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MIKLÓS GÁBORI AND THE STUDY OF THE STONE AGE OF CENTRAL ASIA*

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I am so happy that I had good and warm relations with Veronika and Miklós Gábori for a long time.

I first met Veronika and Miklós more than 30 years ago in Prague during the VI Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences and I was struck by what wonderful people they were.

After our short acquaintance, we began exchanging letters and soon our mutual empathy turned into close friendship. Miklós's visit to Tadjikistan in 1969 was one of the first visits by a foreign archaeologist to our country, even from Eastern Europe. This visit was able to provide only a cursory acquaintance with the area's Palaeolithic sites. He visited some of the Stone Age sites in South Tadjikistan such as the Mousterian site Kara-Bura which was being excavated at that time.

A particular part of Miklós's renowned book was devoted to an extensive trip across what was at that time, Soviet Central Asia in 1972, organized by myself. The itinerary embraced the Eastern regions of the country mentioned above: Dushanbe - Shakhrinau - Dangara - Khovaling - Khudjand - Ferghana - Osh - Samarkand - Khodjakent. During this month-long trip we examined the following Palaeolithic sites: Karatau, Lakhuti - Lower Palaeolithic; Khudji, Ogzi-Kichik, Kajrak-Kum, Ferghana sites, Obi-Rahmat - Middle Palaeolithic; Samarkandskaya site - Upper Palaeolithic etc. (GÁBORI 1978).

In 1977, the Gábori couple took part in an International Symposium - "The Neogine-Quaternairy boundary" held in Dushanbe and at some other locations in South Tadjikistan. During their visits, Veronika and Miklós had the opportunity to study all the Palaeolithic collections housed in the Tadjikistan Institute of the Historical Academy of Sciences. Later, in 1973, I was invited to Hungary where I had the excellent opportunity to visit Vértesszőlős, Érd, the Istállóskő and Szeleta caves and examine a good part of Hungary's Paleolithic collections in the Budapest Museum and the National Museum where the charming Viola Dobosi was my kind guide. At that time, Veronika was working on the translation of her monography which was very interesting for me because the subject of it was a pebble technique similar to one which was developed in South Tadjikistan's Karatau culture. Our contact helped me very much to understand the main issues of the Asian and European Palaeolithic.

I should like to say that all these meetings took place in very warm atmosphere and always provided some very happy moments during our friendship. Later on Veronika and Miklós often recalled the pleasant, familiar table which was prepared by my wife Helene and her little concerts on the piano.

I should also like to emphasize that my Hungarian friends showed unlimited patience and behaved in a very tactful and cultured manner, during the difficult situations which sometimes occurred during our trips.

For Miklós, his interest in the Palaeolithic of Soviet Central Asia was not merely incidental. Miklós visited Mongolia and had the opportunity to become acquainted with some Mongolian Palaeolithic sites (GÁBORI 1963). It seems that after this scientific trip, Miklós began to dream about Central Asian's Palaeolithic.

The first scientific theories about the Central Asiatic Palaeolithic were formulated by Miklós in 1976 in his renowned publication "Les civilisations du Paléolithique moyen entre les Alpes et l'Oural" (GÁBORI 1976). In this book, a chapter was dedicated to the Palaeolithic of Central Asia. There, Miklós analysed the evolution and divergence of Palaeolithic industries on these vast territories. He pointed out that the typogenese of different industries cannot always be identical to the "philogenese" of Palaeolithic civilisation (GÁBORI 1976: 7).

Miklós postulation was that to find the similarity between the Palaeolithic industries of Eastern Europe and Asia's, we must search the places where they connect and the migration routes from the Middle and Near Easts (GÁBORI 1976: 151).

Furthermore, the author considered the situation of Palaeolithic civilisation in Central Asia. He set forward his general ideas about Palaeolithic industries on the basis of the knowledge of the early 70s. These ideas were to be developed in his later publications. According to theories, the Palaeolithic of Central Asia is more homogenius than the European one. The former is more consistent and also simpler (GÁBORI 1976: 151). He also wrote that Asian-type Levallois-Mousterian which is the main complex or group of Mousterian cultures in this region, is characterised by the large dimension of the blanks and a certain archaism in comparison with the European Middle Palaeolithic. These features are connected mainly with the raw materials.

In generally accepting the three main facies or complexes in Central Asia's Mousterian (RANOV 1968), Miklós was quite right when he wrote that one of the main pecularities of Central Asia Stone Age is a mixture of tools which have been made by the pebble technique tradition with artifacts knapped by normal methods (normal that is from a European perspective). In fact, this is the main pecularity of Central Asia Palaeolithic.

With regard to the genesis of the Palaeolithic industries of the region mentioned above, Miklós showed that the main influence or direct migration took place from the Near East. This influence was weaker from the Inner Asian side. However, there are some pecularities which suggested the relative isolation of the inner-asiatic Palaeolithic. In this sense, there was "a long term retardation" there (GÁBORI 1976: 155). This quite short chapter in Miklós's book contains many interesting ideas which were to be developed in the later work of different scholars.

These ideas were developed by Miklós in a special article dedicated to the Palaeolithic of Central Asia, which were his final conclusions as an expert on the subject under examination (GÁBORI 1988).

Of course, it was Miklós's prerogative to put forward his own viewpoint and in many respects his opinions are particularly significant and address important issues. His articles and book have come to occupy an important place in history of Central Asia's Palaeolithic studies.

Lower Palaeolithic

Touching upon some isolated surface finds (except in the case of Karatau, South Kazakhstan, the largest accumulation of Lower Palaeolithic surface finds in Central Asia), Miklós mentioned also two "Loessic Palaeolithic" sites, artefacts of which were desposited in the palesoils (or pedocomp-

lexes - PC) : Karatau - 6 PC (at the time of Miklós work in Tadjikistan this PC was dated as 200 th.y in the old stratigraphical scheme. Now 6 PC has been dated as 600 kyr - RANOV 1997) and Lakhuti (150 and 500 accordingly). He commented that Karatau industry is a "pebble culture" and Levallois flakes, which are met with often enough in Karatau culture sites collections, especially Karatau site, are present. There were no other characteristic features at that time.

I am now able to add some new data about the Loessic Palaeolithic. Firstly, during the last few years, there have been dramatic changes in the dating of Loess-Palesoils sequencing. The use of the oxygen isotope curve (OXY stages) has established many new dates - Karatau now belongs to the 15th stage - c.a. 600 kyr; Lakhuti belongs to the 13th stage - ca 500 kyr (DODONOV, RANOV & SCHAFER 1995). There are also newly-excavated sites: Kuldara (11-12 PC, 800 th.y.), Obi-Mazar PC 7 (700 th.y.), Obi-Mazar PC 4 (400 th.y.), Khonako (200 th.y.) and some important isolated finds. Now it is possible to characterize fully the pecularities of the Karatau industrial complex as consisting of a pebble technique technological base with which specific features are associated.

The first of these is the total absence of techniques for the preparation of cores and blades. Possible Levallois technique traits occurred at Lakhuti and Obi-Mazar 4 PC but only in Khonako site is the Levallois technique predominant (SCHAFER & RANOV 1997). Among the main characteristics of Karatau culture's industries, we can include not only evidence of "pebble-tools" but also some specific features such as the use of quartier d'orange (slice) technique, the tayacien elements, very few blades and the multiplatform and pebble cores. Undoubtedly, Levallois technique is well represented in Khonako 2 PC site. In conclusion, the loessic Palaeolithic industries in Southern Tadjikistan demonstrate the transition from pebble industries technology to Levallois-Mousterien Middle-Palaeolithic complexes (or the substitution of the former with the latter).

I would like emphasize that Miklós was one of the first experts to become acquainted with these very original and important Lower Palaeolithic materials, which were clearly tied to the huge Loess-Palesoils sequence. Furthermore, the hiatus between Lower and Middle Palaeolithic which Miklós described has nearly disappeared. Miklós was absolutely right in saying that bifaces which were found in some regions of the great desert-steppe belt (from the Caspian shore to lake Balkhash) must be very recent for this age (GÁBORI 1988: 287). Even now, we still do not have a good stratigraphical context for these important tools.

Middle Palaeolithic

According to the chronological framework of Central Asia at the time of Miklós's visits, the Mousterian sites were dated as Early Wurmien (and not the Riss-Wurmien as he wrote, GÁBORI 1976: 155).

In his publications Miklós proposes his own theory for the division of facies (or technological variants) for the Mousterian industries of Central Asia:

1. Early Mousterian of Central Asian type

This industry is very different from all industries that are known from the East of the Urals. Its main features are: the large dimension of tools and large blades with a possible secondary retouch. Mousterian point and side scrapers are rare. Debitage is Levallois. The axes of large dimension among the worn pebbles which Miklós viewed as tools of a very archaic type are not intelligible (GÁBORI, 1988: 288). These tools do not exist in the Mousterian of Central Asia.

The sites: Kairak-Kum, Amir-Temir, Aman-Kutan, Djar-Kutan.

2. Developed Mousterian

According to Miklós, all these industries are Levallois. Typical tools are well-worked scrapers, blades, thin elongated points and discoidal cores.

The sites: Teshik-Tash, Obi-Rahmat, Ogzi-Kichik, Kulbulak and Kuturbulak.

3. Moustero-Soanien

The main characteristic is a chopper-chopping complex not only with scars on the working edge, but sometimes with a good Mousterian retouch. The Soanian part is represented by pebble tools, some types of cores and simple flakes. There is a clear similarity with the India-Pakistan sites but in Central Asia the soanien traits are more recent. The Mousterian part is normal with mousterian points, side scrapers, blades, prepared cores. Levallois blanks are rare.

The process of dividing the Mousterian industries in Central Asia chronology was undertaken before Miklós's studies (RANOV 1973) and Miklós's conclusions must be seen as a serious hypothesis. However until now, these versions have had no geological or absolute date base.

L.B. Vishniatsky suggeted in his very recent publication (VISHNIATSKY 1996) that techno-typological division of Mousterian sites in Central Asia is in principle, not possible. For my point of view this is a step backwards for our knowledge of the subject.

As I said above, there is no stable chronological framework for Central Asia's Mousterian industries. In general, the chronology of this period is based on the dates for neighbouring countries, in the first instance from Near East data and the Early Wurmien period there. At the present time, because of new finds in the second PC of Khonako site, we know that the Middle Palaeolithic in Central Asia began from at least 200 kyr.

In this context, Miklós's work must be counted as an important step in the study of the Middle Palaeolithic of Central Asia.

Upper Palaeolithic

According to R. Davis, Miklós considered that from 30 to 14 kyr Central Asia was almost completely empty. However, there are more than 10 post-14 kyr sites. Samarkand site is the largest one. It features a highly developed industry (scrapers, doubled scrapers, blades, bladelles, micro-cores and carenated scrapers). Miklós emphasized that it is possible to consider the date of this site as epipalaeolithic. The next most important site is Shougnou in Tadjikistan. Miklós commented that in the materials from this site, we can observe the transition between Mousterian and Upper Palaeolithic cultures. It is curious is that since Miklós made this observation, very few new Upper Palaeolithic sites have been found.

Mesolithic

Among the sites of the Mesolithic epoch, Miklós mentioned only Oshkhona which is situated on the Pamirs plateau. He observed that the materials from these sites have good analogies with contemporary complexes in Siberia and Tibet. Perhaps it is worthwhile noting that Oshkhona site is the highest Stone Age site in the World (4200 m above s.l.) (RANOV 1987).

Some interesting observations were made by Miklós about the environmental situation. He said that the huge variation of natural conditions in Central Asia make chronological synchronisation difficult (GÁBORI 1976). In the greater part of Palaeolithic sites, fauna did not exist and in rest, it is similar to modern fauna. The last point is not strictly correct; in Ogzi-Kichik

rhinoceros remains were present and in Obi-Rahmat lion remains. In what Miklós said about the arid climate in Central Asia, he is right (but there are also clear indications of changes between dry and relatively wet climates. For example, there is a cold and dry climate during loess accumulation and wet and warm climate during soil formation (the first is correlated with glacial time and the second with interglacial time). (DODONOV & PEN'KOV 1977). The same alternation is observed in a palinological diagram of Palaeolithic sites in Tadjikistan (PAKHOMOV, NIKONOV & RANOV 1982).

In conclusion, Miklós emphasized that the Stone Age industries of Central Asia are more homogenius and simpler than European ones and that in Central Asia, there are no sites where cultural layers with different industries of one period were occupied in stratigraphical order. In the meantime, this statement has been disproved because now we have multi-layered sites such as Kulbulak, Shougnou and, of course, the excellent stratigraphical context of Loessic Palaeolithic sites where the artefacts are embedded into PC of different ages. The sequence of the loess-palesoils sites (1-12 PC) covered almost one million years.

Now we know that Miklós's conclusion about the time of Lower Palaeolithic as "corresponding to the time before the last glacial and Middle Palaeolithic corresponding to the beginning of this glaciation" cannot be right (GÁBORI 1988: 287) because the Middle Palaeolithic site (Khonako) was found in Middle Pleistocene sediments. Miklós's statement that Upper Palaeolithic industries belong to the final stage of Upper Pleistocene can be disputed. The best examples are the cave sites of Kara-Kamar in North Afghanistan and Shougnou in Tadjikistan.

Miklós made a reasoned argument when he wrote about the hiatus between Lower and Middle Palaeolithic in Central Asia, but now this hiatus is not so emphasized as at the time when Miklós made his analysis. More mysterious is the hiatus between the first appearance of Middle Palaeolithic (for the moment it is Khonako PC 2 site - 200 kyr) and the main group of Mousterian sites (Teshik-Tash, Obi-Rakhmat, Ogzi-Kichik, Khudji, etc). These sites existed between 60-40 kyr, as far as our ability to analyse can tell. Perhaps the existence this hiatus is only a reflection of the general scantiness of absolute dates and also the fallibility of using different dating methods.

In this final article, Miklós commented that the first appearance (or origin) of Lower Palaeolithic man in Central Asia remains unknown. The latest find of Kuldara sites pointed to much earlier migration of early man out Africa via the Near East and the Iranian Plateau. I think that it was a type of slowly moving relay-race, when one or more human generations felt the impulse to move to new regions (RANOV 1988a, 1988b).

I absolutely agree with Miklós that the direction of the migration of Neanderthals went from the Near East to Central Asia (RANOV 1984). However, rather more unclear is the connection of Central Asia with Innermost Asia as Miklós thought (GÁBORI 1976: 155), because it is no more than the same waves of those western migration. Miklós puts forward another sound hypothesis about the local genesis of Moustero-Soanien facies and the Upper Palaeolithic in Central Asia.

Miklós's observation about the Mousterian technological versions: they must be contemporary, but there are certain divergences between different industries. For example: in the caves well-faceted tools are very rare except Ogzi-Kichik, V. R., in the desert blades are common, Moustero-Soanien do not exist in the cave sites etc.

The distinction between the industries of the same period can be explained, in Miklós's opinion, by great distances between groups of prehistoric man, divergencies of natural conditions, paleoecology, seasonal situations and isolation which created some small local facies. This idea is good, but I must emphasize that not all researchers agree with this position. For example, L.B. Vishniatsky does not see serious differences between Mousterian industries of Central Asia and thinks that all facies or technical variations mentioned above are one homogenius Mousterian culture (VISHNIATSKY 1996: 169). This position is very difficult to accept.

Miklós makes a reasonable argument when he says that the distance between prehistoric groups driven to specific isolation is the basis for the persistence of some types of tools and it is clear that Mousterian technology and some types of tools existed in Upper Palaeolithic industries even in Mesolithic industries. The choppers and pebble techniques even returned to the historical scene once again in the "Hissar Civilisation", which was actually in the Neolithic.

Miklós conclusions have not lost their scientific significance and many of his observations are still of relevance nowadays. Of course, our knowledge is developing very quickly and now some positions have partly or completely changed. But in any event, the name of this Hungarian expert will go down in the history of Palaeolithic studies of this country, so very distant from his native land.

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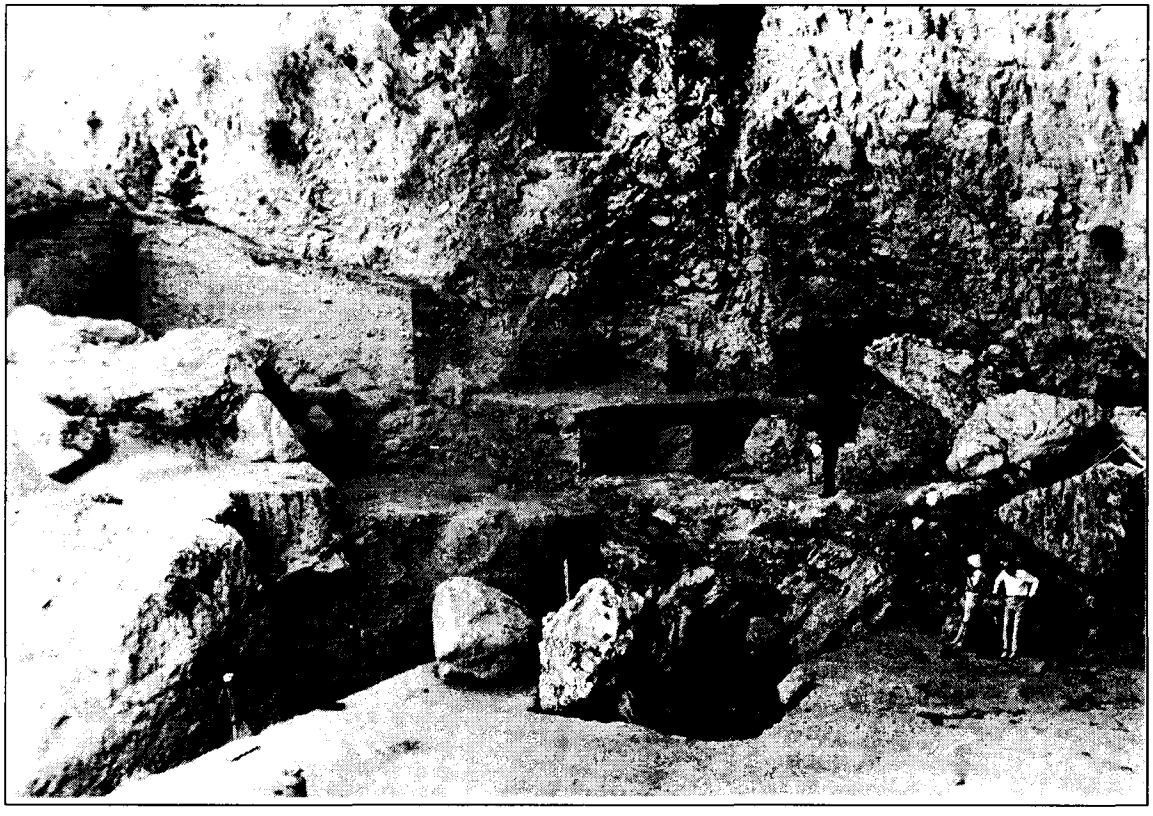
In 1973 at Ságvár near the lake Balaton (Hungary).

In 1977 at the atificial lake of Nurek (Tadjikistan).
From left to right: V. Gábori, V. Ranov, S. Nesmeyanov and M. Gábori.



In 1977 at the excavation of the cave Ogzi-Kichik (Tadjikistan).