INTRODUCTION

The modern Caucasus often conjures up images of a highly turbulent region, harbouring a kaleidoscope of peoples who speak different languages and profess different religions. In spite of this restive reputation, it is not hard to appreciate why the Caucasus has so vividly captured the imagination of travellers and writers. Often perceived as a boundary between worlds, its landscape is immediately arresting. On a clear day in the southern Caucasus, standing on a vantage point along the middle Kura Basin, the immense horizon becomes an irresistible attraction. There, dim in the remote distance, towering high above the foothills is the mighty range of the Greater Caucasus Mountains. Their lower slopes are usually veiled in cloudy vapours, while their snow-clad peaks glitter in the sunlight, suspended between earth and sky. Over the ridge is another world, one of mighty river valleys and foothills that merge imperceptibly with the vast European steppe lands beyond.

No less alluring is the landscape in southernmost Caucasia, in Armenia, for instance, where the cones of volcanoes, extinct since at least the Quaternary period, sharply punctuate the lava plateau that extends into modern Turkey. Two peaks loom large – Mount Aragats (4,090 m) and Mount Ararat, the latter rising as twin pinnacles (5,137 m and 3,914 m) north of Doğubayazit. The solemn mass of Ararat left the thirteenth century Venetian Marco Polo awe-struck.

> An exceedingly large and high mountain. … The circuit of its base cannot be compassed in less than two days. The ascent is impracticable on account of the snow towards the summit, which never melts, but goes on increasing by each successive fall. In the lower region, however, near the plain, the melting of the snow fertilizes the ground, and occasions such an abundant vegetation, that all the cattle which collect there in summer from the neighbouring country, meet with a never-failing supply. (Marco Polo 1908: 35–6)

This dramatic compression of elements has fuelled the sense of mystery. Early on, the Greeks considered the western Caucasus, Colchis, the edge of the known world, where myth and reality blurred.[1] Sir John Mandeville tells us, in a fantastical account of travels that he ostensibly wrote in the fourteenth century, how somewhere amongst the mountains of Georgia there is a country:

> … that is quite covered by darkness, so that people outside it cannot see anything in it; and no one dares go in for fear of the darkness. Nevertheless men who live in the country round about say that they can sometimes hear the voice of men, and horses neighing, and cocks crowing, and know thereby that some kind of folk live there, but they do not know what kind of folk they are. (Mandeville 2005: 163)

The tessellated landscape of the Caucasus, a vast tangle of mountains and etched valleys, wetlands and steppes, satisfies almost any definition of a frontier. Squeezed by the Black and Caspian seas, in an area about the same size as Italy, it effectively separates Eastern Europe from Western Asia. As such, the Caucasus is distant and isolated from the heartland of both cultural regions, and therefore marginal to each. At the same time, this geographically complex isthmus stands as a meeting place where two worlds collide. Its size is modest compared to its immediate neighbours. Nevertheless, the cultural accomplishments of the Caucasus are many. Whether we focus on its creative and dazzling metalwork or look at its ability to blend traditions, the result is a complex region with a variegated and fascinating set of achievements.

Mountains dominate the physical landscape of the Caucasus, and the most formidable are the lofty summits of the greater chain. Comprising about 1,200 km of volcanic uplift, they stretch obliquely from the Taman (or Anapa) Peninsula in the north-west to the Apsheron Peninsula that juts out conspicuously into the Caspian Sea. Although these mountains can be crossed through passes that were originally narrow and tortuous, in prehistory they sometimes acted as a deterrent or even a terminus for human movements – filtering ideas and possibly small scale migrations, but precluding a constant flow of populations.[2] This was certainly the case during much of the Palaeolithic, when the glaciated passes prevented even the adventurous from crossing the peaks. Even so, emerging evidence from DNA studies, discussed in Chapter 1, has yielded surprising results. It seems that the genetic relationship between population groups in the northern and southern Caucasus is much closer than was once suspected, which forces us to re-think the relationship between language and material culture. In an engaging and extensive study that examines

[1] For historical and cultural surveys of the Caucasus from the Classical period onwards see Braund 1994; Alemany 2000; Hewson 2001; Rapp 2014.

[2] The Georgian Military Road, though still narrow, was widened to its present form by the Russian military in the late eighteenth century, after the Georgians freed themselves from Persian suzerainty.

the interconnectivity of distant regions through the flow of materials, Toby Wilkinson reminds us that routes are dynamic corridors rather than static pathways.[3] Not only were routes conduits for raw materials and finished products, they also conveyed knowledge and people.

Not all boundaries of the Caucasus are natural borders in the geographical sense. The Kuma-Manych Depression in the northern foothills, for instance, merges almost imperceptibly with the Russian Plain further north. In the south, the Araxes River, located in and alongside the countries of Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran, likewise shows no clear differences in the landscape on either side of its banks. So this notion of the Caucasus both as a geographical corridor and barrier, a duality that contributed to its unique set of historical circumstances, is one that we shall explore throughout this book.

Although this study goes no further than about 800 BC, stopping short of the arrival of the Greeks in Colchis, it is worth noting the considerable importance mountains, rivers, and other natural features assume in narratives of literate societies. In Christian and Islamic historiography, for instance, these physical topographies were viewed not only as barriers, but as places imbued with symbolism, whose meaning differed depending on perspectives. Thus, to the Christian storytellers, mountains were portrayed as sanctuaries for the defenders of the land, whereas the Arabic narrators viewed them as obstacles in the course of their early conquests. Likewise, rivers were perceived either as boundaries defended by heroes, or bridges to be crossed by the invaders.[4] These conceptions of landscape are useful to keep in mind even for the prehistoric periods, for they entwine the physical reality of geography with notions of social and political thought.

The Caucasus is also a cultural frontier.[5] Pliny the Elder reminds us that at Dioscurias in ancient Colchis, 'business was carried on there by Roman traders with the help of a staff of 130 interpreters' (Plin. *HN* IV.v.107–108). Within the northern foothills that slope down to meet the fringe of the vast steppes of southern Russia, we find a mixture of distinct populations, rich in customs and languages. No less complicated are the historical circumstances and composition south of the range, where a medley of peoples had a cultural orbit that revolved more around the lands to the south, such as Anatolia and Iran, than it did with the European steppes. This sense of frontier that the Caucasus

[3] Wilkinson 2014a.

[4] The spatial geography in the medieval period is dealt with admirably in Robinson 2014.

[5] The terms 'the Trans-Caucasus' (across the Caucasus Mountains) and 'the Cis-Caucasus' (on the near side of the Caucasus Mountains) refers to a Soviet and Russian geographical perspective. These are now rather anachronitic terms and in this book I have used 'the southern Caucasus' and 'the northern Caucasus' respectively. Where they are part of archaeological discourse and terminology such as 'Early Trans-Caucasian culture', I have left the term unchanged. In this book the term 'Caucasian' refers to the inhabitants or traditions of Caucasia, and not to any modern notions of race.

acquired still resonates today. Liminal in character – it is a zone that has its own distinctive structures and cultural landscape, often quite dislocated from hierarchies and traditions that surround it – at the same time it displays a strong connectivity.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE CAUCASUS

In the Caucasus, ethnic, religious, territorial, and political issues are still hotly contested, and in unravelling the approaches to its ancient past, one must tread carefully. Specific and complex socio-political and economic conditions that have shaped this intriguing frontier must be taken into account. In the twentieth century, the Caucasus witnessed the last gasp of Russian imperial expansion, then some seventy more years of Soviet domination, before movements of national liberation created newly independent countries.

Archaeological research mirrors this complicated trajectory and reveals how tsars, revolutionaries, and globalisation have moulded the study of the past of this turbulent region. In studying Caucasian archaeology we need to consider two matters together: conceptual thought (theory) and practical methods (field techniques and strategies). In both cases, the discipline in the Caucasus witnessed radical changes after the fall of the Iron Curtain. It could be argued, in fact, that the dramatic, fundamental, and rapid shifts in approaches Caucasian and Russian archaeologists have had to shoulder since the 1990s find no counterparts in the history of Western archaeology (perhaps the closest rift came with the radiocarbon revolution).

Russian Imperial Archaeology (pre-1917)

While travellers of the nineteenth century were drawn to Egypt and Mesopotamia in the hope of observing the remains of legendary ancient civilisations, they came to the Caucasus for a different reason. This intrepid cohort of Europeans, a combination of the curious and the pious, were attracted to the mystique that borderlands hold. In the 1800s, the Caucasus lay at the edge of empires between the Russian Tsars and Ottoman Sultans. As such, it also attracted the military and spies. James Stanislaus Bell, an emissary of the British Intelligence Office was one such character. Bell pursued his interest in antiquarianism in the northern Caucasus between 1836 and 1839 while supplying arms to the highlanders and instructing them in the skills of guerrilla warfare.[6]

Russian Imperial archaeology started as an antiquarian pursuit singularly intended to find beautiful objects for museums. This was an age of spectacular

[6] Bell 1840.

discoveries made by intensely keen enthusiasts with little resort to refined digging. In Western Europe comparable scholarly and philosophical inquiries led to the establishment of amateur societies and collections of antiquities. Tsar Peter I (reigned 1689–1725), a fervent collector, ignited interest in antiquities in the early 1700s when he requested that old and curious objects from across Russia be gathered together. Although Peter the Great's interest extended across all manner of objects, from ethnographic items to marble sculptures, awareness of Russia's ancient past grew rapidly. The earliest archaeological excavations were undertaken in the second half of the eighteenth century in the Crimea and neighbouring regions along the northern Black Sea coast, where ancient Greek cities and Scythian barrows were targeted. Rich objects and exotica began to fill the state coffers early on, but archaeology was not organised at a state level until the nineteenth century, when learned societies were established to preserve and study the remains of the ancient past.

Amongst the most important in Russia were the Moscow Society of History and Antiquities (est. 1804), the Imperial Archaeological Society (est. 1851), and the Moscow Archaeological Society (est. 1864). Countess Praskovya Sergeyevna Uvarova (1840–1923), well known for her early work along the southern Black Sea coast, became head of the Moscow Archaeological Society, but emigrated together with other White Russians shortly after the revolution. The most powerful institution, however, was the Imperial Archaeological Commission (est. 1859), with a mandate to manage professional investigations in Russia and issue licenses to excavate sites.[7] Professional dissemination of fieldwork results first occurred through publication in the *Archaeological Commission Reports*, printed by the Tbilisi chapter of this Commission, which was established in the 1880s.

A significant turning point in the archaeology of the region was the establishment of the Caucasus Archaeological Committee in 1871. In that same year, Austrian researcher Friedrich Bayern began investigations at Samtavro, near Mtskheta, as did Alexander D. Yeritsov at the cemetery site at Akner, in Armenia; eight years later (1879), Bayern moved to Armenia and investigated Redkin-Lager.[8] Azerbaijan also attracted pioneer explorers, such as Valdomar Belk, a German, who drew attention to the antiquity of the mountainous region of Gedabej.[9] A welter of activities ensued, especially after the Imperial Archaeological Commission held the 'Fifth Archaeological Congress (the Caucasus)' organised by the Society of Amateurs of Caucasian Archaeology, which opened on 8 September 1881. Some 850 participants attended, including

[7] For a history of the early antiquarian societies, see Veselovskii 1900a, and Mikhaelis 1913 for an early synthesis of discoveries. See also Klejn 2001, 2012.
[8] Smith 2005: 238; Lindsay and Smith 2006; Avetisyan and Bobokhyan 2012.
[9] I would like to thank Ferhad Guliyev for providing me with information on the history of archaeological research in Azerbaijan.

the leading European scholars of the day, to discuss matters pertaining to history, archaeology, ethnography, folklore, and languages.[10] Given twentieth-century notions on ethnogenesis that will be addressed later in this chapter, it is perhaps significant that Rudolf Virchow figured prominently in this Congress. Virchow, a conservative biological anthropologist and anti-Darwinist, maintained that cultures were self-contained units, each with a distinctive heritage and generally incapable of acculturation or interconnectivity with their neighbours.[11] One of the concerns of Virchow's research was the desire to identify ethnic identities, a concept that re-surfaced during the Stalinist regime.

Chronology also became a serious concern in the 1880s. This was most clearly expressed in the studies of Jacques de Morgan, who in addition to excavating 576 tombs around Alaverdi and Akhatala, in the Debed River valley of the Lori province of Armenia, compared the material remains from the southern Caucasus with those in the greater Near East and Aegean.[12] His belief that the Caucasus was of special importance for the study of metals was prescient, and his interest in eastern civilisations led him to Persia, where he managed to negotiate a French monopoly of archaeological exploration in Persia. Although he is mostly known for the time he spent at Susa, in south-western Persia, he also excavated a number of the Late Bronze and Iron Age cemeteries in Talish region, and explored the adjacent territories of Gilan and Mazandaran, which hug the southern Caspian Sea shores.[13] These places are particularly important for their cultural connections with sites in south-eastern Azerbaijan in the Caucasus.

As private collections became fashionable, grand museums like the Hermitage were also established to house an emerging body of antiquities, which then became the subject of discussion in archaeological periodicals and congresses. In the Caucasus, the Russian Imperial Geographic Society established a museum for its Caucasian Department in 1852. It was re-named the Caucasian Museum in 1865 and, after the revolution, the Museum of Georgia (1919). Since 1947, it has been the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia, Tbilisi. Despite these many field and organisational activities, late-nineteenth-century Russia saw no major advances in conceptual or analytical paradigms comparable to those in Western Europe.[14] Russian antiquarians did, however, keep abreast of the trends and some embraced the ideas of late evolutionism and early diffusionism.

[10] Gamkrelidze 2004: 214.
[11] Boak 1921.
[12] De Morgan 1889. On De Morgan's expeditions, see Djindjian et al. 2015.
[13] De Morgan 1896, 1897.
[14] Klejn 2001: 1127–32; 2012: 15. For regional surveys of archaeological work, see Kafadarian 1948, Khachatrian 1978, Lindsay and Smith 2006, Avetisyan and Bobokhyan 2012 (Armenia); Gamkrelidze 2004, 2008.

In the northern Caucasus the richness of the Koban region soon attracted attention.[15] Although some explorers, Russian and West European alike, did have a genuine interest in the ancient cultures of the Caucasus, a vast number of tombs of the Koban region were plundered by predatory digging in the nineteenth century by those of antiquarian leanings whose acquisitive enthusiasm for metalwork far outweighed any vestiges of scientific interest they may have possessed. Without any criteria for dating the finds, these crude early investigations stood little chance of resolving the cultural problems. Giorgi Filimonoff, curator of the Moscow Museum, conducted some of the first investigations in the northern Caucasus. In 1877, he initiated excavations at the Koban cemetery, which were continued in later years by Volodimir Antonovich, Rudolf Virchow, and Praskovia and Aleksei Uvarov. To this cohort should be added V. I. Dolbezhev, a local schoolteacher and earnest antiquarian, whose sizeable collection is now held in the State Historical Museum, Moscow. But it was Ernest Chantre, then deputy director of Lyon Museum, who carried out the first sustained expedition to Koban.[16] Chantre also gathered together items dug up by the landowner, hence expanding the French museum holdings of Koban objects to 1,150 items. In his substantial study of Caucasian antiquity, he attempted to bring order to the material from Koban, Samtavro, Redkin-Lager, and Stephan-Tsminda, drawing parallels with central European Hallstatt culture.[17] To stop the tide of antiquities leaving the country, the Russian government enacted a law at the end of the nineteenth century preventing foreign archaeologists from carrying out fieldwork in its territory. Amongst those whose ambitions were thwarted was Baron Joseph de Baye, a French archaeologist and a lover of all things Caucasian.[18]

Soviet Archaeology (1917–1991)

MARXIST-LENINIST IDEOLOGY

More than anyone else, Leo Klejn's vivid and penetrating studies on Soviet archaeological thought have demystified the subject of Soviet archaeology for Western researchers. He refers to the Soviet concepts not as monolithic, but as comprising 'stages of a long journey', which were neither smooth nor straight.[19] Little changed in archaeological thinking in the first decade after the revolution in 1917, though this interlude saw a dramatic slump in fieldwork

[15] Tekhov 1957: 7–15; Kozenkova 1996: 7–11.
[16] Chantre 1886.
[17] For a discussion, see Bedianashvili and Bodet 2010: 279.
[18] Cheishvili 2013.
[19] Klejn 2012: 13. The summary that follows draws heavily on Klejn's studies. See also, Klejn 1977; Bulkin et al. 1982; Klejn 2001. For a history of archaeological discoveries and intellectual traditions in the southern Caucasus, especially Armenia, readers are directed to Smith (2005: 234–51) and Lindsay and Smith (2006). See also Gamkrelidze 2004 for early work in Georgia, and Kohl 2007 for short biographical sketches of key researchers.

and research. Tsarist organisations such as the Archaeological Commission and the Moscow Archaeological Society, seen as the playground of the wealthy, could do little in arresting this malaise. The new political rulers had more pressing issues to deal with, such as institutional change, and they devoted little attention to the restructure of archaeological methodology and thinking. But change did come to archaeology, and it was radical.

Bristling with enthusiasm and missionary zeal, a new generation of Muscovite ideologues, headed by V. M. Friche, a literary critic and art historian, and academician Mikhail Nikolayevich Pokrovsky, a historian, set about placing archaeology squarely within Marxist social history. Their task was to show how analysis of material culture could promote the fundamental Marxist-Leninist concept of a classless society and to defend the enterprise against the 'bourgeois' approach of Western researchers. Using Lewis H. Morgan's model of social evolution as the framework, they defined terms such as 'early communism', 'feudalism', and 'the rise of the state', which became embedded in archaeological literature throughout the Soviet period.[20] This new social approach to material culture generally focused on specific cultural categories – tools, settlements, burials, and so on – but it was fundamentally opposed to the 'palaeoethnological school' promoted by Boris Sergeyevich Zhukov (also a Muscovite and born into a family of newspaper publishers), which viewed human culture as a product of the natural environment. Zhukov's approach emphasised the ecology of past societies, their variability, and their spatial distribution.[21] Ultimately, the deliberations of this new generation of thinkers, who had a minimal understanding of archaeology and only a basic grasp of Marxism, completely changed the trajectory of archaeology in the Soviet Union.

Out of this ferment emerged, in 1919, the Russian Academy of the History of Material Culture (RAIMK), replacing the earlier Archaeological Commission, and renamed in 1926 the Academy for the History of Material Culture (GAIMK). This powerful institution, consisting of departments of ethnology, archaeology, art, and history, was based in Leningrad and was headed by Nikolai Marr, one of the few figures who straddled the Tsarist-Revolutionary divide quite successfully.[22] Prior to the revolution he investigated Ani (1892–1893, 1904–1917), the medieval Armenian capital, and then rose to prominence in early Soviet archaeology. His early work is little known outside the circle of Armenian expertise, where he is recognised for his inter-disciplinary approach

[20] Klejn 2012: 19–20. Morgan was a contemporary of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and much respected by both (and others) for his views on social structure and material culture and the impact of technology on cultural development.

[21] According to Klejn (2012 passim), many of the ideas of Zhukov and his followers foreshadowed the later American processual school.

[22] Archaeological institutes around the Soviet Union fell into line with regard to titles. For instance, just two years after the Armenian Institute of Science and Art was established in 1924, it was re-packaged as the Institute of the Material Culture of Armenia. Avetisyan and Bobokhyan 2012: 9.

to fieldwork and for mentoring a younger generation of scholars.[23] A linguist by training, Marr became known as the founder of 'the theory of stages' or 'Japhetic theory', which explained socio-cultural changes as fundamental economic transformations.[24] He rejected notions of migrations, cultural adaption, and diffusionism because they were seen as pandering to Western European humanism and not serving Marxist political ideology.[25]

At the core of Marr's philosophy was the importance of economic change and its capacity to explain cultural transformations in terms of different stages of economic development. Agriculture, animal husbandry, and technology were given prominence in this context, but the notions of migration and cultural interaction were sidelined.[26] Although external cultural influences and population movements were not denied, they were viewed as products of social circumstances rather than the drivers of historical change. Hence, similar general laws of cultural development were applied to ancient complexes discovered across the Soviet Union from the Caucasus to Siberia. Although this school of thought created a simplistic interpretative model, it did nonetheless focus attention for the first time on indigenous developmental change and the role of technology in ancient societies.

By 1930, the fulcrum of debate shifted to Leningrad, where new idealists were driven to re-fashion the discipline into an even tighter framework. These first attempts to find social value in the remains of the past saw a sharp reaction against earlier empiricism. Typological studies, it was said in these formative post-revolutionary years, turned artefacts into fetishes. Antiquities were seen as meaningless bric-a-brac collected by the affluent that had no bearing on contemporary needs and issues, on the here and now. Antiquities needed to elucidate issues of historical economics and production, rather than be seen as artistic achievements from a remote past. To that end, even the term archaeology was avoided in preference to 'the history of material culture'. Marxism stressed the determinative role of productive economies and, accordingly, material remains were seen as tangible manifestations of the labour of human societies. Essentially and emphatically, archaeology in the Soviet Union was conceptualised as a part of historical science, and its theoretical framework embraced historical materialism.

These tumultuous times had a tremendous impact on developments in the southern Caucasus, where Azerbaijan was the first territory to be incorporated into the Soviet Union in April 1920, followed very soon by the annexation of

[23] Avetisyan and Bobokhyan 2012: 9.

[24] The term 'Japhetic', derived from Japeth, the name of one of the sons of Noah, was applied to the Kartvelian (Georgian) languages. It was Marr's belief that 'Japhetic languages' were sub-stratum languages, which pre-dated Indo-European languages. See Matthews and Marr 1948.

[25] Bulkin et al. 1982.

[26] See, for example, Piotrovskii 1949, who emphasises farming practices at the beginning of the Caucasian Copper Age.

Armenia (December 1920) and Georgia (February 1921). Under the umbrella of the Peoples Kommissariat of Education emerged new Commissions responsible for the protection of antiquities. Other institutions that were founded included the Yerevan State Museum (est. 1919) and the Azerbaijan State Museum of History (est. 1920). Archaeology was soon linked to institutions of higher learning. Ashkharbek Kalantar, an Armenian intellectual and one of Marr's students, was amongst the founders of Yerevan State University (est. 1919). He published a handbook of archaeology and later headed the first department of archaeology in 1930.[27]

INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE UNDER STALIN

The early years of Stalin's tyrannical rule, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, were extraordinarily repressive. By 1929–1930 Stalin initiated his plans for a highly centralised economy, whereby he sought to collectivise the peasantry, phasing out Lenin's New Economic Policy, and launch the Soviet Union as an industrial nation. Klejn's description of the standard of archaeological debate is nothing if not graphic:

> In accordance with the style of the era, scientific debate took on the nature of ferocious political argument and the status of class struggle. The tone became shrill, and did not stop at rudeness and personal attacks. Researchers denounced one another heatedly and implacably; footling theoretical differences were elevated to the scale of fundamental political disagreements; scientific opinions became subsumed into class positions, given scathing labels in the language of the Party, and viciously chastised.[28]

In these years of hardship, those archaeologists who did not engage in political debate prudently turned their attention to 'facts'. They sought to explain material culture (sources) in terms of history and were careful not to stray into the negativity that surrounded theory. A period of historical materialism ensued. New methods were developed that were used to infer social relations from material culture. Out of this milieu emerged what is arguably the greatest legacy of Soviet archaeology, namely the introduction of lithic-microwear and taphonomic analysis, approaches spearheaded by the work of Sergei Semenov on Palaeolithic tools.[29] Throughout these years, there was a voracious appetite for archaeological data and knowledge – expeditions proliferated, as did publications, including the foundation of *Sovetskaia Arkheologiia*, which became the flagship archaeological journal of the USSR.

Tragically, Stalin's rise to power also saw many intellectuals perish or be expatriated. Amongst the archaeologists from the Caucasus exiled to Siberia were the Armenians A. Kalantar, S. Barkhudaryan, and Evgenii Baiburtian. Of these Baiburtian, a prehistorian with an eye for excavation techniques, was active in the

[27] Avetisyan and Bobokhyan 2012: 19.
[28] Klejn 2012: 25.
[29] Klejn 2012: 307–10.