

## AFTERWORD:

# MISHA BRONSHTEIN AND THE LEGACY OF THE EKVEN EXHIBIT IN TÜBINGEN

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The history of archaeological field work in Chukotka extends over the last 60-some years, the product of research efforts by several national and regional Russian institutions (cf. Arutyunov, *this issue*; Mason, Krupnik and Csonka, *this issue*). During the last fifteen years, the ancient burial ground and settlement of Ekven on the Russian Bering Strait coast, south of Uelen, has served as the focus of an international project headed by the State Museum of Oriental Art (SMOA) in Moscow. This international project was sponsored jointly by Canada, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Switzerland-Liechtenstein, and INTAS (the International Association for the Promotion of Cooperation with Scientists from the Independent States of the former Soviet Union, from the European Union and Switzerland). Our friend and colleague Misha, (Mikhail) Bronshtein, served as the leading expert for the INTAS project, based on his enormous wealth of experience in prehistoric Eskimo art and the wide interacting region of the Bering Strait. Misha was also the one who had resuscitated the fieldwork in the Ekven burial ground in 1987, in collaboration with Sergei Arutyunov, one of the original leaders of the Ekven excavations from 1963 to 1974 organized by the then Institute of Ethnography and the State Museum of Ethnography in Leningrad, now St. Petersburg (cf. Arutyunov, *this issue*).

The significance of the renewed Ekven research first reached the community of arctic archaeologists in 1990, at the Inuit Studies Conference in Fairbanks, Alaska, with a presentation by Misha of a paper that described many of the most impressive burial finds. These results also filtered out to researchers in Western Europe, especially in Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland. Coincidentally, in 1990, Alexander Leskov, then the Director of the SMOA, conceived a plan for the first traveling exhibit of the Ekven finds. To this end, Dr. Leskov, the founder of the Department of Archaeology and Prehistoric Art at the SMOA, collaborated with the late Valerii Alekseev, then the Director of the Institute of Archaeology in Moscow, who was active for many years in Chukotka anthropological research, as well as with Sergei Arutyunov, one of the leading Russian arctic ethnographers and archaeologists at the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. Quite significantly, Dr. Arutyunov was also the supervisor of Mikhail Bronshtein's Ph.D. thesis on the prehistoric Eskimo art, defended in 1991. The exhibit that resulted from that partnership was in the well-established tradition of the SMOA's Department of Archaeology and Prehistoric Art venues, building on its immensely successful national and international exhibitions on the North Caucasian objects excavated from the Bronze Age

sites. Unfortunately, one of its authors, Valerii Alekseev, did not live to complete the project, succumbing to death after a short illness in late 1991; nonetheless, he had prepared an article on the prehistoric and contemporary indigenous populations of the Bering Strait region for the catalogue of this exhibit (Alekseev and Alekseeva 1993). As a consequence, the exhibit was organized and completed entirely by the Department of Archaeology and Prehistoric Art at SMOA.

To me, the Ekven exhibition was an event of a lifetime, the realization of a dream that coincided with the end of the Cold War. For nearly forty years, in my position at the Institut der [für] Urgeschichte [roughly equivalent to Prehistory–Ed.] of the University of Tübingen, I had been involved in arctic field work in Canada, and in the study of the American Paleolithic in northern Eurasia and Beringia. The prospect of presenting the impressive though little known Ekven material to the European public represented an incredible opportunity. So inevitably, I leapt at the chance to facilitate the exhibit, with the assistance of the University of Tübingen, due in large measure to my long acquaintance with Valerii Alekseev during my repeated museum studies in Russia or on his many visits to the “western” side of the divide of the Cold War-era. Together, we had often dreamed of international collaboration in museology and archaeology, even in the darkest years of the Cold War, as on my first trip to Siberia in the 1960s. The potential for such a beginning first occurred during the time of Glasnost’ in the then Soviet Union in the late 1980s and it was realized as early as 1990 with the opening of Western Siberia to western scholars during the INQUA (International Quaternary Association) symposia in Novosibirsk and also in Krasnoyarsk, with its audacious regional museum constructed in the form of an Egyptian temple as a symbolic representation of the oldest known historical tradition, built before the First World War at the banks of the Yenisei River.

For scientists in Tübingen far distant Siberia had a considerable familiarity for over two centuries, ever since the pioneering expeditions of the botanist Johann Georg Gmelin (1709–1755), a former student of the University of Tübingen who became a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. During the preparation of the exhibit, eventually entitled *Arktische Waljäger vor 3000 Jahren: Unbekannte sibirische Kunst* [“Arctic Whalehunters 3000 years ago: Unknown Art from Siberia”], the time range was purposefully extended to 1000 BC, beyond the limits of dated sites to include the still unknown, hypothetical formative period that undoubtedly led to the earliest dated finds (cf. Leskov and Muller-Beck 1993). The earliest mari-

time hunting cultures from Beringia are connected with the early Okvik and Old Bering Sea objects dated to the second half of the last millenium B.C. (Dinesman et al. 1999). As the exhibition planning proceeded, the Institut der [für?] Urgeschichte worked ever more closely with the colleagues of the SMOA and especially with Bronshtein, who was the Museum’s up and coming expert on Siberian art.

In 1993, University of Tübingen graduate student Clemens Pasda<sup>1</sup> was invited to participate in the excavation of the burial ground at Ekven as a guest in the still very much restricted Russian Far East. Pasda learned first hand of the controversial dispute between the authorities of the regional museum in Anadyr and the members of the excavation team from SMOA led by Bronshtein and Kirill Dneprovsky, SMOA archaeologist. It concerned the legal excavation rights and the storage of the finds from Chukotka. This dispute was finally settled by an agreement between SMOA and the Anadyr Museum, arranged by Leskov with the participation of the Russian federal authorities and the administration of the Chukotka Autonomous Region. The agreement involved a 50/50 split of the 1990s collections from the Ekven site, including the pieces from the highly endangered erosion front, with equal portions divided between the Russian Federation and the Chukotka Region, to be selected after analysis and conservation of the objects at the SMOA in Moscow.

Simultaneously, the Ekven Tübingen/SMOA exhibit continued to evolve, with cooperation from the City of Tübingen, and the design of several well-crafted showcases<sup>2</sup> [some of which are presently on loan from Tübingen at the Museum of Geology in Moscow]. Finally, the Ekven exhibit opened in Germany on April 3, 1993 in the newly built City Museum, housed in an old public building, of Tübingen. By the time the exhibit closed on May 23, 1993 more than 8,000 visitors—one of the highest numbers for a special exhibit ever at the museum—had viewed the exhibit. The handsomely produced catalogue, to which Bronshtein also contributed the lead paper on ancient Eskimo findings at Ekven (Bronshtein 1993), as well as several co-authored contributions, was also illustrated with superb pictures from the original prints at SMOA selected by Bronshtein. The exhibit then travelled to Munich, Moscow, Zurich, and Hamm in Westphalia until 1995, and subsequently, a portion of the exhibit, was brought to Copenhagen as part of a larger exhibit on arctic archaeology in 1998, sponsored by the Enkidu Foundation of Tübingen. The Copenhagen exhibit attracted over 50,000 people and also had Native artists from the Uelen community in Chukotka

<sup>1</sup>Pasda was a graduate student of the prehistory and archaeology of hunting in Tübingen, subsequently and at present, he is Professor of Prehistory at the University of Jena.

<sup>2</sup>Designed by Interdesign, the company of Dr. Bobykin from Moscow.

demonstrating their ivory carving skills. In linking modern artists with the displays, the SMOA Ekven exhibit not only informed a wide audience about an important aspect of the archaeology of Chukotka but also informed the public about the hard realities of modern life in that remote part of the world. The importance of the exhibit was so great that the former Bundeskanzler (Chancellor) Helmut Kohl was recruited to write an introduction to the second edition of the catalogue, lauding the exhibit as a renewal of the long tradition of partnership in Siberian anthropological research between Russia and Germany.

With the agreement in 1993 between Moscow and Anadyr, forming the legal basis of the SMOA fieldwork in Chukotka, it was possible to start a larger international excavation at Ekven in cooperation with the Chukotka regional museum in Anadyr since 1994. In 1995 the Ekven excavations became an INTAS-sponsored project (INTAS-94-964) administered by the University of Tübingen, with the participation of archaeologists from Canada, Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland. The overall leadership was handed to Kirill Dneprovsky and Mikhail Bronshtein. It also included teams from the Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Dinesman et al. 1999) and from the Research Institute and Museum of Anthropology at the Moscow State University in Moscow; both institutions have a long tradition of fieldwork in Chukotka. This work was advised by the “International Commission for Archaeology in Chukotka” established in Meudon (near Paris) in 1992.

During the first INTAS-sponsored season of 1995, the excavation of the burial ground at Ekven—by far not fully opened during almost three decades of excavations—was suspended. To secure a better understanding of the whole site and of its prehistoric ecology, a systematic excavation of the first ancient subterranean house (no. 18) at the nearby coastal site at Ekven has been started. In addition, the team conducted a cleaning of the eroding coastal beachfront with a complex house stratigraphy and some smaller surveys at Ekven and Cape Verblyuzhyi (Sphinx Point), evidently, an older settlement farther east. The excavation of the “house 18” and at the erosion front was continued from 1996 to 1999, as an international project led by Dneprovsky and Bronshtein out of the SMOA and with several Western archaeologists financed from France, Germany and Switzerland.

However, every year much of the international crew’s field time had to be invested into dealing with the upcoming administrative and logistical problems. It also became evident that the existing local supply and transportation system was insufficient to assure safe fieldwork for a large interna-

tional group in Chukotka. Eventually, it was decided that the remaining excavation had to be done by a small Russian crew from the SMOA; it was conducted until 2002, when the first ancient subterranean dwelling (“House 18”) was fully excavated. Western collaborators did some preliminary research on the findings from the excavated “House 18” (Müller-Beck 2003) and are planning to continue their work with the objects, including some experimental comparative studies in cooperation with modern Native ivory carvers and hunters from Uelen. This partnership may eventually lead to the establishment of an experimental open-air museum or a “historical park” in Uelen, including a 1:1 replica of an ancient underground dwelling, “House 18,” which is an old dream of Misha Bronshtein.

It is our hope that some day a similar venture can be also started at Anadyr, closer to a larger modern community. It is also evident that such plans could materialize only if we secure continuous funding for smaller local efforts as well as for the resumption of an international excavation project at Ekven and Cape Verblyuzhyi. The SMOA team is currently working up the results of its ten-year excavations of the Ekven burial ground, with Kirill Dneprovsky and Mikhail Bronshtein acting as the prime co-authors, in cooperation with the Northwest Asian Commission of the German Archaeological Institute.

During all of those years, to the numerous participants of Ekven field expeditions, research and planning sessions, a small family apartment of Misha, his family, and his parents were true symbols of a welcoming and wide-open house that offered to many of us much more than the renowned Russian hospitality. That modest first-floor apartment at the outskirts of Moscow could keep and cater to up to six guests and even more. During our joint fieldwork in Chukotka, Misha was always able to clear any pending problem, often with the help of his numerous local friends, even if this required a long round-trip walk across the marshy tundra from Ekven to Uelen, when urgent communication was needed. Without him and his famed consistency (polite but relentless under any condition) our work in Ekven and in Moscow would have never been so successful. Thus, our natural gratitude to Misha eventually transformed into a genuine and deep feeling of respect. I have a special note to this, one coming from a person from Germany who happened to start his first contacts with people from Russia and Siberia in the awful year of 1945 and who eventually was able to travel to that “horrible” Siberia and even beyond, to the shores of the Bering Strait. I hope we will continue to walk and to work together with Misha for many years, whatever our fate may offer, until we have to do it on the other side of life, hopefully forever free of time.

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