

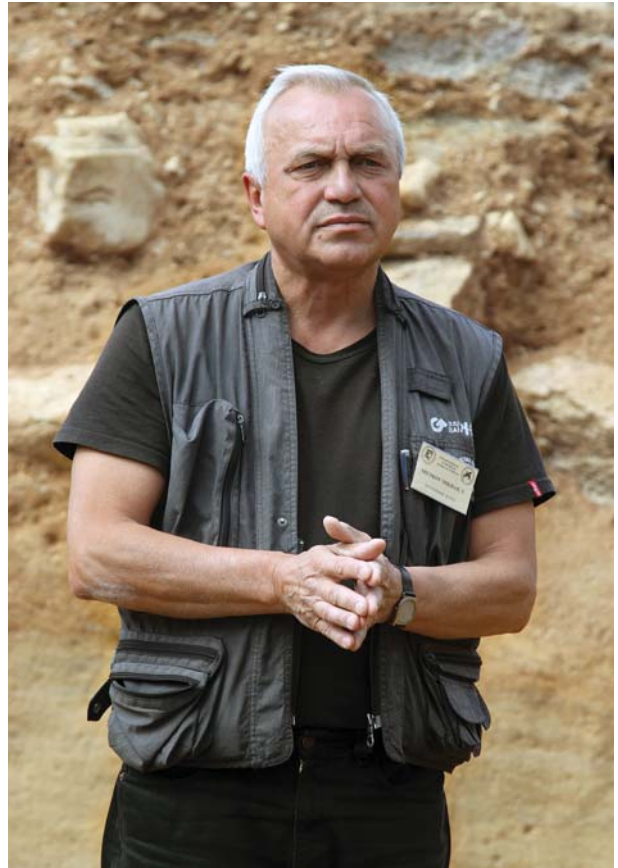
PERSONALIA

Mikhail Vasilyevich Shunkov is 70

In May 2023, Mikhail Vasilyevich Shunkov, an esteemed researcher of the ancient history of North and Central Asia, celebrated his 70th birthday. He is a Doctor of Historical Sciences, a Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Head of the Stone Age Archaeology Department at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and a Professor of the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography at the Institute for the Humanities of the Novosibirsk State University. Throughout his career, he has focused his scientific efforts on the fundamental topics of early human settlement in Northern Eurasia, including the origins and progression of ancient cultural traditions, chronostratigraphy and correlation of Paleolithic cultures, Pleistocene paleogeography, human paleoecology, and reconstruction of the climatic and environmental conditions of ancient human habitation.

M.V. Shunkov came of a family of teachers of higher education and long-term citizens of Irkutsk in Siberia. His father Vasilii Maksimovich Shunkov, a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, holder of many military awards, a lawyer by education, dealt with the economics of agricultural production; he was one of the founders of the Siberian school of hunting science. Mother Nadezhda Vladimirovna Shunkova graduated from the famous Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature and History. For many years, she taught foreign literature at the Philological Department of the Irkutsk State University. Their hospitable house was a meeting place for famous Irkutsk scientists and writers; the writer V.G. Rasputin and playwright A.V. Vampilov were students and friends of Nadezhda Shunkova. The family members rated broad education, creativity, diligence, and self-exactingness very high. Elder brother Boris graduated with honors from Gerasimov Institute for Cinematography and was a well-known screenwriter, director and cameraman of documentary films, one of the most prominent representatives of Siberian documentary filmmaking, a laureate of prestigious European film festivals.

From his childhood, Mikhail was fond of ancient history and having graduated from school in 1971, he entered the History Department of the Irkutsk State University. In his student years, he took an active part in the study of key Paleolithic sites in the north of Baikal Siberia under the guidance of an original scientist and a tireless field researcher M.P. Aksenov. Mikhail Shunkov



graduated from university in 1976, after which he spent two years as a junior researcher at the Laboratory of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of Siberia at the Tomsk State University. He then pursued graduate studies at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences, where he was mentored by the esteemed Professor V.P. Lyubin, a patriarch of Russian Paleolithology. Mikhail Shunkov gained invaluable experience in field research and analytical studies in field laboratories during internships with the Caucasian and Kostenkovskaya Paleolithic expeditions.

In 1987, the young and talented archaeologist was invited by Academician A.P. Derevianko and offered a position at the Institute of History, Philology and Philosophy of the Siberian Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The decision to move to Akademgorodok in Novosibirsk determined the Mikhail's future destiny. Having started as a researcher, he was proposed

the position of senior researcher after defending his Ph.D. thesis entitled “Mousterian Sites in Intermountain Basins of the Central Altai” (under V.P. Lyubin’s supervision) in 1990. In 2001, having defended his doctoral dissertation under the title “Archaeology and Paleogeography of the Paleolithic of the Northwestern Altai”, M.V. Shunkov took up a position of the Chief Researcher and Deputy Director for scientific work; in 2015, he was elected to the position of Director of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and served in this capacity until he reached the age limit set for heads of academic institutions.

Mikhail Shunkov gained his first experience in scientific and organizational activities when he led the Middle Yenisei Archaeological team in 1987–1988. Thereafter, he headed the Altai Archaeological Team, engaged in multidisciplinary studies of multi-layered Paleolithic sites in the northwest of the Altai Mountains. Since 1990, Mikhail Shunkov has been in charge of one of the largest archaeological research stations in Russia, “Denisova Cave” in the Altai. He took an active part in the construction of Denisova station “from the first peg”. For more than 30 years, near the station, interdisciplinary studies have been carried out focusing on the Siberian Paleolithic sites that provide the most abundant information on archaeology and paleogeography of the area. The Denisova station host major scientific events of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, including international symposia with leading Russian and foreign scholars. The high level of organization and hospitality at large-scale international scientific forums at Denisova station is a great merit of the hero of the anniversary.

Mikhail Shunkov focused his efforts on the interdisciplinary studies of multilayered Paleolithic sites in the Altai. In 1990, Mikhail published a monograph describing the Mousterian sites in the Central Altai, which was the first comprehensive publication on the Middle Paleolithic of Southern Siberia. Based on the profound amount of analytical data on the Mousterian sites of the Central Altai and their comparison with the materials of the Altai cave sites, the author identified main trends in the development of the Middle Paleolithic cultural traditions in the Altai. He proposed the following division: lithic industries of the open-air site of Tyumechin-1, the caves of Ust-Kan, Okladnikov and Denisova belonged to the Mousterian of various types depending on the proportion of the Levallois and Mousterian components in the toolkit. In contrast, the lithic assemblage of Tyumechin-2 was specific; it was attributed to the denticulate Mousterian facies, which had no parallels in the Altai Paleolithic.

Using multidisciplinary approach, M.V. Shunkov proposed an original concept of interrelation between prehistoric culture and the paleoenvironment in Southern

Siberia. The main provisions of this concept are presented in the fundamental issue “Paleoenvironment and Paleolithic Human Occupation of Gorny Altai”, which was published in 2003. The book summarizes the results of many years of interdisciplinary studies at the reference Paleolithic sites in the Altai Mountains—Denisova Cave, Ust-Karakol, and Anuy-2. It was the first attempt to trace the development of Paleolithic cultural traditions and the evolution of the paleoenvironment in the North and Central Asia during a wide chronological range, from the Middle to Upper Pleistocene. Based on the comprehensive analyses of Paleolithic materials, their geological position in the sequence of Pleistocene deposits, biostratigraphy and geochronology data, M. Shunkov provided a detailed description of the main cultural trends in the Middle and Upper Paleolithic, identified the areas of their distribution, developed a regional periodization and chronology of the most ancient cultural and historical events, defined certain patterns in the development of the prehistoric culture and interactions between the early humans and nature, and considered the process of the initial human settlement in the Altai in the general context of the ancient history of North and Central Asia.

Over 20 years, M.V. Shunkov has carried out studies at the oldest archaeological site in Siberia—the multilayered Early Paleolithic site of Karama, near Denisova Cave. At this site, several horizons of human habitation with an archaic pebble industry were recorded in association with the Early Pleistocene deposits date to 600–800 thousand years ago, which indicate the habitation of the Altai by *Homo erectus* populations most likely arriving with the first migration wave from Africa. The derived analytical data suggest that the process of the initial peopling of the Altai took place under favorable, relatively warm environmental and climatic conditions. At that time, birch and pine forests, with the admixture of dark coniferous and broad-leaved species exotic for the modern flora of the Altai, prevailed near Karama.

In recent years, M.V. Shunkov has focused his scientific activity on the development of the hypothesis on the origins of culture of the anatomically modern humans. The research culminated in the discovery of a new form of fossil hominin, which was named the Denisovan, after the place of discovery. The analysis of the sequenced genome of representatives of the new group of ancient hominins revealed the sisterly affinity to Neanderthals, i.e. at first, the ancestral branch diverged from the evolutionary tree common with the anatomically modern humans; later, the Denisovan branch diverged from the Neanderthals. According to the available analytical data, during the Upper Pleistocene, along with anatomically modern humans, Eurasia was populated by at least two more hominin groups: Neanderthals in the west and Denisovans in the east. Comprehensive studies of archaeological materials from Denisova

Cave testify to the autochthonous development of the Paleolithic traditions during ca 300 thousand years, and the development of the Upper Paleolithic culture on the local Middle Paleolithic basis, which implies not only cultural, but also genetic continuity of the prehistoric population of the Altai.

M.V. Shunkov also carries out active field research in other regions of Eurasia. Since 2008, he has been the head of the Montenegrin team studying Paleolithic caves in the eastern part of the Adriatic. Interdisciplinary studies of lithology and stratigraphy of the Pleistocene deposits, as well as Paleolithic layers in the rockshelters of Bioče and Malishina Stena, and in Trlica Cave, produced the data on the evolution of the Middle and Upper Paleolithic industries and a new assessment of the origin and development of the most ancient cultural traditions in southeastern Europe.

In 2015–2019, Mikhail Shunkov headed reconnaissance works in the northeast of Kazakhstan, during which dozens of Paleolithic sites illustrating various chronological periods were discovered, including Kurchum—one of the oldest Early Paleolithic sites in the region, and Ushbulak—a unique multi-layered Early Upper Paleolithic site in the Shilikta Valley.

Results of extensive field and analytical studies by M.V. Shunkov are presented in 14 monographs and more than 600 articles, including 13 papers published in the world's leading scientific journals *Nature* and *Science*. Mikhail Shunkov was the editor-in-chief, author and co-author of the chapters on the Paleolithic in the *History of Siberia*; his contribution in the preparation of volume 1, published in 2022, was significant. He is an active popularizer of knowledge about the ancient past of mankind through publications in the journals *Science First Hand*, *Scientific American*, and in numerous interviews and comments for federal and regional media.

Mikhail Shunkov devotes much time to the management of projects of the Russian Foundation for Humanities, the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, the Russian Science Foundation, and the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences. For many years, M.V. Shunkov was a member of the Expert Council of the Russian Foundation for Humanities and the Russian Foundation for Basic Research in history, archaeology, and ethnography. M.V. Shunkov is the Head of the Department of Stone Age Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a member of the

Academic and Dissertation Councils of the Institute, and the Joint Academic Council for Humanities of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology of Eurasia*, the editorial boards of the journals *Theory and Practice of Archaeological Research*, *Archaeology of the Eurasian Steppes*, and *Universum Humanitarium*. Mikhail Shunkov is actively involved in organizing scientific events at the international and all-Russian level, including activities on the revival and holding of the All-Russian Archaeological Congresses.

M.V. Shunkov is a Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a Corresponding Member of the German Archaeological Institute, a laureate of the Academician V.P. Alekseev and Academician T.I. Alekseeva Prize for scientific contribution to anthropology and archaeology on the issues of interdisciplinary research.

Along with research and organizational activities, Mikhail Shunkov is engaged in teaching in higher professional education. Since 1976, he has been constantly supervising the archaeological field practice of students of historical faculties of the Tomsk State University, Astafiev State Pedagogical University in Krasnoyarsk, and the Institute for the Humanities of the Novosibirsk State University (NSU). Mikhail Shunkov is the author of the course of lectures “Human Paleoecology”, which he delivers at NSU Institute for the Humanities. Under the guidance of Mikhail Shunkov, thousands of schoolchildren from towns and villages of the Altai Territory underwent field practice at Denisova Cave. Young people enjoyed warm friendly atmosphere and the attention of the leader; they got personal interest and respect for the past; subsequently, many of former schoolchildren started to engage in history and archaeology. Mikhail Shunkov serves as a Scientific Advisor to applicants for the degree of Candidate and Doctor of Sciences; more than ten specialists have successfully defended their dissertations under his scientific supervision.

Currently, Mikhail Shunkov is full of creative forces and aspirations. We wish the hero of the anniversary fruitful scientific activities, new wonderful discoveries, and inexhaustible creative energy in the implementation of all his ideas!

*A.P. Derevianko, V.I. Molodin,
A.I. Krivoschapkin, and M.B. Kozlikin*