

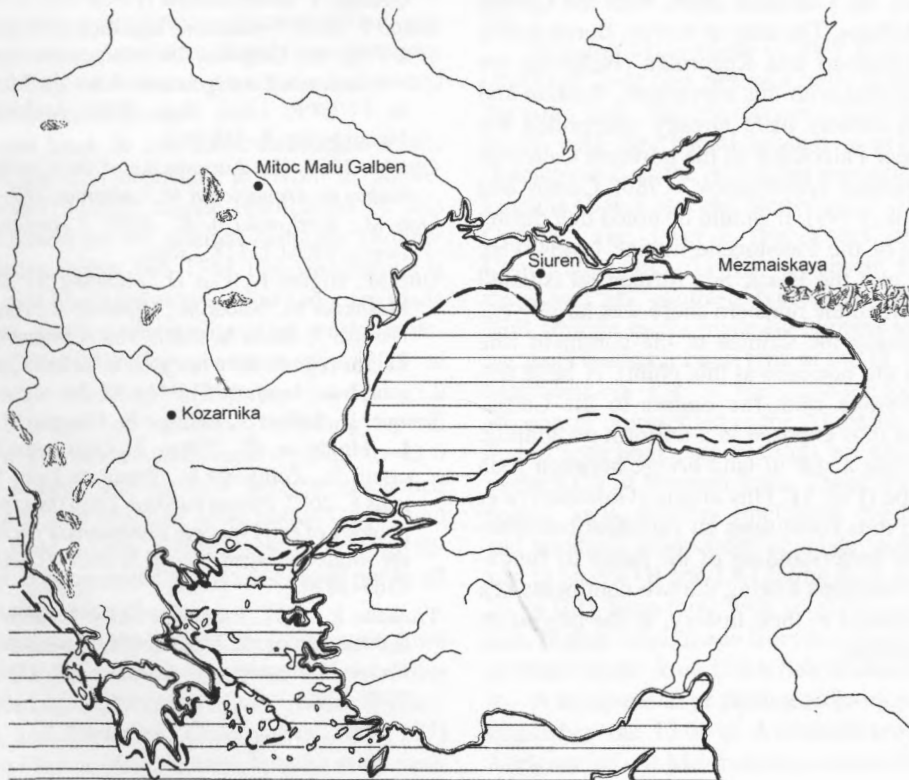
COMMENTS ON MEZMAISKAYA (NORTH CAUCASUS)

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The recent publication of the upper levels at Mezmaiskaya has made it possible to better understand the Early Upper Paleolithic in this cave and, more generally, for area in the Caucasus region (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006, specifically *Eurasian Prehistory* Vol. 4: 2: 2006: 43–78). In particular, the early dates ($36,100 \pm 2,300$ BP) demonstrate the importance of this site in the study of exchanges between the Zagros and the Crimea. The abundant figures clearly show the technological and typological affinities of these assemblages. The authors insist on the abrupt nature of the appearance of these industries that break from

the roots of the local Mousterian, as demonstrated in the Georgian Caucasus (Nioradze and Otte, 2000; Bar Yosef *et al.*, 2006; Kozłowski, 1969). In effect, evidence of Mousterian techniques is rarely documented on the plates (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 23: 12–13) and the assemblage suggests a rapid change, apparently due to a wave of migration of anatomically modern humans across Europe (crania from Oase, in Romania; Trinkaus, 2007; Rougier *et al.*, 2007).

At Mezmaiskaya, the lithic techniques employed first demonstrate the preparation of short blades, extracted from multidirectional cores with



crest preparation (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 20: 5–10). Tablets were also removed, either from blade cores or from the fronts of thick endscrapers (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 20: 11–12). Among the dihedral burins, certain specimens have multiple twisted removals (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 23: 1–2). The toolkit includes endscrapers with a high front and at least one made on an Aurignacian blade (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 23: 11). Bladelet tools are abundant and include Arjeneh points (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 22: 1–11) and bladelets with Dufour retouch (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 22: 12–18). Figure 22:19, is, it appears, inverted. Bone tools are also abundant (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 24) and perhaps include a sagaie fragment (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006: Fig. 25: 25).

All of these criteria clearly indicate the presence of Aurignacian assemblages in this part of the Caucasus, comparable to those observed in the Zagros (Otte and Kozłowski, 2007; Otte *et al.*, 2007) and the Crimea (Demidenko and Otte, 2007; Noiret, 2005). Such a presence seems to confirm an east-to-west axis joining the Zagros Mountains, the Caucasus chain, with the Crimea and the Balkans. The sites of Siuren, Buran-Kaya, Mitoc (Romania) and Kozarnika (Bulgaria) are thus associated with this movement. Russian and Ukrainian authors have already interpreted the Early Upper Paleolithic in the northern Caucasus in this manner (Amirkanov, 1986; Cohen and Stepanchuk, 1999). It should be noted that during this stage of the Pleistocene marine levels were very low and the Black Sea formed an isolated lake for which the northern shore was largely exposed, joining the Crimea to the continent (the Azov Sea did not exist at this point). A large terrestrial passage from the Zagros to the Carpathians was thus exposed in a uniform geographic area, forming a sort of land bridge between Asia and Europe (Fig. 1). This article (Golovanova *et al.*, 2006) thus constitutes an excellent contribution to our understanding of the range of fundamental phenomena linking the two continents at a crucial moment in their history, at the origins of the Aurignacian.

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