

P.M. Dolukhanov*

**PREHISTORIC ETHNICITY IN THE NORTH-EAST OF EUROPE
– COMMENTS ON THE PAPER BY MILTON G. NUNEZ**

Numerous recently published synthetic works pose the problems (or on which basis the problems may be posed) related to prehistoric ethnicity in northern and eastern Europe. I mean in the first place, publications by Soffer (1985), J.K. Kozłowski (1986), Zvelebil (1986), Matiskainen (1987), Taavitsainen (1987) and some others. The paper by Nunez (1987), beyond any doubt, belongs to this category.

All the above cited works tend to reconstruct both the palaeoethnicity and the social pattern of past societies, based primarily on newly secured archaeological records, using in the fullest way the palaeoenvironmental evidence. One notes a deficiency common to the greater part of these publications: with few exceptions, they seem to ignore theoretical items. Without recurring to these, in the present writer's view, it is hardly possible to deal with ethnicity related problems.

Among the all-important theoretical issues, one should especially mention the following ones: 1) relevance of archaeological evidence; in other words: what kind of ethnic reconstruction one may achieve relying on archaeological evidence; 2) definition of key archaeological and ethnical units; 3) categorical interrelation of these units.

Referring to another paper (Dolukhanov 1988) where these and related issues are dealt with in greater detail, I would like to stress here the following points.

David Clarke (1968:188) has provided the most comprehensive (although not the only possible) definition of (archaeological) culture (AC): 'a polythetic set of specific and comprehensive artefact-type categories which consist-

ently recur together in assemblages within a limited geographical area'. On the same page one finds a definition of another key concept, that of technocomplex (TC): 'a group of cultures characterized by assemblages sharing a polythetic range but differing specific types of the general families of artefact-types, shared as a widely diffused and interlinked response to common factors in environment, economy and technology. . .'

One may see, that both units are purely empirical ones, being distinguished by different sets of attributes. TC distinguished by attributes, related to environment, material production and subsistence pattern normally embrace large geographical areas and by definition, may include several ACs. Nonetheless, one may envisage theoretically opposite cases: a single AC including several TCs.

As for ethnicity, in the writer's view, it may be seen as a population megaentity resulting primarily from the spatial distribution of productive activities and from adaptation to a specific environment; as a result it displays peculiarities in social and economic factors, in culture, in communication and in corresponding symbolic systems.

Regarding the crucial issue of mutual relationship of the above mentioned categories, one should stress the point that there exists a large degree of consensus among researchers as about the lack of direct connections between archaeological entities (e.g. AC or TC), on the one hand, and ethnicities, on the other. As Taavitsainen (1987:228) rightly puts it 'it is not possible to link any separate body of prehistoric find material to any historically known ethnic group'. This inadequacy is mainly due to the specificity in the formation of the material culture assemblages. The emergence of these assemblages was much affected by such factors, as local peculiarities in the production of material goods (traditions);

* Institute of Archaeology (Leningrad Branch), Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Dvortsovaya nab. 18, 191065 Leningrad, USSR.

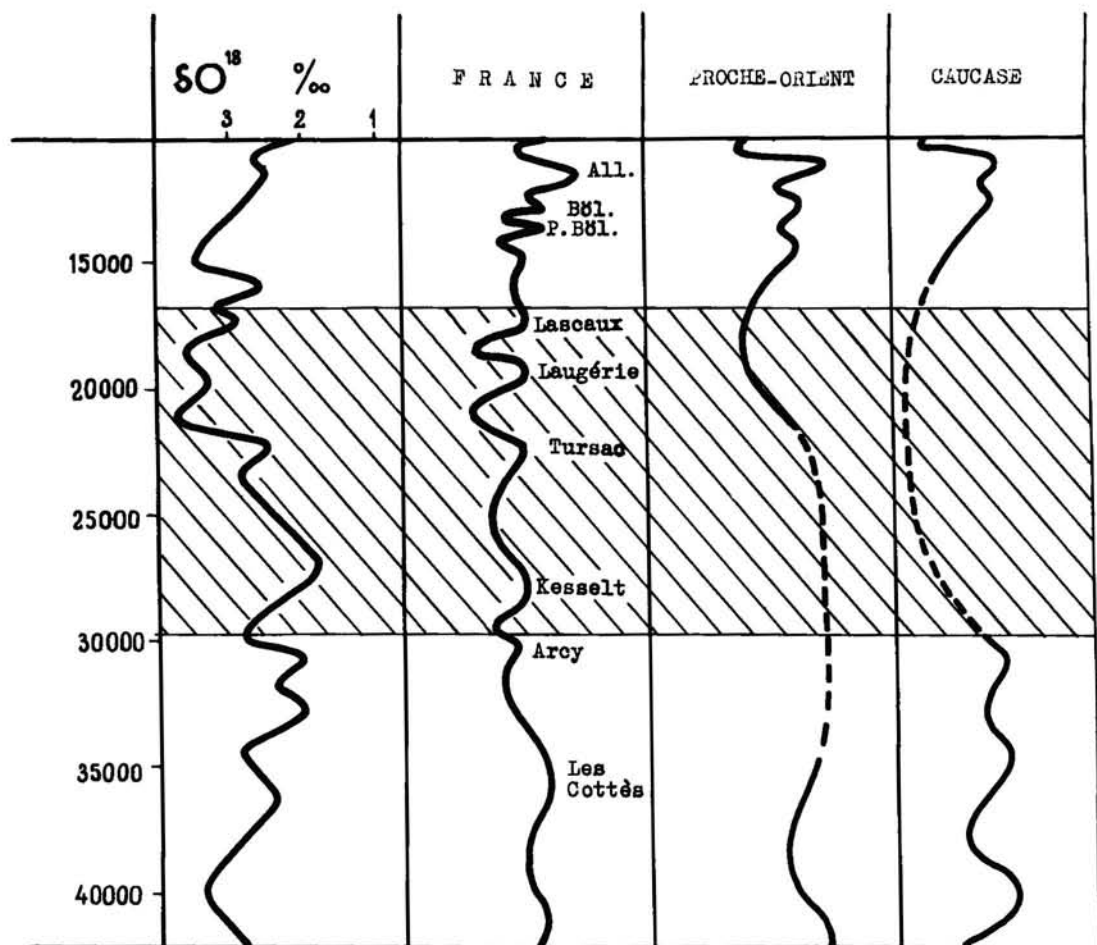


Fig. 1. Climatic fluctuations in Europe and in the Near East during Upper Pleistocene. Hatched area: Upper Palaeolithic.

long distance trade and exchange pattern in raw material and products; mutual penetration and dialogue of cultures, as well as numerous other factors, each of which deserves special attention.

Of no less importance are information losses due to 'archaeologization' of living culture, to the retrieval and to processing of archaeological records (Gardin 1979; Galley 1986).

As follows from the above said, reconstruction of ethnical processes based on archaeological evidence necessitates a complicated processing. The all-important elements of this are: modelling (simulation) of social, economic, cultural etc. processes responsible for the emergence of archaeologically observable units; evaluation of similarity of such units in time and space as indications of their capacity to the transfer of information. One should especially emphasize the

point that palaeoethnical reconstructions may be successfully tried on the basis of high ranking empirical units only. These units feature general pattern of adaptation of large population entities. In some cases, these units may correspond to TCs, but normally, these are of even greater rank.

Dwelling on these premises, we shall examine some questions raised in Dr. Nunez's article. The writer is basically right when he outlines the ecological setting of the Russian Plain during the maximum of the Last Glaciation. It particularly concerns his emphasis on the uniqueness of plant communities and the multienvironmental mosaic (p. 4). One should only specify that the climatic deterioration that has ultimately led to the establishment of the pleniglacial environment, had started in the eastern Europe ca. 27–26 Kyr fol-

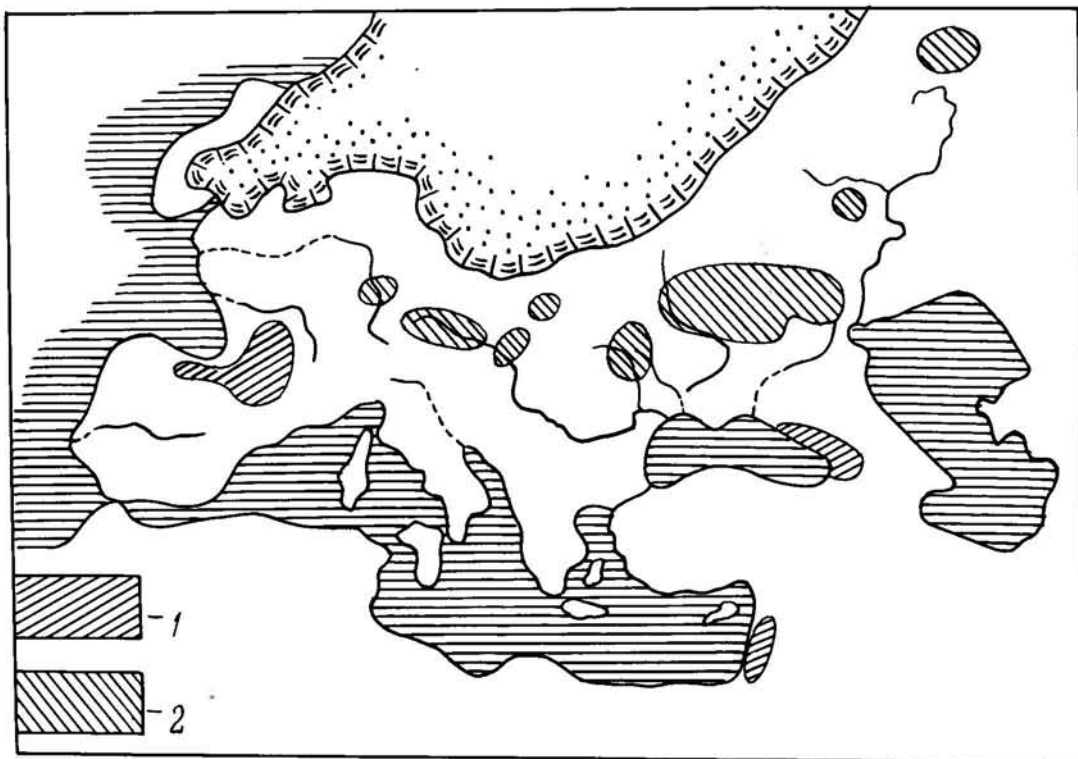


Fig. 2. Upper Palaeolithic concentration zones. 1 – Mediterranean zone; 2 – Periglacial zone.

lowing the end of Dunayavo Interstadial (Arslanov et al. 1981:12–27). This event corresponds to the end of Kesselt in Western Europe ca 27 Kyr (Leroi–Gourhan 1977). The establishment of pleniglacial conditions in Europe coincided with the deep regression of the Ocean and with an hyperarid phase in subtropical latitudes. As Nunez rightly points out, the pleniglacial conditions persisted until ca 15 Kyr (Fig. 1).

During the above mentioned time-span one may distinguish two concentration zones of Upper Palaeolithic sites in a vast area including both Europe and the Mediterranean basin *sensu lato*. The sites making up these zones are distinguishable by their ecological setting, by technical features of the tool-kit, by subsistence patterns and mode of life of social groups which had left behind these sites. The first zone (referred to as 'Mediterranean') includes the southwest of France, Cantabria, Liguria, scarcely populated Apennines and Balkans, the Levant and the western Caucasus. The second zone ('Periglacial') includes the sites situated in central and eastern Europe: from the middle Rhine in the west up to Petchora and southern Urals in the east (Fig. 2).

The Upper Palaeolithic economy in the Periglacial zone was primarily based on the hunting of mammoth supplemented by arctic species in the north, and by steppic ones in the south and in the west. The settlement pattern featured open-air sites situated on river terraces near lake-like widenings of flood-plains. A certain degree of hierarchisation is obvious (Soffer 1985): a number of large residential centres with indices of permanent or semi-permanent occupation is distinguishable.

Upper Palaeolithic industries within the Periglacial zone feature complexity and variability, on which basis a number of ACs are recognised there. At the same time, one notes a number of common typological elements in the tool-kit: e.g. leaf-points – pointes à face plane, shouldered points, geometric microliths, as well as artistic manifestations, particularly feminine figurines (Kozłowski 1986:149).

The origin of the Upper Palaeolithic in the Periglacial zone is rather obscure, in the present state of our knowledge. Certain researchers (Amirkhanov et al. 1980) report similarities in early Upper Palaeolithic assemblages with local

Late Mousterian industries. It was particularly the case of Dniester – Prut basins.

Taking into account the cultural continuity which may be followed up from the Upper Palaeolithic in the Periglacial zone up to civilizations which relationships to the Finno-Ugrian ethnicity seem to be positively established (Dolukhanov 1986; Nunez 1987), one may imply that the Upper Palaeolithic Periglacial zone as a whole was populated by direct predecessors of Proto-Uralian speakers.

It is well known, that Gy. Laszló (1961) has identified the Proto-Uralian speakers with the Swiderian epi-palaeolithic group. According to our present knowledge, Swiderian was one of the TCs, which were spread in the North-European plains in the Late Glacial times, ca 15–10 Kyr. Emergence of these groups may be convincingly explained in term of a readaptation to the Late Glacial amelioration of climate. The Nunez's 'marginal' model may be successfully tested in this case.

As far as the Mediterranean zone is concerned, in my opinion, it may be identified with a hypothetical Basque-Caucasian linguistic group. Arguments in favour of this hypothesis are cited elsewhere (Dolukhanov 1988).

It is sufficient to note here that there are archaeological data evidencing contacts between two Upper Palaeolithic zones. J. Kozłowski (1988:193) reports a number of Central European typological elements in Late Perigordian industries. It is worth mentioning in this respect that Hubschmid (1969:40) wrote about syntactic similarities in the Basque and Uralian languages. If it is really the case, one may see there both archaeological and linguistic indications of contacts between two groups of the primitive population of Europe.

These are but few comments I wanted to make on some of the topics raised in the most interesting and instructive paper by M. Nunez.

REFERENCES

- Amirkhanov Kh.A., M.V. Anivovich, I.A. Borziak 1980. K probleme perehoda k verkhnemu paleolitu na Russkoi ravnine /The problem of transition to Upper Palaeolithic on the Russian Plain/ *Sovetskaya arkeologiya* 2:265–23.
- Arslanov Kh.A., S.L. Breslav, E.P. Zarrina, O.M. Znamenskaya, I.I. Krasnov, D.B. Malakhovsky, E.A. Spiridonova. 1981. Klimatostratigrafiya srednego valdaya Severo-Zapada i Centra Russkoi ravniny /Climatostratigraphy of the Middle Valdai in the North-West and Centre of the Russian Plain/. In: *Pleistocenovyie oledneniya Vostochno-Evropetskoi ravniny /Pleistocene Glaciations of the East-European Plain/*. Moscow: Nauka: 12–27.
- Clarke D. 1968. *Analytical Archaeology*. London: Methuen.
- Dolukhanov P.M. 1968. Natural environment and the Holocene settlement pattern in the north-western part of the USSR – *Fennoscandia archaeologica*, III:3–16.
- Dolukhanov P.M. 1988. Cultural and ethnical processes in prehistory as seen through the evidence of archaeology and related disciplines. In: S.J. Shennan (ed.) *Archaeological approach to cultural identity*. London: G. Allen Unwin.
- Galley A. 1986. *L'Archéologie de demain*. Paris: Belfond.
- Gardin J.-Cl. 1979. *Une archéologie théorique*. Paris: Hachette.
- Hubschmid J. 1960. *Mediterrane Substratum – Romanica Helvetica*, 70.
- Kozłowski J.K. 1986. The Gravettian in Central and Eastern Europe – *Advances in World Archaeology*, 5:131–200.
- Laszló Gy. 1961. *Östörténetünk legkorábbi szakaszai*. Budapest.
- Leroi-Gourhan Arl. 1977. Les climats et les plantes et les hommes (Quaternaire supérieur de l'Europe occidentale) – *Studia geologica polonica*, LII:249–261.
- Matiskainen H. 1987. Die mesolithische Steinzeit im Binnenseegebiet Finnlands – *Fennoscandia archaeologica*, IV:19–34.
- Nunez M. 1987. A model for the early settlement of Finland. – *Fennoscandia archaeologica*, IV: 3–18.
- Soffer O. 1985. *The Upper Palaeolithic of the Central Russian Plain*. Orlando: Academic Press.
- Taavitsainen J.-P. 1987. Wide-range hunting and swidden cultivation as prerequisites of Iron Age colonization in Finland – *Suomen Antropologi*, 4 1987:213–233.
- Zvelebil M.ed. 1986. *Hunters in transition*. Cambridge University Press.