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# The Middle Paleolithic stone industries of the lower Volga River (Volgograd Region, Russia).

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## Abstract

The Middle Paleolithic period in the lower Volga River is represented by a number of sites. Among them, the most famous is the Sukhaya Mechetka site (Zamyatnin, 1961), as well as localities of Chelyuskinets II and Zaikino Pepelishche with destroyed cultural layers were investigated at the turn of the 1980-1990s (Kuznetsova, 2000). The lithic industry of the Sukhaya Mechetka site comprises about 4000 pieces, including 350 tools. Among cores, multi-platform cores with radial or parallel flaking methods predominate. The tools are made on short flakes, as well as 18 percent of tools are made on fragments, and natural slabs and pebbles. The overwhelming majority (45,5%) of the tools are variable scrapers (more than twenty varieties), including simple side-scrapers and transverse scrapers, convergent and angled scrapers. There are variable Mousterian points and asymmetrical points (12% of tools), and limaces. Bifacial tools comprise a significant percentage (more than 12%) of the tool set. Among them, bifacial knives of the Klausennische type (with diagonal and side backs) and Volgograd type represent the most numerous group. There are also bifacial small handaxes, biface-axe, and bifacial leaf points. Characterizing the Sukhaya Mechetka industry in general, one can note that it belongs to the group of so-called "Eastern Micoquian" sites - the industry includes characteristic bifacial knives, numerous and variable scrapers and points. In addition, it is worth noted a fairly large percentage (up to 13%) of the so-called "Charentian element" (scrapers with a convex edge and limaces). The tool groups of Sukhaya Mechetka have analogies among the Middle Paleolithic industries known in the southern Russian plain, Crimea and northwestern Caucasus, such as sites of Zhytomyrskaya, Antonovka, Chokurcha, Zaskalnenskaya group, Ilskaya, Mezmaiskaya Cave, and others. The lithic assemblage of the Chelyuskinets II locality comprises 198 pieces, with a few tools (scrapers, point and fragment of a Mousterian small handaxe). The lithic assemblage of the Zaikino Pepelishche locality comprises 551 lithics. The cores are represented by bifacial radial and irregular cores. There are 88 tools (15% of the assemblage). Among them, scrapers predominate (28%), represented by thirteen varieties, including bifacial scrapers, three Quina-type scrapers, simple, diagonal, with steep retouch, transverse, convergent, and angled scrapers. There are seven points, and a few bifacial and partial bifacial limaces. The seven bifacial tools include sub-triangular and ovate bifaces. In general, the industry can be assigned to the group of Eastern Micoquian sites. The three investigated sites are similar as in the composition of raw materials, and the main techno-typological characteristics: radial or parallel flaking technique used to produce short flakes, wide use of methods of bifacial processing and various multi-row retouch for tool-making, and the characteristic tool set including bifacial knives, limaces, small "handaxes", a significant percentage of angled scrapers. In this case, one can assume that we are dealing with a single cultural tradition.

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