

## Preface

Our investigations in the Lesser Caucasus arose from a visit to the site made by Tania King in 1998 while on a six month academic visit to the Institute of Geology, National Academy of Sciences, The Republic of Armenia. At that time there was increasing interest in discoveries being made at the site of Dmanisi, Georgia, which is located approximately 30 km from the border of Armenia. Armenian scientists were keen to collaborate on survey projects in the region with scientists from overseas.

One of the sites that Tania was shown during that first visit was the cave at Azokh. She noted that a large amount of sediment had been excavated from the front of the chamber, but she also saw that sediments still remained *in situ* at the rear of the cave, and hence, there was a potential for further excavation and discoveries. On returning to the UK, a collaboration was formed with Yolanda Fernández-Jalvo (who was then an EU Post-doctoral Research Fellow at The Natural History Museum), Peter Andrews (then head of the Human Origins Program of The Natural History Museum – NHM), and Levon Yepiskoposyan (who was a visiting researcher at University College London). We first carried out a survey of regions in northern, western and southern Armenia in collaboration with Yuri Sayadyan and other members of the Institute of Geology, the Armenian National Academy of Sciences, in 1999. This was followed in the same year by a short visit to Azokh Cave and nearby Tughlar Cave in Nagorno-Karabakh.

After a second survey in 2001 (King et al. 2003; Fernández-Jalvo et al. 2004), we agreed to undertake excavations at Azokh Cave to investigate archaeological, geological and palaeontological context of this site. The Azokh sites are located in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory at the southeastern end of the Lesser Caucasus range. This volume describes the results from the eight excavations from 2002 to 2009 and the scientific research conducted on the excavated material. This work is still ongoing.

At the time when we started this project, there were no specialists in Paleolithic Archaeology, Anthropology, Geology or Palaeontology at the State University of Arstakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), and few in The Republic of Armenia, and so we brought together a group of specialists that would continue the work at the site of Azokh and other localities, with the long term intention of setting up relevant departments in the local university, and ultimately increasing science capacity in Nagorno-Karabakh. We placed particular emphasis on the training of local students. In this respect, two local students are receiving postgraduate training in Archaeology and Palaeontology at European institutions (IPHES/University of Tarragona – under the direction of Isabel Cáceres and Ethel Allué) supported by the Erasmus Mundus (Master's degrees in Quaternary and Prehistory) and Wenner-Gren (Wadsworth International Fellowship for Ph.D. research) Foundations. Additional students from both local and overseas participate in the excavations, we have a number of field assistants from Azokh village who joined the excavation team each year. Several have received training in excavation techniques and also in the field laboratory, and some of the assistants are now well qualified in excavation techniques and are included in the excavation team.

The project has received support from a great number of individuals, academics, and officials, institutions and organizations, particularly from the Government of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). We are especially grateful to the Ministers for Culture, Education and Sport, NK, from 2002 to 2009, who have provided permissions to work at the site, supported the work in numerous ways, and have generously provided access to materials and loaned parts of the collection for conservation and study at institutions outside Nagorno-Karabakh. Since 2009 the Department of Tourism and Protection of Natural Monuments has been responsible for the site, and the project has benefitted from the support and interest of Mr. Sergei Shahverdyan, Head of the Department of Tourism, NK. We are extremely grateful for the interest and support of Mr. Ashot Ghulyan, Head of the National Assembly, and Ms. Narine Aghalbalyan, Minister for Culture, NK. Since the start of the project Dr. Melanya Balayan, Director, Artsakh State Museum for Country and History, has provided support and assistance in numerous ways, and has been extremely generous with providing access to the material. We also thank the staff of the museum for their help in many ways over the years. We are very grateful to Mr. Artur Mkrtumyan, Director, Base Metals Ltd., for his support and for the donation, loan and transport of scaffolding, the loan of a total station in 2007/8, and for providing the assistance of his specialists as advisors for the project. We thank Mr. Seyran Hayrbedyan, Base Metals Ltd. for specialist technical assistance over the course of many years. We are grateful to Museo Regional de Madrid for the loan of a total station in 2009, and to Ms. M.C. Arriaza who carried out the work. We also thank Análisis y Gestión del Subsuelo S.L., Spain, and most especially to E. Aracil for geophysical works carried out at the site in 2007 and 2009. We are very grateful for the institutional support of the Armenian Institute, London, and especially Dr. Susan Pattie, whose interest and support have benefitted the project since its start. We thank Dr. Yuri Sayadyan and Dr. Razmik Panossian for the invitation to collaborate with Tania King and the suggestion to visit the site. Most especially we thank the enormous help given in many ways over the years by Mr. Samvel Gabrielyan, the renowned artist who lived and worked in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh. We have been greatly saddened by his recent death (22 July 2015). Samvel was a bastion of support for this project and an inspiration to us all.

Most importantly, we thank the people of Azokh village whose generous support has made possible the fieldwork that is now in its 14th year. We thank the mayors of the village (2002–present) – Mr. Levon Asryan, Mr. Gevork Gevorkyan and Mr. Georgy Avanesyan, for their assistance and interest over the years. We are especially grateful to Mr. Ilias Poghosyan, Headmaster of Azokh Village School, who was instrumental from our very first visit to the site in 1998 and who generously accommodated us and facilitated our visit in 1999 during which we visited several caves in addition to Azokh caves. We thank Mr. Poghosyan for his interest and help in numerous ways, and especially for the use of the school premises as a field laboratory in recent years. We thank all our field assistants past and present. We are very grateful to a large number of local staff who has provided essential support for the project during the field season each year.

We are grateful to the The Harold Hyam Wingate Trust, for providing the fellowship to TK that funded her initial six month research visit to Armenia in 1998. In 1999, PA received an exchange grant from the Royal Society to collaborate with the Armenian Academy of Science. We are hugely indebted to an anonymous donor who has provided funding each year from 2002 to the present day, enabling us to carry out fieldwork each year, and providing continuity for the work. We are also grateful to three other donors who have provided financial assistance to the project. The other major source of funding during the early years was the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (CSIC) and The Spanish Ministry of Science (research projects BTE2000-1309, BTE2003-01552; BTE 2007-66231). Since 2009 the project has received substantial funding for fieldwork from the NK government, which has also provided further continuity for the work. We are also very grateful to AGBU (UK) which provided funding for the fieldwork for several seasons. Individual team members have also received funding for their participation in the fieldwork for several years and we are grateful for funding

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Thanks are also extended to nearly 40 experts, most of them anonymous reviewers of the chapters in this volume, whose critical comments have greatly improved the final work. Special thanks are also given to Eric Delson and Eric Sargis, the editors of the Springer series “Vertebrate Paleobiology and Paleoanthropology” for their constant support and advice, as well as to Sherestha Saini, Publishing Editor of Springer.

Lastly, we thank all the Azokh Cave team members, past and present, for their invaluable and individual contributions to the project over the last years. Each team member has brought unique skills to the project that have helped advance the work in important ways. In addition, each member has also created a strong atmosphere of teamwork, which has facilitated the progress of the fieldwork and scientific aspects of the project.

This book is *in memoriam* of Patricio Domínguez-Alonso, a good friend, an important scientific member of the Azokh team, and an invaluable field manager and researcher. He has recently left us (15 November 2013).

Yolanda Fernández-Jalvo

Tania King

Levon Yepiskoposyan

Peter Andrews

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