

## SKILL GRANTS

# Project 1804S: Mezhyrich International Archaeology Summer School: Interdisciplinary Study of an Upper Pleistocene Site

**Project Leaders:** Pavlo Shydlovskiy (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine), Stéphane Péan (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, France)

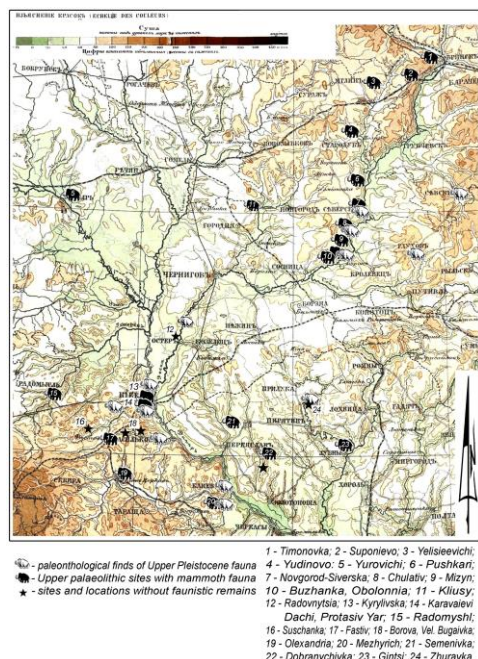
**Contact:** [prehist@knu.ua](mailto:prehist@knu.ua), [stephane.pean@mnhn.fr](mailto:stephane.pean@mnhn.fr)

## Archaeological context of Mezhyrich Upper Palaeolithic settlement with mammoth bone dwelling structures

**Authors:** Pavlo Shydlovskiy<sup>1</sup>, Stéphane Péan<sup>2</sup>, Ostap Tsvirkun<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine; <sup>2</sup> Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, France; <sup>3</sup> Institute of Archaeology NAS of Ukraine

Mezhyrich is an Epigravettian open air base camp, in the Middle Dnieper basin, dated to 14.9–14.3 ka 14C BP (i.e. between 18.2 and 17.4 ka cal BP), situated in a loessic sedimentary context. Four mammoth bone dwelling structures have been uncovered, surrounded by activity areas and pits. The Mezhyrich International Archaeology Summer School, which took place in summer 2018, was dedicated to young scientists in archaeology, especially Master students, PhD students and post-graduate early career researchers, from the following institutions of Ukraine and France: Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, National University “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”, Institute of Archaeology NAS of Ukraine, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris.



**Fig. 10. Upper Pleistocene localities in the Middle Dnieper valley.**

During the 2018 Summer School project implementation, which took place during field work in Mezhyrich within the framework of the Ukrainian State Fund for Fundamental Research project (No. F77/82-2017) named “Mezhyrich mammoth-hunters’ settlement: archaeological research and museum studies”, student training and research were conducted, as well as several trips and excursions to other Pleistocene locations of the Middle Dnieper region. The past years of research at the Mezhyrich site and its surrounding landscape have yielded the following results.

The territory of the Middle Dnieper Region belongs to the Late Upper Pleistocene mammoth zone, in which mammoths played a central role in a mammalian complex of herbivores and carnivores, and was the main subsistence resource of Palaeolithic groups.



**Fig. 11. Stéphane Péan lecturing on “Methods of Zooarchaeology” at Department of Archaeology and Museology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.**

In the basin of the Middle Dnieper and its tributaries, a large number of Upper Palaeolithic sites and palaeontological deposits have been uncovered (Fig. 10). The archaeological settlements are attributed to different cultural and chronological facies: Gravettian (24–19 ka 14C BP), Epigravettian (15–13 ka 14C BP), Final Palaeolithic (13–10 ka 14C BP).

Several Epigravettian sites refer to the Mezhyrichian type of industry, which is dated in a rather narrow time-span between 15–13 ka 14C BP. They include notably the following large settlements: Mezhyrich (Fig. 10: 20), Dobranichivka (Fig. 10: 22), Ginty (Fig. 10: 23), Semenivka I, II, III (Fig. 10: 21), and Buzhanka II (Fig. 10: 10), which have seen large-scale excavations over many years. Typo-technological analysis of lithic assemblages allows us to understand the uniformity of reduction strategies within this assemblage type, distinguishing it from other synchronous and neighbouring Epigravettian industries such as Mezinian, Yudinovian, Ovruchian and Osokrovka.

Such a technological, territorial and chronological homogeneity of sites represents the remnants of the living activities of a single society. These sites have different functional and seasonal characteristics, which provide a unique opportunity to reconstruct certain aspects of life, seasonal mobility cycles, and hunting strategies in a single palaeo-environmental context.

Considering the logistic model of annual mobility, base camps with mammoth bone dwelling structures, such as Mezhyrich, Dobranichivka and Ginty, represent the centre of movements of human groups in the most convenient places in terms of availability of natural resources, while other sites were used as short-term camps, kill-sites, or flintstone raw material deposits.

Spatial features of the site layout indicate a standardized use of the residential area. The centre of such an assemblage is a dwelling, around which there are functionally distinct structures and zones associated with butchering activities, flint processing, storage structures, and garbage deposits. Several pits that surround the dwellings can be reconstructed as structures filled with both stored raw materials and middens comprised of butchery, artefact processing and hearth fuel waste. The renewed investigation of the internal space in the fourth dwelling of Mezhyrich will test the hypothesis of a standardized location of functionally defined areas within the dwelling structure, around a central hearth.

Considering the spatial distribution of dwelling structures in Mezhyrich and the other Mezhyrichian sites, it suggests a centralized behavioural pattern that manifests itself at different levels: dwelling structures, residential areas, base camps and an inter-site microregion.

Preliminary results of the 2019 International School and expedition were highlighted in the [presentation](#) “The Secret Diary of the Mammoth Hunter” at the LEGIO HISTORICA Festival on 23 November 2018; at the [open lecture](#) “Mammoth hunters: from field research to social interpretation” which held in Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv on 20 March 2019; and at the presentation “Bone tools from the household pit of Mezhyrich Upper Palaeolithic settlement: Interpretation of the field object” at the XXXVth Archaeological Conference in Rzeszow (Poland) on 2–3 April 2019.



**Fig. 12. Trimmed and decorated distal part of a mammoth rib from the fourth dwelling of the Mezhyrich settlement.**

Following the 2018 Summer School, a [scientific seminar](#) on the study of the Mezhyrich settlement with the use of zooarchaeological methods was given by Stéphane Péan (Fig. 11) for students and young scientists of the Department of Archaeology and Museology and the Institute of Biology, from

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, on March 20-30, 2019.

Expected research results will be presented at two international conferences:

The 3rd Conference "World of Gravettian Hunters" in Krakow, Poland, on 20-25 May 2019 and the 25th Annual Meeting of European Association of Archaeologists in Bern, Switzerland, on 4-7 September 2019.

In the future, based on the experience of leading the summer school, it will be possible to form an international focus group oriented to new issues about cultural and chronological, seasonal and palaeoeconomical research on Upper Palaeolithic sites in the Middle Dnieper basin area, including a central component focusing on skills enhancement

of research methods in prehistoric archaeology (Fig. 12).

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