 m. To the south of this mighty mountain range, Transcaucasian depression and Transcaucasian Highland are located. To the north of it, piedmont plains extend, turning into the steppe zone of South-East Europe.

On the territory in question, the monuments of all sections of the Early Stone Age are represented: Oldowan, Acheulian, the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic (Fig. 1). It is extremely important that each of these sections of Palaeolithic of the Caucasus is characterized by the presence of paleoanthropological finds. Regions of this kind are known to be unique on the Palaeolithic world map. Thus, a through comparative review of paleoanthropological

materials of different age originating from a single, geographically independent region is of special importance for understanding of global and regional history of the genus *Homo*.

2. Main stadial and cultural-chronological characteristics of Palaeolithic Caucasus

The most ancient archaeological finds in the Caucasus are located in the five layers of the lower part of the Muhkai 2 site in Central Dagestan, at a depth of 53–73 m from the surface. The age of the discovered archaeological material corresponds to the chronological range of 2.4–1.95 Ma. This is confirmed by a combination of paleontological and paleomagnetic data related to the section (Amir Khanov et al., 2014, 2016; Chepalyga et al., 2012; Derevyanko et al., 2012). The argument for the establishment of the upper age limit was the discovery of bone remnants of voles of the genus *Mimomys* in layer 80 of Muhkai 2 site, which, in turn, lies in a sequence of sediments below Olduvai paleomagnetic episode. The lower bound of dating is based on the results of paleomagnetic studies, which show that it does not go deeper than the border of Gauss-Matuyama epochs.

The materials in question characterize one of the paths of the initial settlement of Eurasia by man. This path ran along the western coast of the Caspian Sea. The beginning of progressive cultural development and the regional historical process on a large part of the Eastern European Plains was, in general, associated with the penetration of the first human communities through the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: vasbor1@yandex.ru (S. Vasilyev), amir Khanov@rambler.ru (H. Amir Khanov).

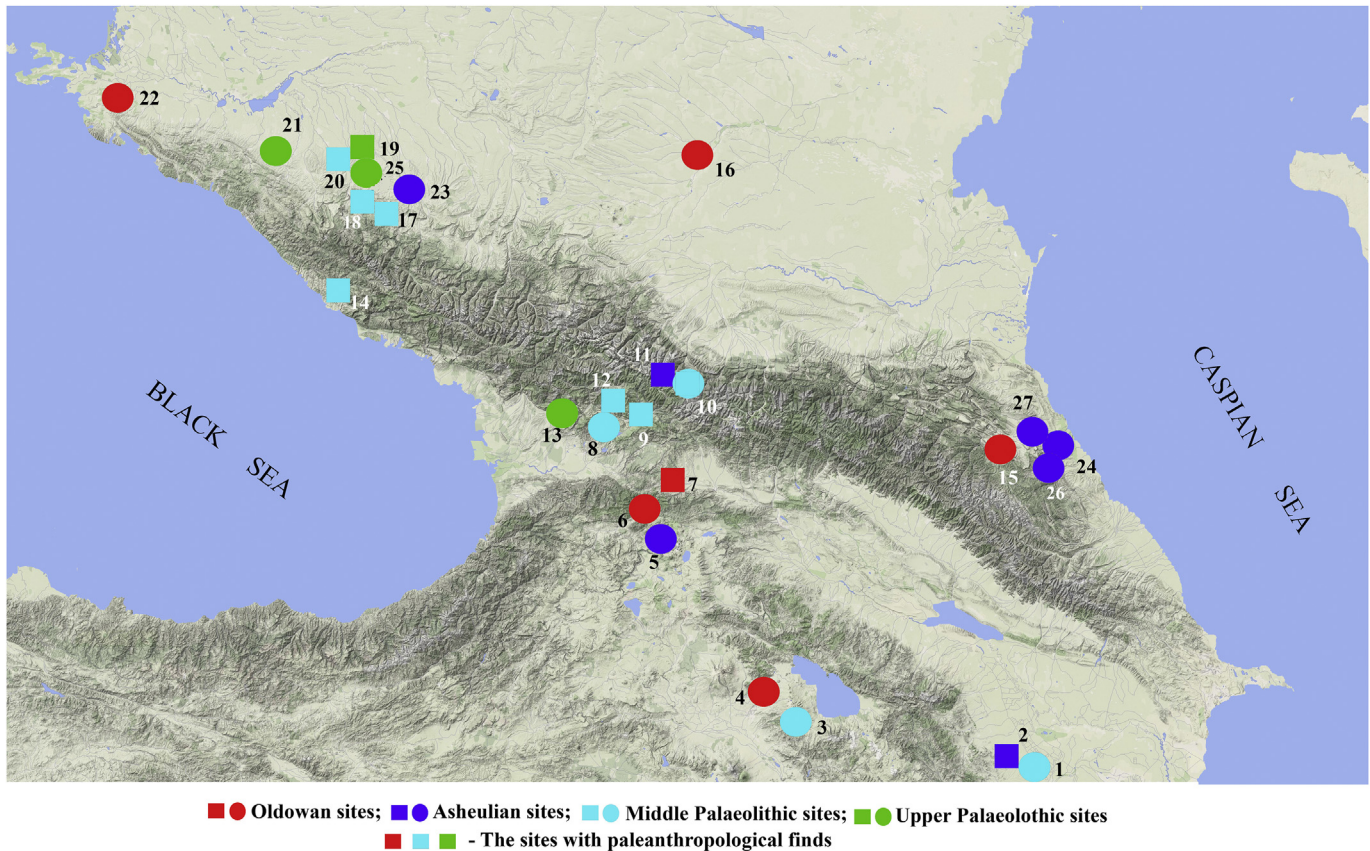


Fig. 1. The main sites of the Palaeolithic of Caucasus. 1 – Azykh; 2 – Taglar; 3 – Yerevan cave; 4 – Nurnus; 5 – Muradovo; 6 – Lori group of sites (Dashtadem, Kurtan, etc.); 7 – Dmanisi; 8 – Ortvala; 9 – Dzhurchula; 10 – Kudaro 3; 11 – Kudaro 1; 12 – Sakazhia; 13 – the group of the Upper Palaeolithic sites of Imereti (Georgia) (Dzudzuana; Samertskhlekhe, Sakazhia etc.); 14 – Akhchtyr; 15 – the group of the Oldowan sites of Central Dagestan (Ainikab 1; Muhkai 1, Muhkai 2 etc.); 16 – Zhukovskiy career; 17 – Matuzka; 18 – Mezmaiskaya; 19 – Satanai Rockshelter; 20 – Barakaevskaya; 21 – Kamennomostskaya; 22 – the group of the Oldowan sites in the South of Azov Sea region (Bogatyri; Rodniki; Kermek); 23 – Treugolnaya cave; 24 – Darvagchai 1; 25 – Gubskiy 1 Rockshelter; 26 – Dyubekchai; 27 – Chumus Inits; 28 – Bondi Cave.

Caspian corridor. The West Caspian path of the initial settlement was both a transit direction when moving towards Eastern Europe and Northwestern Asia, and a natural refuge providing people with necessary resources for a very long time in case of need. North-East Caucasus and, in particular, Inner Dagestan, became a cultural reservoir of Oldowan epoch, where the ancient culture found the necessary conditions for a very long existence in its traditional form.

2.1. Oldowan of the Caucasus

It follows from the above-noted that the initial epoch of Palaeolithic – Oldowan is fully represented in the Caucasus. The geography of its sites is very extensive. It includes the modern territory of Armenia (Nurnus paleolake site, Kurtan, etc.), Georgia (Dmanisi site) in the South Caucasus, as well as the southern regions of Russia in the North Caucasus: Dagestan (Ainikab 1, Muhkai 1, Muhkai 2 sites), Stavropol Upland (Zhukovskiy career) and South East Azov Sea coastal region – Priazovje (Bogatyri, Rodniki, Kermek sites).

Oldowan of the Caucasus has a technocomplex (Fig. 2), which fundamentally distinguishes it from the subsequent Acheulean epoch relics. The main technical and typological indicators of Oldowan of the Caucasus generally coincide with those in the industry of classic East African Oldowan. The lower bound of the time-frame of the epoch under discussion dates back to before 2 million years ago; the top bound is approximately 0.8 million years ago.

Within the epoch the evolution of stone inventory is observed. The main indicator of the evolution is the beginning of use of large flakes for making chopping and crushing tools (pikes, choppers) along with the usual blanks (cobbles, nodules, fragments) at the end of the Early Pleistocene, as well as the appearance about 1 million years ago of bifacial processing elements and its derivatives – sporadic proto-bifaces.

2.2. Acheulian

On the territory of the Caucasus, several dozen Acheulian monuments were discovered and investigated. Among them there are multilayer cave sites, stratified open air sites, locations with deposits of archaeological material on present-day surface and points with single finds. The monuments belong to very different geomorphological levels – from the piedmont plains to the highlands area.

The emergence of industries with bifaces (Fig. 3) has always been the archaeological criterion for determining the Acheulian. In regards to the moment from which the beginning of the Acheulian epoch should be dated in the Caucasus, currently, there are two points of view. According to the first one, this milestone should be attributed to the border of the Pliocene-Pleistocene (Presnyakov et al., 2012). As proof, the presence of expressive biface in one of the layers of Karahach site (Armenia) with U-Pb dating of about 1.9 million years ago is indicated (Belyaeva and Lyubin, 2014). Some researchers have expressed objections concerning this date. Firstly,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7450833>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7450833>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)