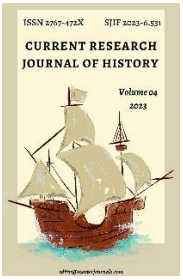
CURRENT RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HISTORY
(ISSN –2767-472X)
VOLUME 05 ISSUE 06 Pages: 13-17
SJIF IMPACT FACTOR (2022: 5. 728) (2023: 6. 531) (2024: 7.848)
OCLC – 1243560778
Publisher: Master Journals



Journal Website: https://masterjournals.com/index.php/crjh

Research Article

NEW FINDINGS ON THE STUDIES OF THE OLD STONE AGE IN UZBEKISTAN

Submission Date: June 20, 2024, **Accepted Date:** June 25, 2024,
Published Date: June 30, 2024
Crossref doi: https://doi.org/10.37547/history-crjh-05-06-03

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ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the results of the study of the Stone Age in Uzbekistan during the years of independence. The article analyzes the results of local and international archaeological expeditions.

KEYWORDS

Paleolithic, Selungur cave, Obirahmat cave, Asian Acheulian culture, Kulbulak, Teshiktash, transition from the Middle to the Upper Paleolithic.

INTRODUCTION

During the ancient Stone Age, the Central Asian region played a crucial role in migration processes in various directions due to its favorable geographical location and paleoecological conditions.

Regarding the issue of early Paleolithic sites in Central Asia, specialists from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IAE SB RAS) have expressed skepticism about the presence of this period in the region. For instance, they argue that the lower layers of Kölbulak lack any connection with the Brunhes-Matuyama deposits and that the materials from Selungur Cave belong to the Middle Paleolithic. However, when it comes to the Acheulean context of Kölbulak, our Russian colleagues themselves have convincingly described the mixed nature of the cultural deposits at the site.

Therefore, it is natural that Acheulean period materials appear in different excavation layers and depths. The absence of early Paleolithic materials in some excavations does not necessarily imply that Acheulean artifacts are entirely absent from the site. After all,

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sedimentary deposits do not accumulate layer by layer in a perfectly sequential manner. Excavations conducted by M. R. Kosimov revealed Acheulean artifacts among the lower-layer industries, which were observed and confirmed by prominent specialists such as V. A. Ranov, N. K. Anisyutkin, and several others. Unfortunately, during the relocation of the base of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, these materials were lost without a trace.

Regarding the chronological classification of materials from Selungur Cave, it is important to note that in 1988, a major international conference was held at the site to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the discovery of Teshik-Tash Cave. During the conference, many participants acknowledged the presence of Early Paleolithic artifacts among the materials from Selungur. For instance, some hand axes, cleavers, and other stone tools found in Selungur's cultural layers are characteristic of the Asian Acheulean culture of the Early Paleolithic period. This suggests that Selungur Cave serves as a key reference site that reflects both the Early and Middle Paleolithic periods.

Russian researchers have not expressed any opinions regarding other Early Paleolithic sites in Central Asia, such as Boriqozgon, Tandirqozgon, and Qoratov. Nevertheless, the author argues that Early Paleolithic sites were indeed present in the Central Asian region, and the conclusions made by Russian colleagues about the absence of Early Paleolithic remains in the area were hastily drawn and erroneous.

In recent years, archaeological discoveries have further reinforced the significance of Central Asia as one of the key regions in the formation and dispersal of modern humans. This topic has sparked widespread debate and discussion, attracting increasing scholarly interest.

Thanks to the collaboration of scientists from various countries (Uzbekistan, Russia, the USA, Poland, France, and Japan), groundbreaking discoveries have been made. The *Obi-Rakhmat Man* exhibits a hybrid nature, displaying characteristics of both Neanderthals and anatomically modern humans. Many of its parameters are unique among paleoanthropological finds worldwide. The reason behind this admixture and the presence of specific traits remains uncertain, making it difficult to provide a definitive answer. It is possible that this discovery represents an independent representative of the multiregional formation of modern humans, or it serves as evidence of interbreeding between Neanderthals and modern humans.

The uniqueness and significance of the *Obi-Rakhmat Man* discovery for historical science, alongside the importance of studying the associated cultural materials, necessitated the organization of an international conference dedicated to the issues of the Stone Age in Central Asia. This conference was held in Uzbekistan from August 9 to 15, 2004, with financial support from the prestigious *Wenner-Gren* International Scientific Foundation. The event was attended by renowned scholars from more than ten countries, including Uzbekistan, Russia, Tajikistan, the USA, Austria, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Luxembourg, and Japan.

At the end of the 20th century, the resumption of archaeological research at key Paleolithic sites in Central Asia led to the identification of significant technological and cultural innovations within Middle Paleolithic industries. Chronologically, these discoveries suggest that structural changes in ancient human culture in the region began at least 20,000–30,000 years earlier than the emergence of Late Paleolithic cultures in Europe.

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Notably, archaeological complexes dated to approximately 80,000–70,000 years ago revealed systematic application of advanced blade and microblade knapping techniques—technologies previously considered exclusive to Late Paleolithic cultures. This finding not only underscores the presence of progressive innovative solutions within Middle Paleolithic industries but also raises critical questions regarding cultural terminology and classification. Additionally, it reignites debates about the driving forces behind cultural evolution, highlighting the role and impact of technological and cultural innovations in the earliest history of humankind.

Furthermore, in examining the transition from the Middle to the Late Paleolithic and its subsequent development, it becomes crucial not only to determine the origins and timing of specific cultural components but also to understand the mechanisms that facilitated the convergence of acquired cultural potential—various technological and cultural innovations that arose at different times and in different locations. This process ultimately contributed to the formation of a new Late Paleolithic culture and played a key role in defining the comprehensive behavioral complex of anatomically modern humans.

In 2003, hominid remains discovered in Obi-Rakhmat Cave marked the first find of this type in Uzbekistan in the past 65 years. Previously, the Middle Paleolithic burial of a child found in Teshik-Tash Cave had defined the easternmost boundary of Neanderthal distribution. This discovery had led to the assumption that all Mousterian complexes in the region were associated with this specific anthropological type. However, the morphological characteristics of the skeletal remains from Obi-Rakhmat Cave, along with the associated stone industry, challenge this long-standing axiom and call for a reassessment.

The anthropological remains consist of six sequential teeth from the upper jaw and approximately 150 small fragments of the skull. Some of these skeletal remains were found in situ within the stratigraphic layer, while others were identified during the washing process of loose sediments taken from the site. This indicates a strong spatial association among the skeletal elements. Although all these finds come from a relatively small area of the deposit, there is no evidence to suggest they were part of a deliberate burial or influenced by other taphonomic factors.

Chronological analysis of the layer containing the paleoanthropological materials suggests that it is over 40,000 years old. Overall, the analysis of the skull fragments indicates a close affinity with anatomically modern humans. However, discriminant functional analysis of the metric characteristics of the teeth found at the site has identified Neanderthal-like traits. Although this result is statistically reliable, there are no significant size-based differences among Pleistocene hominid groups. The use of tooth size as a taxonomic indicator remains problematic, as larger teeth are often associated with representatives of anatomically modern humans.

Thus, in terms of morphology, *Obi-Rakhmat Man* cannot be classified as an anatomically modern human, a Neanderthal, or an archaic *Homo sapiens*. The extreme fragmentation of the skull and the young age of the individual complicate the precise determination of its morphological characteristics. However, visible morphological features suggest a closer resemblance to anatomically modern humans. The reconstructed left side of the skullcap is relatively large and thin, while the temporal bone exhibits a more modern external appearance.

These cranial features, characterized by gracility and large size, combined with the archaic appearance of the teeth and the ambiguous morphology of the ear

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labyrinth, exhibit a mosaic morphology similar to the hominid remains discovered at the *Oase* site in Romania.

Thus, scientific research conducted in Uzbekistan during the years of independence has led to new conclusions about the study of the ancient Stone Age. In particular, the reassessment of cultural and chronological development models for the Middle Paleolithic period has prompted a revision of facies differentiation at the end of this era. Specifically, the *Mousterian* tradition in the region has moved away from the *denticulate facies* classification, and the role of the *Levallois* component in local Middle Paleolithic industries has been reevaluated and diminished.

The analysis of prominent blade industries in the Western Pamir-Tianshan region has confirmed that they belong to a single cultural tradition, which was found to have existed from approximately 80,000–70,000 BCE to 40,000–35,000 BCE. Based on the technological and typological characteristics of the studied complexes, indicators of transitional industries were identified, and the Obi-Rakhmat variant of the transition from the Middle to the Upper Paleolithic was distinguished.

During the years of independence, numerous new Paleolithic sites have been discovered and introduced into scientific discourse, including Todakhotin 1 and 2, Angren, Yangiobod 1 and 5, Jom, Bulungur, Chashmabulok, Kokcha, Oyaqogitma, Sultan Uvaystog, Machay 2, Toda 1, Chodak, Sariqorgon 1, Jonobod, and Qotirbulok (Andijan region), among others. These findings not only enriched the mapping of ancient Stone Age cultures in Uzbekistan but also demonstrated that geometric microlithic tools characteristic of the Mesolithic period at Todakhotin 2 evolved from local Upper Paleolithic industries.

The materials from Chodak, Sariqorgon, and Qotirbulok, identified for the first time in the Fergana Valley and associated with the Late Paleolithic, filled a crucial gap in the region's prehistoric record, significantly enhancing our understanding of early human settlement and technological development.

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