

THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC MAMMAL FAUNA OF THE BAIKAL REGION, EASTERN SIBERIA, RUSSIA (NEW DATA)

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There are two different geographic zones in the Baikal region: the periglacial Siberia (Fore-Baikal) region and the arid extraglacial Central Asia (Trans-Baikal) region. In the Fore-Baikal region, Karginian interstadial mammal fauna remains (Wurm II, 50 000 to 23 000 yrs. BP.) have been excavated from several archeological sites (Khenzykhenova 2005).

The first Karginian mammal fossils in the Fore-Baikal region were found in 2003–2005 by a Russian–Japanese project team at the Bol’shoj Naryn site, 53 °N, 203 °E (Sato *et al.* 2008). Other mammal fossils dated to the same period were found in 2007–2008 during excavations at the Gerasimov site in Irkutsk (Kogai *et al.* 2007). A zooarchaeological examination of both fossil groups helped to determine differences in the habitats of people at the two coeval Paleolithic sites, located not far apart. The species composition of the Karginian mammal remains from these two sites, suggests the widespread presence of open landscapes and forested areas in the area, as well as a warmer and more humid climate in comparison to the preceding glacial era. Large mammals that lived in the Baikal region during the Karginian interstadial were typical representatives of the Upper Paleolithic faunal complex (Gromov 1948), with the mammoth (*Mammuthus*) widely spread to the east of Lake Baikal, and the rhinoceros (*Coelodonta*) in the Trans-Baikal region. Steppe and forest species of small mammals were also represented. The Brandt’s vole (*Lasiopodomys brandti*) [which lives in the dry steppes and deserts] was a dominant species in the Trans-Baikal region. The coeval fauna of the Fore-Baikal region included steppe species [the narrow-sculled vole (*Microtus gregalis*) dominated at the Gerasimov site, and the steppe lemming (*Lagurus lagurus*) at the Bol’shoj Naryn site] together with forest, tundra and field species, and some intrazonal animals. Thus, the faunal fossils obtained from the Bol’shoj Naryn site and the Gerasimov site were ecologically mixed and surprisingly diverse. Comparative analysis of small mammal faunas dating back to the Karginian interstadial shows the predominance of the steppe species not only in the Fore-Baikal region but also in the Trans-Baikal region.

It may also be asserted that open landscapes prevailed at that time. Radiocarbon dating of the Karginian soil was conducted in Novosibirsk, Seoul and Tokyo.