Notes and Articles

I

New Data on Palæolithic finds in Mongolia*

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The American expeditions led by Roy Chapman Andrews in the 1920–1930's were followed by a long interval with no new data forthcoming on the neolithic civilization of Outer Mongolia. While in the surrounding territories of Siberia and North China research kept advancing, it stagnated for twenty years in the Republic of Outer Mongolia. Recently attention is again drawn to a problem still in suspense on the earliest cultures of the Mongolian Plateau and Northern Gobi. What made the gap in our information so noticeable was that during those twenty years, important sites in North and Eastern Siberia were and are still being discovered in increasingly great numbers and, moreover, that the wealth of materials garnered by the Sven Hedin expeditions were published. But until recently the very rich collections made by the large-scale expeditions organized by the Americans remained inaccesible, and about which researchers had only N. C. Nelson's preliminary reports to go by. One reason for this, in our opinion, is that the ideas and hypotheses held about the Gobi cultures are far more numerous than the archæological materials permitted, prior to the comprehensive works of F. Bergman (1945) and F. Maringer (1950).

In the 1950's new research started. From the occasional pick-ups here and there during the archæological diggings of sites of historical periods, many stone-age sites came to notice in various parts of the country—outside the area covered by the Andrews expeditions. And now during recent years a mass of sporadic finds have been accumulating in the small collections of the capital and certain district centres. Their importance lies firstly in that they are new landmarks in the unexplored regions of Mongolia and at the same time provide incentives for more systematic excavations (Ser-Oddžav 1956; Dordžüren 1957–1958). Later two expeditions of A. P. Okladnikov brought to light finds of the greatest importance, especially in the Southern Gobi sector and Orkhon river region. In his excavations Okladnikov succeeded in securing objects of the most archaic type ever found in Mongolia; and in 1960, the first excavations of a stone-age stratum were undertaken in the Orkhon river region (Okladnikov 1962). In 1958 and 1961 I myself made excavations in different parts of the country, particularly in Central Gobi and the Gobi-Altai region (Gabori 1962*a*, *b*). During our expeditions we explored in part sites located by the Mongolian Museum staff, we made new excavations there and examined new areas. At the same time with the aid of Mongolian scientific organizations we were able to study in more careful manner all the archæological material preserved in the country's collections, and later publish our findings (Gabori 1962*a*). The new data have greatly modified our views of the Stone Age of Mongolia. We can now take into account some sixty new sites (Gabori 1963*b*);

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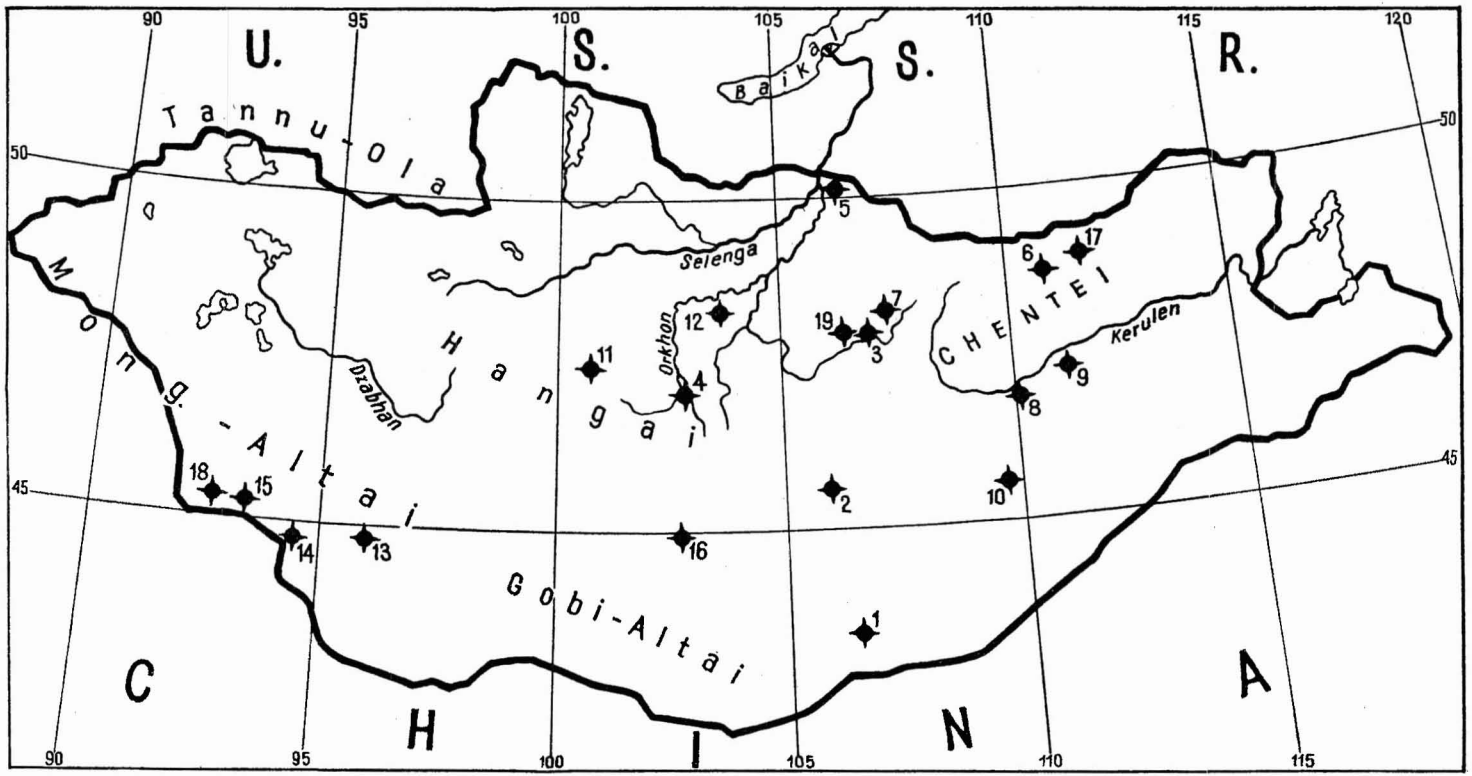

FIG. 1. Sites of Palæolithic finds in Outer Mongolia.

1. Ottson-maïnt
2. Mandal-gobi
3. Tseisan-tologoï (Oulan-bator)
4. Erdene-dzu
5. Altan-bulag
6. Binder, Rashan khad
7. Makhūr tolgoï
8. Kherē gökhöl
9. Bayantsogt ovō
10. Ulān-dzēg
11. Taïger-tšulū
12. Inget tolgoï
13. Narīn tūroï
14. Tsagān ders
15. Damdžigīn us
16. Bodgo-solongo
17. Öglögtšin kherem
18. Övdög tünkh
19. Oulan-bator, airport

some of which indicate the beginning of civilization in this region at a period much earlier than we had so far thought.

From the typological point of view, the most ancient culture of Mongolia can be defined as Levallois-Mousterian. It was A. P. Okladnikov who discovered the characteristic material in the region of Ottson-maïnt, located in the southern Gobi close to the Chinese border. The lithic industry gathered in several places includes a range of relatively primitive macrolithic blades, traces of which have also been picked up elsewhere. The tool assemblage is composed, for the most part, of large crude blades, but objects of Mousterian type as well and cores of an archaic type which attract attention (Okladnikov 1962: 86). Most of the objects are roughed out [épannelés] and sometimes superficially worked, in a fashion similar to those known in the cruder flake industries. Nevertheless the different types are clearly defined. The archæological material contains sporadically some narrower blades, in part retouched, while the kinds of tools of more recent cultures known from other excavations are absent. The ventral side of the tools is smooth, exhibiting a marked bulb of percussion. The most characteristic trait of the Ottsonmaïnt lithic industry is the Levelloisian technique—the form given to the base—large and blunt sections of the base remain on the blades and this confirms their typological classification.

N. C. Nelson had mentioned earlier the sporadic occurrence of tools of Aurignacian and Mousterian types in the southern region of the country, especially on the plateau situated between Ulān-nūr and Arza-bogd mountain, as well as near Orok-nūr (Nelson 1926: 11–12; 1939: 260). F. Bergman, who published similar data from Inner Mongolia, says that among the objects collected some might be earlier than Neolithic; but they appear to represent rather typological traditions (Bergman 1945: 191; Maringer 1950: 206). So far we have no coherent group of important Palæolithic finds to formulate definite identifications. What we particularly need are stratigraphic observations, which likewise we lack for Ottsonmaïnt.

For surface finds only the typological definition of the tools can be made. Besides type and shaping, the objects possess external characteristics, which clearly distinguish them as a group from the objects of industries so far known, and in particular by their material, dark grey and occasionally reddish colour, patina and wear which characterize tools found in the deserts. Their cutting edges, their retouches, and their entire surface are well worn, as though eroded by sand, something not observed in the Mesolithic and Neolithic finds in similar conditions, not even of tools of the Late Palæolithic. For analogies of typological classification, we need only go to the forms of the classic Lower Palæolithic of Western Europe, among which are a number of tools of the same type.

Though the archæological material from Ottson-maïnt has not been published in detail, one already sees its importance. From the Mesolithic onward (the archaic phase of the Shabarakh culture) we know something about the peopling of the Gobi, and with this sudden appearance of an industry, apparently connected with the Lower Palæolithic, several new observations on the whole industries of Inner Asia may be made. According to A. P. Okladnikov the appearance of Levalloisian techniques is proof that the Gobi well might have had worldwide importance in the

gradual advance of civilization. Finds which he estimates as dating from 40 to 50 thousand years or even earlier, he defines as Palæolithic in the true sense of the word (Okladnikov 1962: 86). What is important is the fact that the recent cultures of the Gobi had local antecedents in this region, which were carried over through the intermediary of definite cultural diffusions.

From Central Gobi, near Mandal-gobi we know of a find which though consisting of only a few tools, bears great resemblance to the Ottson-maïnt tools. There too the utensils were surface finds on a desert or semi-desert type of terrain: blades of large size and crude treatment, a point worked like the Moustern type besides other less typical tools—their material and patina are identical to those described by Okladnikov. It should be mentioned that in the same restricted territory, the predominant industry is late Mesolithic, represented by small-size tools (also surface finds), with neither the patina or characteristic wear of the first (Gabori 1963*b*). Their difference is not to be explained by the different properties of the rock that was used; they are older tools of the Levalloisian type, made of more massive and harder rock formed by the silification of sedimentary clay (group of spilocite-desmocite rock). Unquestionably we are confronted with finds of two different cultures—though lacking more concrete data on their chronological relationship. Several similar atypical tools are also found to the north, in the vicinity of the settled area of Delgertsogt (in the district of Central Gobi); but the majority of the tools recovered there belong to the Mesolithic.

Tools of Lower Palæolithic type, although in a reduced number, are found near Ulan-bator at Tseisan-tolgoi on the Tola terrace. A. P. Okladnikov mentions rich materials of the Late Palæolithic discovered there (Okladnikov 1962: 88), but among the earliest tools are several Mousterioid pieces, clearly earlier from a typological point of view (Dordzüren 1957: 5; Gabori 1963*b*). Possibly it is a problem of two industries of different character—or else chronologically, very late tools, but connected by their type to the Lower Palæolithic. Analogous phenomena are noticeable in the region north of Mongolia. Mousterioid types appear after the complex of Mal'ta-Buret', due to a southeast influence. Here, the rock material of the tools differs from that used in the desert region, but is similar to that of the Late Palæolithic and Epipalæolithic objects showing strong Siberian affinities, discovered at other sites in this Tola sector.

From a typological point of view, the material that A. P. Okladnikov found in an archæological stratum, not far from Erdene-dzu (the ancient Karakoroum, actually Kharkhorin) on the terrace of the Orkhon, belongs to an analogous industry. The tools found at a relatively shallow depth, in the lower archæological layer, are nearest to Levalloisian and Mousterian types (scrapers; points; large, regular formed blades; split and worked stones like choppers) (Okladnikov 1962: 87–88). In the upper layer these types occurred with equal frequency, but the major part of the material belongs, from all evidence, to the Mesolithic (prismatic cores, small scrapers, core scrapers of the Siberian type). In our opinion, the lower bed culture is younger than that of Ottson-maïnt, as the truely archaic elements disappear little by little in the more recent blade culture—for even though the Mousterioid tools are similar to those of the Mousterian culture of Soviet Central Asia, Uzbekistan (Teshik-Tash, Amir-Temir, Khodzhikent, etc.)—this material

has a characteristic appearance of the Late Palæolithic. The immediate stratigraphic succession of this Levallois-Mousterian type industry and the Mesolithic, and the relationships of their assemblages, pose a problem that will only be resolved when we have detailed publication of the finds.

The origin of the Mongolian finds, in appearance analogous to those of the Lower Palæolithic (in the main we believe, to those discovered in the Gobi), still requires more study. The Palæolithic of Central Asia mentioned above, of Northern China, and in a wider sense, of South-East Asia may affect their connections with other industries. The occurrence of several tools of Acheulian type does not necessarily indicate an indigenous development. As said previously, the finds along the banks of the Orkhon show on the whole a typological resemblance to those of Central Asia, but the different types may have come, for that matter, from the Gobi, and the choppers point neither to the North or the Northwest. In the territory of Inner Mongolia some tools are also found which, in type and other external characteristics, as well as wear, seem to be absolutely identical with the objects mentioned above (Maringer 1950: pl. XXXVII, 2). Likewise Levalloisian and Mousterian elements appear in the Palæolithic of North China (Movius 1955: 280), where, probably, we should look for the origin of their influences. In the Stone Age culture of the whole of Mongolia down to more recent periods, we find a vaster and more coherent cultural area in the region east of the Altai and on Chinese territory—but this does not exclude close Mongol-Siberian relationship, since migrations took place within the area. The question of whether this primitive blade industry is—chronologically—closer to the Late Palæolithic or to the Mesolithic than we had thought from the typology of finds, cannot be definitely settled for lack of more exact observations and some stratigraphic data.

The deposits and finds of the Palæolithic and the Epipalæolithic ages though more numerous are still insufficient to give a coherent picture based on the forms and kinds of tools. We know of approximately 15 assemblages, big and small, in different parts of the country, among which comes in first place, the rich lithic industry from an archæological layer of the Tola terrace near the Ulan-bator airport (Okladnikov 1962: 88). This material is still unpublished. The rest of the finds come from surface collections, and because of their geographical localization and their position in the direction of culture diffusion, they show certain typological differences.

The tools from beds found in the northern part of the country—at Altan-bulag on the Siberian frontier, Binder (Rashan khad), Öglögtšīn kherem in the region of the Onon river (district of Khenteï)—prove a direct relationship with the culture of southern Siberia, Altan-bulag—where at another place, a Neolithic of northern character is encountered with scrapers on blades, prismatic burins, angle burins and bec de flûte, retouched blades of average dimensions and cores, all Palæolithic in character. These tool types are known not only in the Trans-Baikal beds and other adjacent Siberian sites, but in all the immense region called 'the Eastern Europe-Siberian sphere'. Often the rock with which the tools are made is identical to that of the objects found to the southeast of Baikal (Abramova 1953: 277). We may remark in Mongolia, we come across tools of a type more archaic than the Trans-Baikal tools recently published by Okladnikov (1961: 157, fig. 2–3). Some similar

objects occur in a number of beds in South Siberia, up to the Yenisei (for example the finds of Mal'ta, Afontova, Katuni, the Angara region), and it seems that the relationships of the Mongolian industries with these last are even more marked than with the material of sites geographically closer; perhaps explainable by chronological divergences. Some of the late Upper Palæolithic tools of the Siberian type also occur at Öglöktšīn kherem. This rather scanty material contains none of the rather large tools of the later period or implements of the recent Gobi culture. Among it there are different scrapers and large blades partially retouched at their base, with several atypical burins and some 'Mousterioid' types. Just as at Altan-bulag some types of tools, which become frequent only later in the Mesolithic, are found.

Several tools of the same type have been found at Makhūr tolgoï to the northeast of Ulan-bator and further west, and even northward in the environs of Inget tolgoï, Kobdo, and Taïger-tšulū (district of Bulgan), and Khanngaï. At these last places, scrapers on large size blades, double scrapers and several Aurignacian types are encountered. Towards the southeast appear vestiges of this late Siberian Palæolithic culture, in the region of the Kerulen river, Kherē gökhöl and Bayantsogt ovō (district of Khenteï), and also further to the south, in the semi-desert region in the vicinity of Ulān-dzēg (district of the eastern Gobi).

The implements appear to change slightly with the distance of their sites from where such implements first appeared. The Bogdo-solongo site in the southern part of the country supplied most of the scraper blades of rather Epipalæolithic nature, whereas there is an absence of other sorts of Siberian tools, for example burins, which however are rare enough throughout the whole of Mongolian territory. The scraper blades resemble for the most part those known in the most ancient phase of the Shavarakh culture, and to their analogues found farther south in the industries of Inner Mongolia and Sinkiang.

In the southeastern part of Mongolia the south of the Altai range, some Late Palæolithic tool types in four different locations are known to us. These small collections of finds differ from those of the North. Among the implements collected at Övdög tünkh (Khovd district) are some retouched blades with greater than average sizes, and scrapers on blade ends of the Aurignacian type, and also crudely worked blades exhibiting features of the Lower Palæolithic, and Mousterian points similar to those already mentioned. Their material and patina are likewise similar to those of the objects found in the Gobi, and we cannot dismiss the idea that these types possibly reached the West by a more direct route from the central region of the Gobi. It remains to be seen whether all these finds with their varied composition represent the same cultural level although, unquestionably, among them are found the fewest Mesolithic elements. Not far from this bed, in the vicinity of Damdžigīn us, also occur several types of archaic tools (in the same region there was also clearly distinguishable Neolithic material) and the collections found more to the east, in the vicinity of Tsagān ders, and Narīn tūroï, also show traits very close to those of the preceding ones (Gobi-Altai district).

The typological character of the finds mentioned, which belong in part to the Late Palæolithic and in part to the Epipalæolithic, can be classified with the Siberian culture, probably of the same age. We know that there was a north-south

cultural penetration, reaching the southern part of the Gobi, and its way led in all probability, across the Selenga-Orkhon valley. We recognize this already in the vestiges of Mousterian type tools (Tola terrace, Erdene-dzu, Khenteï region, Gobi-Altai region), and the opposite direction of this influence, probably of a southeastern origin, which perhaps made itself felt more than once during the Stone Age and became more intense in Siberia during the Neolithic. At the same time, we already trace Mesolithic types—the chronological-cultural interdependence between these and the Lower Palæolithic assemblage is a recurrent problem. That the roots of the Mongolian Mesolithic, no less than the interrelations of its industries, were developed earlier, well before the archaic phase of the Shabarakh culture, seems probable.

These types of Palæolithic tools, which because of their greater number, can be regarded as collective finds, raise several problems, and our research is now at the stage where again these questions depend even more on their cultural and chronological classifications. The new finds, particularly those coming from a vast, little explored territory, readily lead to diverse theories. We therefore consider that the definite answer to the problems awaits wide-spread excavations and publication of the materials that have been unearthed.

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