Stone Age in Northern Armenia

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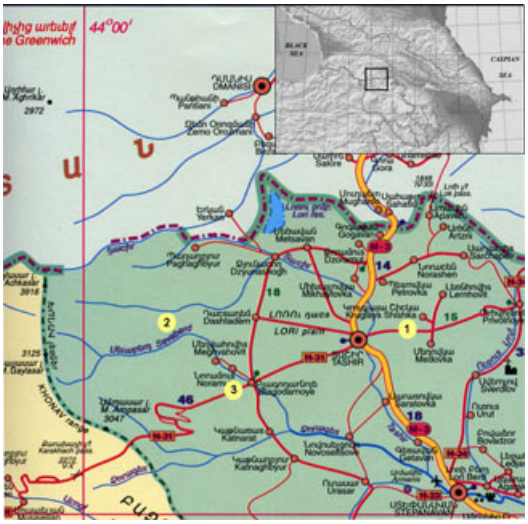


Figure 1. *Location map.*

In 2003-2005 a joint Armenian-Russian archaeological expedition discovered a group of Stone Age sites in the Lori region of Northern Armenia (see *Antiquity* 78, 301, Sept 2004: http://antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/dolukhanov301/). There, two open air sites with Late Acheulean artefacts *in situ* were found (Dashtadem-3 and Blagodarnoe-4) on the south-eastern slope of the Javakhetian Ridge; also Grotto Pechka in the north-western part of the Somkhetian Ridge with Mousterian and Mesolithic artefacts, as well as 15 surface occurrences with Early and Late Acheulean artefacts in the south-eastern part of the Javakhetian Ridge. The excavations of Dashtadem-3 and Grotto Pechka started in 2005. It is worth mentioning that the region under study is next to Georgia and situated 10-30km south of the famous Dmanisi site with palaeoanthropological finds of *Homo ergaster* with a radiometric age of 1.85±0.01 MA.



Figure 2. *Dashtadem-3. 2005 excavation.*

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Figure 3. *Dashtadem-3. Handaxe.*

Dashtadem-3. The site is located 6km west of the village of Dashtadem (Ilmazlu), on a rocky promontory on the left bank of the stream Gyulunbulak (right tributary of the river Tashir), 20m above its bed (1902m above sea level). In October 2005 an area 5x6m was excavated to a depth of 0.8m. The sediments are represented by loamy soil which rests on porphyritic andesine. The rock lies from 0 to 1m beneath the modern surface. The bottom horizon of the loam was not explored in this season. Most stone artefacts were embedded in the lower part of the loam. The artefacts were not redeposited but rather partly displaced in some way in the course of soil formation and erosion of the andesine rock. Organic remains were not preserved. The excavated area yielded 816 Late Acheulean artefacts of hyalo-dacite. 35 cores and 139 tools were found, including 25 handaxes (elongated triangle, ovate, backed ovate, amygdaloid or almond-shaped), 9 Levallois points, 16 scrapers, 13 end-scrapers, 20 backed knifes, 32 beak-like pieces, and 7 notched pieces.

Dashtadem. 9 surface occurrences with Early and Late Acheulean artefacts were found within a radius of 2.5km of the site of Dashtadem-3 in the mountainous part of the Gyulunbulak valley. A total of 200 finds of hyalo-dacite were collected, including 58 handaxes (+19 in the 2004 season) of cordiform, amygdaloid or almond-shaped, ovate, triangular, lanceolate, transverse-edged and some particular forms; also 10 scrapers, 4 "tsaldy" tools, 1 pick, 5 choppers and chopping-tools, and 24 cores (flat uni- and bi-directional, discoidal, and Levallois).



Figure 4. *Grotto Pechka, looking south-east.*

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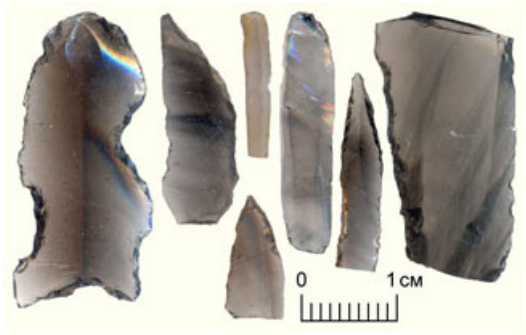


Figure 5. *Grotto Pechka. Tools.*

Grotto Pechka is located 1km west of the village Kruglaya-Shishka, on the left bank of a stream, 15m above its bed, in the limestone rock between the mounts Siskyatskaya and Kiseleva (1670m above sea level). An area of excavation of 3x2m was placed at the mouth of the grotto. In 2005 it was cleared down to 0.6m (the bottom of the grotto was not reached). The deposits exposed in the trench consist of four layers: Layer 1 (top) - black humic soil, and Layers 2-4 - loam of different colours saturated by limestone detritus. Layers 1 and 2 yielded mixed Mousterian and Mesolithic material: artefacts of dacite, obsidian and flint as well as potsherds and fragments of bones. Layers 3 and 4 yielded exclusively Mesolithic artefacts of obsidian as well as of flint, rock crystal and dacite: more than 1600 pieces were recovered, including 99 cores (prismatic, pyramidal and others), 2 segments, trapezoid, microborer, 112 backed microblades and blades, and 4 figured pieces.

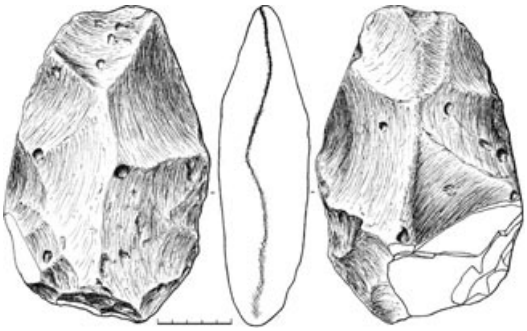


Figure 6. *Blagodarnoe-1. Handaxe.*

Blagodarnoe. Four Acheulean surface localities were discovered to the west of the village of Blagodarnoe in the basin of the stream Blagodarny (right tributary of the river Karakala). This group is located 8km to the south-east of the site of Dashtadem-3. In the course of a two-year survey a total of 370 finds of hyalo-dacite were collected including 174 handaxes (cordiform, amygdaloid or almond-sahped, ovate, triangle, lanceolate, rectangular, special Tashir-type), 1 cleaver, 15 scrapers, "tsaldy" tools, 8 picks, 4 Levallois points, 3 points, 2 foliate points, 2 choppers, and 62 cores. Two artefacts were extracted directly from test-profiles of the stream banks where dense brownish-yellow loam was exposed in the bottom part.

Hence, in addition to earlier groups known in Armenia, such as the two groups of Late Acheulean locations related to obsidian deposits (the workshops of Satani-Dar and Djraber-Atis), a new Acheulean centre based on andesitic-dacitic rocks has been revealed in the northern part of the country. Natural forms and flaking qualities of this raw material seem to be reflected in the morphology and typology of the local Acheulean (large cutting tools with lateral working edge as opposed to backed ones of "tsaldy" type, wide cleaver-like tools, etc.). The majority of the finds collected are characteristic of the Late Acheulean - flat, partial or backed bifaces, dominated by medium or small-sized specimens, Levallois cores and blades. At the same time, there

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are also some heavily weathered massive tools such as thick handaxes formed with large flaking, heavy picks with sub-triangular section, "tsaldy" tools, and transverse-edged large cutting tools of sub-rectangular form. The presence of these archaic artefacts permits to suggest for the first time that bearers of handaxe industries arrived in the Southern Caucasus much earlier than in the Late Acheulean.

For the Acheulean industries of the Transcaucasian volcanic upland, two separate raw material zones appear clearly defined. The obsidian zone located in the southern part contains primarily Upper Acheulean obsidian artefacts. Andesitic-dacitic bifaces have been encountered there too, but they are very rare. A considerable number of andesitic-dacitic bifaces was found only in the Satani-Dar occurrence located closely to the northern limits of the obsidian zone. In contrast to the southern obsidian zone, the northern zone, which covers Northern Armenia and Southern Georgia contains exclusively Acheulean artefacts fashioned from local andesite and dacite; small local obsidian deposits were not used. Taking into account the archaic Acheulean forms found there, one may suppose that this zone began to be occupied earlier than the obsidian zone. Moreover, it seems quite possible that the andesitic-dacitic zone of the Transcaucasian upland was a starting point for a further Acheulean expansion to south and to north.

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