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### THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATIGRAPHIC STUDIES IN CENTRAL ASIA DURING THE 1940s–1960s

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#### Abstract

This article examines the development of research on the Stone Age history of Central Asia between 1940 and 1969 from the perspectives of historiography and archaeological methodology. Particular attention is paid to the institutionalization of Paleolithic and Mesolithic studies, the expansion of scientific institutions and archaeological expeditions, and the application of stratigraphic methods in archaeological fieldwork. The study addresses the typological classification of stone tools, the identification of cultural layer sequences, the examination of archaeological finds within their geological contexts, and the establishment of relative chronologies for prehistoric sites. It also considers the significance of emerging scholarly traditions and interdisciplinary approaches in the investigation of Central Asia's prehistoric past. The article aims to provide a historiographical assessment of the transition from predominantly descriptive studies of individual archaeological finds to systematic research based on stratigraphic investigation and comparative analysis.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, Stone Age, Paleolithic, Mesolithic, historiography of archaeology, 1940–1969, institutionalization of scientific research, stratigraphy, cultural layers, stone tool typology, archaeological expeditions, relative chronology.



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Archaeological research virtually came to a standstill during the Second World War. However, following the war, particularly from the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the exploration and investigation of Stone Age archaeological sites in Central Asia expanded considerably. During the postwar period, the Soviet government placed greater emphasis on scientific development, organizing research expeditions to various regions of Central Asia. In the 1950s, specialized archaeological research institutions and university departments were established in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Dushanbe (formerly Stalinabad), where divisions dedicated to Stone Age studies began operating. In 1943, the Institute of History and Archaeology was established under the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR. By the 1950s, a group of specialists in Stone Age archaeology had emerged within the institute. Subsequently, in 1970, the Department of Stone Age Archaeology was officially established within the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR in Samarkand [1]. This department was specifically dedicated to investigating the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods and specialized in studying the earliest archaeological history of Central Asia.

One of the first major postwar archaeological expeditions was the South Turkmenistan Complex Archaeological Expedition (YuTAKE), launched in Turkmenistan in 1946. Led by M. E. Masson, with the participation of V. M. Masson, I. N. Khlopin, and other researchers, the expedition primarily investigated Neolithic and Eneolithic settlements. During these investigations, B. A. Kuftin conducted the first excavations at the Jeitun settlement near Ashgabat in 1952. Subsequently, between 1955 and 1963, V. M. Masson carried out systematic excavations at the site [2]. Jeitun was dated to the sixth millennium BCE and identified as one of the earliest agricultural villages in Central Asia [3]. The discovery of mud-brick dwellings, handmade painted pottery, and remains of wheat



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and barley within the cultural layers demonstrated that the inhabitants of Jeitun practiced agriculture and animal husbandry [4]. This discovery was of considerable importance for understanding Neolithic cultures in Central Asia and brought the existence of a distinctive regional Neolithic tradition, known as the Jeitun culture, to the attention of the academic community.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Stone Age archaeological sites were progressively identified in other regions of Central Asia. Archaeologists from Samarkand State University began searching for evidence of Paleolithic occupation in the vicinity of Samarkand. In 1947, a research group led by D. N. Lev investigated the Omonqoton Cave, located south of Samarkand [5]. By 1949, D. N. Lev had reported the preliminary findings from the cave [6]. Subsequent excavations conducted in 1953–1954 uncovered Mousterian stone tools and animal remains at Omonqoton [7]. This archaeological site became an important source of evidence confirming the presence of Paleolithic populations in the Samarkand oasis. Between 1958 and 1967, D. N. Lev also conducted excavations at the Upper Paleolithic site of Samarkand, located within the modern city [8]. As a result of these investigations by Samarkand University researchers, the Stone Age cultures of the Zarafshan Valley were introduced into academic scholarship.

During the same period, Early Paleolithic sites began to be identified in the Fergana Valley and southern Kazakhstan. In 1958, Kazakh archaeologist Kh. A. Alpysbayev discovered open-air Lower Paleolithic sites in the Karatau Mountains of southern Kazakhstan [9]. At locations such as Borykazgan, Tanirkazgan, Akkol, and Kyzyltau, researchers discovered roughly fashioned stone handaxes, including Acheulean bifaces, along with other stone implements. These artifacts were tentatively dated to several hundred thousand years ago [10]. These discoveries provided the first evidence of Lower Paleolithic human activity in the territory of Kazakhstan.



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The 1960s marked a period of significant discoveries in the archaeology of the Central Asian Stone Age. In 1962, the Obi-Rakhmat Cave site, situated approximately 100 km northeast of Tashkent in the foothills of the Chatkal Range, was discovered by a research group led by A. R. Muhammadjonov. The initial excavations were conducted by Kh. K. Nasriddinov and subsequently continued by R. Kh. Sulaymonov in 1964–1965. Obi-Rakhmat yielded a rich assemblage of stone artifacts associated with the transition from the Middle to the Upper Paleolithic, as well as hearth remains and faunal materials.

The site's most remarkable discovery—six teeth and fragments of a skull belonging to a child approximately 9–12 years old—was made not during the Soviet period but in 2003 by a joint Russian-Uzbek archaeological expedition in archaeological Layer 16. M. Glantz and colleagues (2008) identified Neanderthal-like characteristics in the dental remains, while the cranial fragments displayed features more closely resembling those of anatomically modern humans. Consequently, they interpreted the specimen as exhibiting a mosaic combination of morphological traits. A. P. Derevyanko (2025), however, proposed a possible association with Denisovans.

No paleogenetic findings confirming the Obi-Rakhmat child's affiliation with anatomically modern humans have been published. Therefore, the taxonomic classification of the specimen remains a subject of scholarly debate. Layer 16 has been dated to approximately 70,000 years ago, within an estimated range of 60,000–90,000 years. Thus, Obi-Rakhmat has become one of the key archaeological sites for investigating cultural and anthropological processes associated with the final stages of the Middle Paleolithic and the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic in Central Asia [11; 12; 13; 14].

During the 1960s, extensive Paleolithic investigations were also initiated in the territory of the Tajik SSR. Archaeologist A. P. Okladnikov and Tajik researchers



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searched for traces of early human occupation in the mountainous regions of Badakhshan and the Hissar Mountains. Although A. P. Okladnikov and V. A. Ranov conducted preliminary Paleolithic surveys in Tajikistan during the 1950s and 1960s, Lower Paleolithic sites were identified in the loess deposits of southern Tajikistan primarily during the 1970s and 1980s under the direction of V. A. Ranov. In particular, Lower Paleolithic archaeological sites were discovered in areas such as Lakhuti, Karatau, Kuldara, and Khonako in the Khovaling District of southern Tajikistan. The Kuldara site, located near the village of Lakhuti in the Khovaling District of Khatlon Region, yielded ancient stone tools from inclined Pleistocene deposits dated to approximately 800,000 years ago [15]. Furthermore, archaeological sites such as Khonako II and Obi-Mazor-6 on the Khovaling loess plateau were reported to contain deposits dating to approximately 600,000–900,000 years ago.

These discoveries provided scientific evidence suggesting that the earliest human presence in Central Asia extended far back into prehistory, approaching one million years ago. In particular, investigations conducted under V. A. Ranov's leadership resulted in the identification and documentation of numerous Mousterian and Upper Paleolithic sites throughout the Hissar Valley.

In 1973, Ranov, in collaboration with S. A. Nesmeyanov, published a fundamental monograph devoted to the geological and stratigraphic analysis of Paleolithic deposits in Central Asia, including the Pleistocene stratigraphy and Paleolithic archaeological sites of the region [16]. The publication provided a comprehensive examination of the geological chronology and cultural characteristics of the Lower, Middle, and Upper Paleolithic periods in Central Asia [17].

In conclusion, from a methodological perspective, this stage in the development of Central Asian Stone Age archaeology was characterized by the establishment and consolidation of stratigraphic approaches, typological analysis, and



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multidisciplinary research methods. These methodological developments laid an important foundation for the systematic investigation of prehistoric archaeological sites and contributed significantly to the reconstruction of the earliest stages of human history in Central Asia.

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