

New Approaches to the Study of Early Upper Paleolithic 'Transitional' Industries in Western Eurasia. Transitions Great and Small

Julien Riel-Salvatore and Geoffrey A. Clark (eds.)

British Archaeological Reports International Series 1620. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007, 180 pp. (paperback), £36. ISBN-13: 9781407300320.

Reviewed by LEONID VISHNYATSKY

Institute for the History of Material Culture, Dvortsovaya nab. 18, St. Petersburg, 191186, RUSSIA; paleo@i8699.spb.edu

The book under review is dedicated to the memory of Professor Amilcare Bietti (1937–2006). It represents a collection of papers given in the symposium "Upper Paleolithic 'Transitional' Industries: New Questions, New Methods", held during the 67th annual meetings of the Society for American Archaeology in 2002. Altogether, there are 11 papers, including the introductory chapter in which the editors summarize the content of the volume. Judging by the reference lists, most of the contributions were updated before publication.

The editors preferred not to group the articles into thematic sections, and it is only for the purposes of reviewing that I divide them here into three blocks. The first one is mainly concentrated on the Chatelperronian and related subjects, the second comprises papers devoted to particular regions and local Late Middle Paleolithic and Early Upper Paleolithic industries, and the third can be very conditionally designated as methodological.

The 'Chatelperronian block' includes three papers, which differ in their scope and objectives. L.G. Straus in his brief essay, "Even the notion of a 'transitional industry' is a suspect typological construct," questions both the validity of the notion of "transitional industry" in general and the reality of all the 'litho-cultures' labeled by this term, in particular. The latter are just "archaeological constructs," "typological pigeon-holes," which, he thinks, "are generally assumed to be 'real' entities in some sense equivalent to self-identified ethnic groups." Even the best studied of these constructs, the Chatelperronian, is not enough 'unitary' and is thus very far from being as 'real' as the Linear Bandkeramic or Cardial cultures are. I am not sure if there are many archaeologists nowadays who would equate litho-cultures (or even ware-cultures) with 'self-identified ethnic groups,' and while I agree that Chatelperronian, as well as Uluzzian, Szeletian, Lincombian, etc., are our constructs, I doubt that we can now or will be able in the future to dispense with constructs of this kind. After all, it is thanks to typological constructs and pigeon-holes that we can understand each other and discuss the issues like those raised by Straus. And, when discussing it, let us not lump all 'transitional' industries together as equally vague. Yes, all of them are 'accidents of history' (as G.A. Clark notes in the concluding chapter), but some of these accidents appear to have been lucky enough to stand the test of time and new data. The Chatelperronian is definitely one of such 'lucky accidents'. While it is quite possible that some of the assemblages mentioned by Straus were ascribed to

this industry mistakenly, its integrity (techno-typological, geographical, chronological), continuity with the Mousterian of Acheulian Tradition (MTA), and association with Neanderthals make it for the time being a sound archaeological culture and a useful analytical unit.

No wonder that F. Harrold in his paper, "On the fate of the Neanderthals and the Middle-Upper Paleolithic transition in Western Europe," does not hesitate to continue to use this 'suspect typological construct' in discussing the principal models proposed to explain the archaeological record of the transition period. He presents a concise and thoughtful overview of the evidence that was available by 2004 and makes a number of interesting points on different aspects of the theme. In the final count, he gives preference to the 'population dispersal model' and finds it instructive to compare the rise and spread of the Upper Paleolithic with the rise and spread of the Neolithic, following the track trodden by O. Bar-Yosef. However, the population dispersal model fails to answer why in some parts of East Asia and America the 'Neolithic Revolution' started at about the same time as or just slightly later than in the Near East. Neither can it explain, in my view, how it came to be that the first demonstrably Upper Paleolithic assemblages 'popped up' nearly simultaneously in such remote areas as the Near East, Central Europe, the Russian Plain, the Altai Mountains, and the Transbaikal. In this sense, it seems to be the 'indigenist model' that fits the data best of all, but the inevitable implication of this model is that there must have been some universal cause(s) effective over a considerable part of the Stone Age oecumene (inhabited world) and capable of generating similar trends in cultural development. What these causes were remains obscure.

The paper by G. Lucas, J.-Ph. Rigaud, J.F. Simek, and M. Soressi, first published in Zilhão and d'Errico (2003) and since then freely available on the net, is devoted to the Chatelperronian assemblage from Layer B of Grotte XVI at Cénac-et-Saint-Julien, Dordogne, France. The authors use various kinds of data to demonstrate the principal homogeneity of this industry and succeed in doing so.

The regional reviews are represented by four contributions. A. Bietti and F. Negrino consider the late Mousterian, 'Transitional', and early Aurignacian assemblages of Continental Italy, paying primary attention to the Uluzzian. They stress the absence of Uluzzian assemblages in the north of Italy, question Palma di Cesnola's scheme of the evolutionary sequence within this industry, and put forward the idea that the assemblage of Layer 2 from Grotta della Fabbrica

should be considered late Mousterian rather than Uluzzian. The last point does not seem well substantiated. Judging by the illustrations, there are at least three curved backed tools (Figure 5.9: 7–9) among 37 retouched artifacts, and scaled pieces are as numerous (over 80) as one would expect them to be in an Uluzzian collection rather than in a Mousterian one. Unfortunately, the paper is poorly edited. For example, all references to Figures 5.10 and 5.11 on pages 50–54 are confusing and relate in fact to Figures 5.8 and 5.9.

I. Karvanić in his contribution presents an overview of the Middle/Upper Paleolithic interface in the northeastern part of the Adriatic region. He briefly summarizes the data obtained from the main Croatian sites (Vindija, Velica Pećina, Mujina Pećina, Sandalja II), and supplements this summary with brief characteristics of some selected Slovenian and Bosnian assemblages relevant to the subject.

D. Adams analyses the relationship between the Szeletian and Aurignacian assemblages in Hungary and the rest of Central Europe and concludes that the former “represent special-purpose activity sites” associated with the latter. The conclusion is based on chronometric, topographic, and faunal evidence, as well as on the analysis of the patterns of raw material procurement and utilization. In this connection, it is interesting to note that an assemblage displaying—from the excavator’s point of view—a meld of “Szeletoid and Aurignacoid features” and occurring in clear geological conditions has recently been reported from the Upper Kama basin in the extreme northeast of Europe (Pavlov 2009).

D. Olszewski after discussing a number of general issues associated with the study of the Early Upper Paleolithic, provides a short summary of the Levantine industries usually considered to exemplify the Transition, and then dwells in more detail on the genesis of the Zagros Aurignacian (aka Baradostian). She shows that, unlike the Levantine Early Upper Paleolithic industries, the earliest Aurignacian assemblages of the rockshelter of Warwasi (Levels AA–LL) contain numerous Middle Paleolithic elements not only in technology, but also in typology and may thus be considered as an example of a ‘transition.’ Similar observations have been made recently on the materials of Yafteh Cave, also in the Zagros region (e.g., Otte and Kozłowski 2004).

The ‘methodological block’ consists of two papers. J. Riel-Salvatore and C.M. Barton use a seemingly simple quantitative method proposed by Barton in 1998 to reveal diachronic changes in technological organization patterns and land-use strategies. The method consists of plotting the frequency of retouched tools in an assemblage against its ‘artifact volumetric density,’ defined as the quantity of chipped stone per cubic meter of sediment. The relationship (r) between the two variables is expected to be negative (the higher the tool frequency the lower the artifact volumetric density, and *vice versa*), and the resulting pattern, best distinguished when all the assemblages under study are plotted on the same graph, is thought to reflect shifts between more expedient (low tool frequency against high artifact volumetric density) and more curated (high tool frequency against low artifact volumetric density) ar-

tifact use. Assuming that expedient assemblages tend to be associated with logistical mobility, and curated ones are more often a consequence of residential mobility, one can use the obtained patterns also to assess changes in land-use strategies. In theory, everything looks very interesting and promising, but in practice, the use of the method is associated with numerous difficulties. In addition to the problems that can be caused by post-depositional disturbances or inadequate excavation techniques, there is a problem of sampling, which seems to be particularly difficult to overcome. Different areas of the same cultural layer can greatly differ in both tool frequency and artifact volumetric density. This is the case with most open-air sites and big caves, and may well be the case with many small caves, too. Because even small caves (to say nothing of bigger sites) are rarely excavated completely, the frequency/density values will often depend on mere chance. Maybe this is why the practical outcome of the method used so far looks rather ambiguous. The authors apply it to a dozen multilayered Spanish and Italian sites (Middle and Upper Paleolithic) and find the results satisfying, but, in fact, nearly half of their graphs seem to show positive rather than negative relationships between the two basic variables. The interpretations of the graphs also can be debated. For instance, while the pattern obtained for Salt (Figure 6.3) is said to answer the model expectations, and formally speaking this is so, one cannot help noting that for five of the six studied assemblages (those on the right side of the graph) r definitely is positive. It is only at the expense of one assemblage at the left upper end of the graph that the total r value becomes negative. Using the data obtained for the Middle and Upper Paleolithic layers of Gorham’s cave, the authors assert, that “expedient assemblages for both periods correspond to phases of climatic deterioration, while curated assemblages indicate milder climatic conditions.” However, their Figure 6.2 clearly shows that the last and second high peak of tool frequency falls exactly at the beginning of the Last Glacial Maximum, whereas the last and highest peak of artifact volumetric density corresponds to the early part of OIS 3.

While most papers included in the volume are based to a large extent on the authors’ previous publications and reproduce their usual ideas and arguments, M.S. Bisson presents a brand new work devoted to hafting in the Middle Paleolithic. He starts with the classification of the possible methods and functions of hafting, provides a summary of the available evidence for the hafting of stone tools during the Middle Paleolithic, and concludes that this evidence is indicative of “episodic rather than incremental technological change, and limited transmission of innovations across time and space.” In addition, Bisson attempts to use what he calls attribute analysis to identify the lithic artifacts, which were intentionally modified for hafting. According to his analysis, there are tens of such objects in the assemblage from Layer B1 at Skhūl Cave. This may well be the case, but needs further confirmation. Unfortunately, heavy patination of stone pieces does not allow testing these results by use-wear analysis. It is a pity also that most of the drawings of what are supposed to be tools modified for

hafting look unconvincing, which may be partly due to the fact that there are only dorsal and ventral views, but no profiles (Figure 9.2).

The concluding paper, written by one of the volume editors (G.A. Clark) and entitled "Putting transition research in a broader context," is the largest one and covers a broad range of subjects from purely archaeological to philosophical. The main point, however, is that the culture history approach to the study of the Middle-Upper Paleolithic transition has long out-lived its usefulness and should thus be replaced (the sooner, the better) with an approach based on Neo-Darwinian Theory and principles of evolutionary ecology. In my view, these two perspectives (i.e., culture history and evolutionary ecology) are not at all incompatible, and it would be unwise to reject one of them for the sake of the other.

To conclude, I find most of the papers interesting and thought-provoking. Some of them are an engaging read.

Overall, the volume is a useful addition to the quickly growing body of literature devoted to the study of the Middle to Upper Paleolithic transition.

REFERENCES

- Otte M. and J.K. Kozłowski. 2004. *La place du Baradostien dans l'origine du Paléolithique supérieur d'Eurasie. L'Anthropologie* 108: 395–406.
- Pavlov P.Yu. 2009. Stoyanka Zaozerie – pamyatnik nachalnoi pory verhnego paleolita na severo-vostoke Evropy (Zaozerie – an Early Upper Paleolithic site in the north-east of Europe). *Rossijskaya arkheologia* 1: 5–17 (in Russian).
- Zilhão J. and F. d'Errico (eds.). 2003. *The Chronology of the Aurignacian and of the Transitional Technocomplexes. Dating, Stratigraphies, Cultural Implications*. Lisboa: Instituto Português de Arqueologia (*Trabalhos de Arqueologia* 33).