

book news & reviews

500,000 YEARS IN SIBERIA

DIGS LINK A
LONG HISTORY
OF MIGRATIONS
TO CULTURAL
DIVERSITY

BY THEODORE G.
SCHURR

New archaeological evidence concerning how people lived in Siberia during the Paleolithic period is the subject of this ambitious book. Along with patterns of cultural change and continuity, the book attempts to trace the routes of human migration throughout Eurasia and describes the evolution of Siberian lithic cultures (those using stone tools), from the Early to the Late Paleolithic, that accompanies the movements. It also

compares these Siberian lithic cultures with those in regions farther south and east, namely, Mongolia, China, Japan, and the Americas.

The data discussed suggest that the first settlements in Siberia did not occur recently (e.g., during the late Pleistocene, around 45,000 years ago) but some 250,000 to 500,000 years before present (Y.B.P.), as part of the expansion of archaic *Homo* throughout the Old World. If confirmed, these findings would mean that archaic *Homo* was capable of adapting to a range of diverse environments, including those present in northern Asia.

The book presents new evidence for the continuity of certain lithic cultures from continental Europe and East Asia to Siberia over a long period. It also sheds light on human activity in Siberia during the Upper Paleolithic, particularly the in situ development of Upper Paleolithic lithic industries. These appeared in the Altay Mountain region some 30,000 to 50,000 years ago, and subsequently spread to both eastern and western Siberia. This evidence also indicates that Upper Paleolithic traditions younger than 30,000 Y.B.P. are quite varied. These findings suggest that geographically defined cultures emerged as diverse adaptations to different ecological conditions.


The new Siberian data further imply that ancestral Amerindian populations entered the New World some



The Paleolithic of Siberia: New Discoveries and Interpretations, Anatoliy P. Deren'anko, ed. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 416 pp, 231 maps and figures, cloth, \$65.00.

25,000 to 19,000 Y.B.P., and that another migration associated with the Paleoarctic tradition in eastern Beringia may have taken place around 15,000 to 14,000 Y.B.P. This interpretation runs contrary to the Clovis First model of the peopling of the New World, in which a single pulse of ancestral Paleoindians using Clovis lithic technologies arrived in the Americas around 11,500 Y.B.P. Although exciting, the model must be confirmed with discoveries of pre-20,000-Y.B.P. sites in northeastern Siberia, from which ancestral Paleoindians are likely to have moved across Beringia and into North America.

In discussing the most recently excavated sites in Siberia, the book focuses on descriptions of soils, geomorphology, lithics, and related information. As a result, it reads like something of a hybrid between a traditional research monograph and an extended review of the current data in the field. The non-specialist will need to have patience to glean the implications of the important discoveries.

Overall, though, the book does an admirable job of synthesizing the enormous amount of data from numerous sites around Siberia and discussing its relevance in understanding the human occupation of this region during the Paleolithic. It provides a new and rapidly evolving context in which to view the past 500,000 years of human movement through Northern Asia. 

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