

# **The Palaeolithic of Northeast Asia**

The History and Results of  
Research in 1940–1980

**Vitaly A. Kashin**

*Translated and edited by Richard L. Bland  
and Yaroslav V. Kuzmin*

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Cover background: The Orochi River valley, Gizhiga River basin (photo by I.E. Vorobei).

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## List of Abbreviations

AN AzSSR	Akademiya Nauk Azerbajjanskoi Sovetskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki [Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic].
AN SSSR	Akademiya Nauk Soyuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik [USSR Academy of Sciences].
BKICHP	Byulleten Komissii po Izucheniyu Chetvertichnogo Perioda [Bulletin of the Commission for Study of the Quaternary Period].
BP	Before Present (in radiocarbon dating, with AD 1950 as a starting point).
Cand. Sci.	Candidate of Sciences (Soviet/Russian scientific degree equal to Ph.D. and D.Phil.).
Dr. Sci.	Doctor of Sciences (Soviet/Russian scientific degree equal to <i>Dr. habil.</i> degree in Western Europe, and to Full Professor position in USA).
DVF	Dalnevostochny Filial [Far Eastern Division].
DVNTS	Dalnevostochny Nauchny Tsentr (Akademiya Nauk SSSR) [Far Eastern Scientific Centre (USSR Academy of Sciences)].
GAIMK	Gosudarstvennaya Akademiya Istorii Materialnoi Kultury [State Academy of the History of Material Culture, Leningrad].
GES	Gidroelectrostantsiya [Hydroelectric power station].
IA RAN	Institut Arkheologii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk [Institute of Archaeology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow].
IIMK	Institut Istorii Materialnoi Kultury [Institute of the History of Material Culture, USSR/Russian Academy of Sciences, Leningrad/St. Petersburg].
IYaLI	Institut Yazyka, Literatury i Istorii Yakutskogo Filiala Sibirskogo Otdeleniya Akademii Nauk SSSR [Institute of the Language, Literature, and History, Yakut Division of the Siberian Branch, USSR Academy of Sciences, Yakutsk].
KPSS	Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuzu [Communist Party of the Soviet Union].
KSIA	Kratkie Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii [Short Communications of the Institute of Archaeology].
LIAE	Lenskaya Istoriko–Arkheologicheskaya Ekspeditsiya [Lena Historical–Archaeological Expedition].
LOIA	Leningradskoe Otdelenie Instituta Arkheologii AN SSSR [Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archaeology, USSR Academy of Sciences, Leningrad].
MIA	Materialy i Issledovaniya po Arkheologii SSSR [Materials and Studies on the Archaeology of the USSR].
NIIYaK	Nauchno-Issledovatel'skiy Institut Yazyka i Kultury [Scientific Research Institute of Language and Culture, Yakutsk].
PAE	Prilenskaya Arkheologicheskaya Ekspeditsiya [The Lena Archaeological Expedition].
RGO	Russkoe Geograficheskoe Obshchestvo [Russian Geographical Society].
SO AN SSSR	Sibirskoe Otdelenie Akademii Nauk SSSR [Siberian Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences].
SORGO	Sibirskoe Otdelenie Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva [Siberian Branch of the Russian Geographical Society, Irkutsk].
SVAKAE	Severo-Vostochnaya Kompleksnaya Arkheologicheskaya Ekspeditsiya [North-East Asian Interdisciplinary Archaeological Expedition].
SVKNII	Severo-Vostochny Kompleksny Nauchno-Issledovatel'skiy Institut DVNTS AN SSSR [North-Eastern Interdisciplinary Research Institute, Far Eastern Scientific Centre, USSR/Russian Academy of Sciences, Magadan].

VAE	Vilyuiskaya Arkheologicheskaya Ekspeditsiya [Vilyui Archaeological Expedition].
VINITI	Vsesoyuzny Institut Nauchno-Technicheskoi Informatsii [All-Union Institute of Scientific-Technical Information, USSR/Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow].
VSORGO	Vostochno-Sibirskoe Otdelenie Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva [East Siberian Branch of the Russian Geographical Society, Irkutsk].
YaGU	Yakutsky Gosudarstvenny Universitet [Yakutsk State University, Yakutsk; now North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk].
YaORGO	Yakutskoe Otdelenie Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva [Yakutian Branch of the Russian Geographical Society, Yakutsk].
YF SO AN SSSR	Yakutsky Filial Sibirskogo Otdeleniya Akademii Nauk SSSR [Yakut Division of the Siberian Branch, USSR Academy of Sciences, Yakutsk].

## Translators' Introduction

This book, written by Vitaly A. Kashin (1946–2010), was originally published in Russian in 2003. It contains meticulous descriptions of discoveries of Palaeolithic sites in a vast region of Northeast Asia (essentially, the northeastern part of modern Russia), and analysis of hypotheses, ideas, and concepts related to the Northeast Asian Palaeolithic. This is especially important for better understanding the development of knowledge on this subject, closely related to the issue of the peopling of the New World, because a very limited number of papers by Soviet/Russian archaeologists on the Palaeolithic of Northeast Asia were published in English (and other languages) until the mid-1990s. We, therefore, decided to make this book available to the international scholarly community, especially to North American colleagues dealing with the extremely complicated problem of the initial human settlement of the Americas.

From the age of nineteen V.A. Kashin was involved in archaeology, and participated as an employee of the Institute of Language, Literature, and History (Yakut Division of the Siberian Branch, USSR Academy of Sciences) in excavations of all important Palaeolithic sites in the Aldan River basin from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s; thus, gaining first-hand knowledge of its prehistory and stratigraphy including controversial issues. In 1991, he defended his Cand. Sci. (Ph.D.-equivalent) dissertation that is the basis of this book. After that, Kashin moved to the Institute of Humanitarian Studies, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), and continued archaeological works in the Kolyma River basin, where he found and studied 47 Neolithic sites (see Kashin 2013), until his death.

The main *dramatis personae* of this book are four scholars – Aleksei P. Okladnikov (1908–1981), Nikolai N. Dikov (1925–1996), Yuri A. Mochanov (1934–2020), and Svetlana A. Fedoseeva (1936–2017) (the latter two were also husband and wife). They made the largest contribution to the creation and development of archaeology in Northeast Asia, the vast and remote part of Eurasia. Their works are described in numerous books and edited volumes cited in the main References at the end of this monograph.

However, the history of Palaeolithic studies in Northeast Asia is also a history of personalities. A biography of Okladnikov was recently published (Konopatskii 2019, 2021). It is well known that Okladnikov, as a ‘doyen’ of Siberian archaeology, was to some extent jealous of other researchers who worked in regions that were previously studied by him, especially the basins of the

Lena and Angara rivers (see Kuzmin 2021). Therefore, Mochanov and Fedoseeva were his rivals. Okladnikov did not support Dikov during the early stage of his career, but later accepted Dikov’s Dr. Sci. dissertation for defense at the Institute of History, Philology, and Philosophy (Siberian Branch, USSR Academy of Sciences) in Novosibirsk, where Okladnikov was a Director and a head of the Scientific Council (see Kuzmin 2021).

There is not any doubt that Mochanov and Fedoseeva throughout their 50+ years of research created the modern archaeology of Yakutia, not only in terms of the Palaeolithic but also the later periods. However, the personal interrelations of Mochanov with colleagues and employees were often far from cordial. He (according to Kuzmin’s personal observations) had only two kinds of relationships with other scholars: love and hate, nothing much in between. There was bad blood between Mochanov and Dikov because the former did not accept the undisturbed stratigraphy of the Ushki cluster in Kamchatka. In a Foreword to the translation of his 1977 book, Mochanov (2009, pp. xii–xviii) calls scientists who disagree with him by the quite derogatory term “armchair archaeologists”. In one of his latest books (Mochanov 2007), he goes on and on about the differences in opinions on the Dyuktai culture, severely criticising numerous scholars, especially Okladnikov (Mochanov 2007, pp. 100–102; see also Mochanov and Fedoseeva 1996: 160–161).

Mochanov, as his boss, gave Kashin a hard time for not agreeing with the scheme of periodisation developed by Mochanov (1977). In Kashin (2003, p. 34, footnote) it is said: “Yu. A. Mochanov and S. A. Fedoseeva protested against the inclusion in this book of drawings from their published works. For any inconvenience for readers of the book in this regard, the author apologizes”. We excluded it from translation, but it is worth mentioning here as evidence of the tense relationships between Mochanov and his employees and students in case of disagreement. One of us (Y. Kuzmin) also experienced the hostile treatment by Mochanov on the issue of the age of the Diring Yuriakh site (see Kuzmin and Krivonogov 1994, 1999).

In order to have the main schemes of periodisation of Northeast Asian Palaeolithic more visible and understandable for international readers, we put together all major cultural complexes in chronological order (Table 1). It is based on fundamental monographs of two leading archaeologists of this region, Mochanov (1977) and Dikov (1979).



Table 1. Major Palaeolithic cultural complexes in Northeast Asia.

Periods	Yakutia	Kamchatka	Kolyma River and Chukotka
Holocene	Sumnagin	Final Ushki (Layer V)	Early Mal'tan  Late Siberdik
Late Pleistocene	Dyuktai	Late Ushki (Layer VI)  Early Ushki (Layer VII)	Early Siberdik

We have 'created' our own system of transliteration by combining the BGN (US Board of Geographic Names) with a slightly modified version of the LOC (Library of Congress). We have also settled on one ending for words, as the English language forces us to do, rather than providing the appropriate ending (masculine, feminine, neuter, plural/nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, and prepositional) that can occur in Russian.

Some names and terms are 'semi-formalised' in English. We decided not to use an apostrophe (') to transliterate the Russian soft sign letter ('ь'), especially for site names which are now widely accepted like Malta (instead of Mal'ta) or Buret (instead of Buret'). For names that do not have an accepted English form we have tried consistently to use our system for transliterating. The Russian '-ский' ('-skii') end of names we reduced to '-sky'. We generally give a (Russian) 'i' or 'y' plural for plural words that are not translated. This is with the exception of ethnic names, which are given no ending in the plural (following one accepted form found in *Webster's 3rd International Dictionary*, 1965). The common Russian term "archaeological culture" or simply "culture" we translated as "cultural complex", "assemblage", and "culture" interchangeably.

For published references, we give transliteration of the original title of a paper and/or a book and its translation, and for sources (such as edited volumes, collections of papers and/or abstracts, periodicals, and semi-periodicals) only transliteration is given. This, however, is sufficient enough to find the volumes in the LOC online catalogue or in Russian library resources. The archival sources are manuscripts (typewritten excavation reports) deposited at the Institute of Archaeology, Russian Academy of Sciences, in Moscow, and can be found by their indicated numbers in the archival catalogue.

We reduced the number of illustrations compared to the original 70 in Kashin's (2003) volume and selected the most important ones for understanding the main prehistoric cultural complexes of Northeast Asia. Many extra figures and other drawings can be found in Mochanov's (2009) and Dikov's (1997, 2003, 2004) books.

Since the research for this volume was completed in 1991, and included in Kashin's Cand. Sci. dissertation, several books and a plethora of papers were published in English about the archaeology and palaeoecology of the Northeast Asian Palaeolithic. It is, therefore, worth mentioning some of them here.

Major monographs by Mochanov and Dikov are now translated (Dikov 2003, 2004; Mochanov 2009). The volume by Mochanov and Fedoseeva (2008) and translation of Mochanov's (1976) review paper (see Mochanov 1986) contain the essence of their research in Yakutia and neighbouring territories from the 1960s to the 1990s. The description of the still enigmatic Diring Yuriakh site, accepted by Mochanov as the oldest in Asia and one of the oldest in the entire world, can be found in Mochanov (1993). Research on the Palaeolithic of Chukotka and the Kolyma River basin, conducted mainly after 1980, is summarised in Dikov (1997), Kiryak (2010) (see also Kiryak 1996), and Slobodin (2014). The descriptions of Palaeolithic sites in other parts of Northeast Asia, mentioned in Kashin's book, are also available (Khlobystin 2005; Ineshin and Tetenkin 2017; Slobodin *et al.* 2017). A compendium volume edited by West (1996) is an excellent source on the Palaeolithic archaeology and palaeoecology of Beringia (including both Siberia and North America). The annotated bibliography of Palaeolithic studies in Beringia, compiled by Beaudoin and Reintjes (1994), is also valuable for any student of the Northeast Asian Palaeolithic. As for North America, three books—among many others—are very useful for general information

about the oldest archaeological complexes (see Haynes 2002; Hoffecker and Elias 2007; Meltzer 2009).

More summary sources are now available for the international scholarly community about the Palaeolithic of Northeast Asia. The pressure flaking technique, initially established by Flenniken (1987) for the Dyuktai culture, was additionally studied by Gómez Coutouly (2016, 2018). Issues on microblade complexes in Northeast Asia and North America are examined in two edited volumes, by Kuzmin *et al.* (2007) and Goebel and Buvit (2011), and in a review paper by Keates *et al.* (2019). Results and problems of the chronology and palaeoenvironment of the Northeast Asian Palaeolithic are summarised in Kuzmin and Orlova (1998), Vasil'ev *et al.* (2002), Pitul'ko and Pavlova (2016), Pitulko and Pavlova (2020), Pavlova and Pitulko (2020), Kuzmin (2017), and Chlachula *et al.* (2021). The results of DNA analysis of rare Palaeolithic human fossils in Northeast Asia can be found in Sikora *et al.* (2019).

We are grateful to several colleagues for their cooperation in our work. As always, *Archaeopress* and personally D. Davison and R. Makjanić enthusiastically supported its publication. N. Coppock-Bland helped with copy-editing of the text. Photographs of the landscapes and sites in Northeast Asia were provided by A.A. Galanin, N.A. Krenke, V.V. Pitulko, and I.E. Vorobei. V.V. Kalinina—V.A. Kashin's widow—supplied a photograph of the book's author.

We sincerely hope that this volume will serve as a useful source on the history of Palaeolithic studies in Northeast Siberia in the twentieth century. Now, the translation of all major Russian books on this subject is completed. *Finis coronat opus.*

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## Introduction

The Palaeolithic of Northeast Asia (Figure 1) is a relatively young phenomenon in archaeology. Until recently, the opinion was that people settled there rather late (in the Neolithic). It seemed incredible to talk about the history of a Palaeolithic population of one of the harshest areas for life on the planet. However, thanks to the works of A.P. Okladnikov, N.N. Dikov, Y.A. Mochanov, S.A. Fedoseeva, A.N. Alekseev and other researchers, the Palaeolithic of Northeast Asia became a reality and received universal recognition.

By the beginning of the 1980s, numerous sites had been discovered and studied there (Figure 2), which

made it possible to identify major cultural complexes and create a number of original concepts regarding their appearance, features of development, and place and role in the prehistory of the Northern Asian and American continents. Their meaning is preserved at the present time (early 2000s) in the appropriate chronological framework.

The results of these studies attract a lot of attention and produce a wide variety of opinions and assessments among specialists. The attitude towards them is expressed in a range from full recognition (Boriskovsky 1980; and others) to rejection of the scientific



Figure 1. Northeast Asia (shaded) (after Kashin 2003, p. 152; modified).

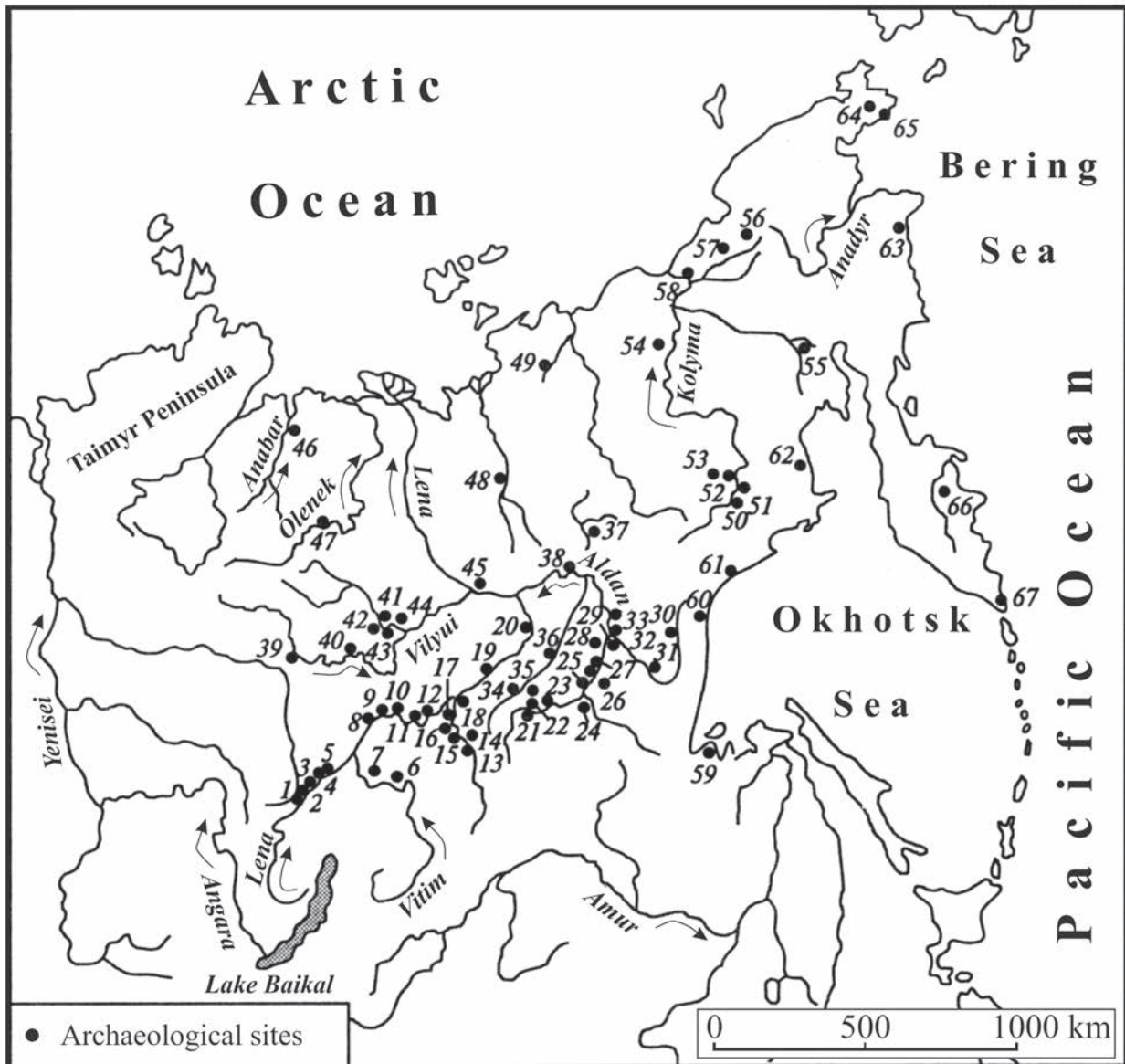


Figure 2. Distribution of Palaeolithic and presumably Palaeolithic sites in Northeast Asia (Okladnikov 1953a) (after Kashin 2003, p. 207; modified). 1 – Mironovo; 2 – Korshunovo; 3 – Chastinskaya; 4 – Dubrovino; 5 – Solyanka; 6 – Avdeikha; 7 – Bolshaya Severnaya; 8 – Khamra; 9 – Gamataiskaya; 10 – Nyuya; 11 – Tochilnaya; 12 – Daban; 13 – Ytylakh; 14 – Kurung; 15 – Novyi Leten A, B, and C; 16 – Malaya Dzhikimda; 17 – Bolshaya Kyuske; 18 – Teryut; 19 – Markhachan; 20 – Kullaty; 21 – Ust-Timpton I; 22 – Sumnagin I and III; 23 – Tumulur; 24 – Alysardakh; 25 – Belkachi I; 26 – Dyuktai Cave, Ust-Dyuktai I; 27 – Bilir I, Ust-Bilir II; 28 – Ust-Mil I, II, and III; 29 – Verkhne-Troitskaya, Nizhne-Troitskaya; 30 – Yakimgzha II; 31 – Kyra-Krestyakh; 32 – Ezhantsy; 33 – Eldikan; 34 – Ust-Kyunkyu; 35 – Buyaga; 36 – Dyamalakh; 37 – Tomto; 38 – Ikhine I and II; 39 – Ust-Chirkuo; 40 – Ust-Syuldyukar; 41 – Kyuskyunde; 42 – Kharya; 43 – Kuta; 44 – Talanda; 45 – Kitchan; 46 – Tebyulyakh; 47 – Olenek; 48 – Kuranakh I; 49 – Berelekh; 50 – Siberdik; 51 – Kongo; 52 – Maiorych; 53 – Shilo; 54 – Bochanut; 55 – Bolshoi Elgakhchan I; 56 – Tytyl I-IV; 57 – Yagodnaya II and III; 58 – Panteleikha I-VIII, Pirs; 59 – Torom; 60 – Amka; 61 – Kukhtui III; 62 – Utyrchuk; 63 – Inaskvaam I and II; 64 – Chelkun II and III; 65 – Kurupka; 66 – Ushki I, II, IV and V; 67 – Lopatka.

significance of many discovered sites and historical reconstructions based on factual material (Fainberg 1986).

In such a situation, it seems important and necessary to turn to the history of the study of the Palaeolithic in Northeast Asia as a form of scientific research that

helps to establish the measure of the truth of the hypotheses and propositions put forth, their strengths and weaknesses, and the true state of knowledge of the problem. In this sense, the author shares the opinion that "... the essence of any phenomenon can be understood only by knowing its history and the history of its study" (Formozov 1975, p. 11). It

is also important that a retrospective view, which comprehensively restores the process of scientific knowledge, contributes not just to the most objective assessment of the achieved progress but also opens up prospects for further improvement of scientific understanding. Science cannot develop successfully without deep knowledge of all accumulated theoretical, methodological, and factual information, without taking into account successes and achievements, and without striving to identify and correct shortcomings and flaws. Therefore, it is not by chance that one of the requirements of modern archaeology is the creation of chronicles of archaeological research, both for the study of individual regions of the country and for the study of particular epochs (Formozov 1975).

The first steps in this direction have already been taken. Historical research on the archaeology of certain regions of Northern Asia has been conducted by Zykov (1972), Arkhipov (1973a), and Demin (1981). Case studies have also appeared. This is, first, the fundamental two-volume work of Larichev (1969, 1972), devoted to the history of research and ideas on the Palaeolithic of Northern, Central, and East Asia up to 1951. The historiographical section in Abramova's (1979a) monograph on the Palaeolithic of the Yenisei River has an independent research character. The work of Konstantinov (1983) on the development of views of the Palaeolithic of Western Transbaikalia is noteworthy. As for the history of the study of the Northeast Asian Palaeolithic, so far only some information is known, summarised in the works of Okladnikov (1953a), Zykov (1972), Mochanov (1992), and partly Arkhipov (1973a). Bibliographic references are contained in the publications of Dikov (1967b, 1970c, 1975b), Mochanov and Fedoseeva (1980), Fedoseeva (1971), Safronov (1976), Alekseev (1982, 1987), Argunov (1982), and Kistenev (1982). The activities of the Lena Historical-Archaeological Expedition (hereafter - LIAE), led by A.P. Okladnikov (see Zykov 1972; Larichev 1972), are highlighted. However, a special generalising work on the history of Palaeolithic studies in Northeast Asia has not yet been written.

The purpose of this work is to show the origin, development, and state of Palaeolithic studies in Northeast Asia by the early 1980s. In this regard, it seemed important to do the following:

- to define criteria and periodise the process of studying the Palaeolithic of the region;
- to give an assessment of each selected period;
- to examine in detail the history of field research and the process of accumulation of factual material both in archaeology and in related disciplines – geology, palaeontology, palynology, and radiocarbon dating;

- to determine, if possible, the quality of sources, the degree of their informativeness, and their importance to modern science;
- to study from which specific sources and in what measure certain historical reconstructions and generalisations followed in different periods of study;
- to show the evolution of research techniques and ways and means of developing modern ideas;
- to trace and analyse the development of the problems in Palaeolithic studies, as well as theoretical views, concepts, and ideas of various scholars on such key issues for Palaeolithic research of Northeast Asia as the chronology of sites, the identification of archaeological cultures, origin, areas, and relationships determining their place and role in the Palaeolithic of Northern Asia and America; and
- to compare the concepts of researchers and identify the most difficult issues in the study of the Palaeolithic of the region under consideration.

It was considered methodologically justified to look at each problem from the point of view of how a phenomenon appeared, passed through what main stages in its development, and a look at its current state. It also seemed expedient to show a parallel display of practical and theoretical research, most of all revealing cause-and-effect relationships and the dialectic of the unity of the empirical and theoretical knowledge.

The chronological framework of this volume covers the years 1940–1980. The lower limit is set by the time of the discovery of the first traces of the Palaeolithic in the region. These finds were not unexpected; they had been initiated by the entire course of the previous Russian and, in particular, Siberian Palaeolithic studies. Therefore, the lower boundary is preceded by a necessary brief excursion—starting from 1871, the year of the discovery of the Palaeolithic in Russia—regarding some prerequisites for the formation of Palaeolithic research in Northeast Asia. The upper boundary is more tentative. Here the author encountered the same problem that Larichev (1972, p. 8) writes about, namely, the difficulties of “... accurately drawing the upper boundary, given the continuity of the research process, both field and general theoretical ...”. The author agrees with Larichev that “... in these conditions it is most convenient to consider the issuance of large publications in which the results of a more or less completed cycle of works carried out over a relatively long period of time are summed up as a kind of boundary” (Larichev 1972, p. 8). For Northeast Asia, such a threshold can be considered the publications of monographs by Mochanov (1977), Dikov (1977a, 1979d), and edited volumes on Palaeolithic topics: *Novye*

*Arkheologicheskie Pamyatniki Severa Dalnego Vostoka* [New Archaeological Sites of the Northern Far East] (1979), *Novoe v Arkheologii Yakutii* [New in the Archaeology of Yakutia] (1980), and *Noveishie Dannye po Arkheologii Severa Dalnego Vostoka* [The Latest Data on the Archaeology of the Northern Far East] (1980).

This work uses published and archival data and archaeological collections as well as the authors' experience and knowledge accumulated during long-term excavations of all Palaeolithic sites in the Aldan River basin.