

Obituary



Vladimir Petrovich Litvinenko (1951–2011)

Vladimir Litvinenko was born on August 8 of 1951 in the southern Russian town of Taganrog (Rostov Region). Most of his life and scientific activity were connected with this seaside port town on the northeastern coast of the Sea of Azov not far from the delta of the huge Don River. Vladimir got a strong devotion to fossil mammals in his university years in the Rostov-on-Don State University. As a student of Biology and Soil Sciences (1968–1973), under the guidance of Dr. Vera Baigusheva he started his first studies of fossil mammals in the area of the Lower Don River and the Sea of Azov region. He was among the first mammalian paleontologists graduated from the Rostov State University.

His early experience in collecting mammalian fossils Litvinenko got at the Liventsovka sand pit near Rostov-on-Don. This famous locality of Middle Villafranchian mammals produced a rich collection of animals known as the Khapry faunal complex (unit). This association includes meridionaloid elephants, bunodont mastodons, stenonid horses, giraffes and other inhabitants of savanna-like landscapes in Eastern Europe. Subsequently, Litvinenko collected more remains

of this fauna in Morskaya and Merzhanovo, coeval localities at the coast of the Sea of Azov.

Vladimir's pregraduation practice (1972) took place in the vicinity of the famous Don cossack Veshenskaya stanitsa (village). In the nearby Lebyazhinskiy village Litvinenko collected a rich and diverse large mammals association, including the early woolly mammoth, from fluviatile deposits exposed in the right bank of the Don River. This fauna characterizes the final stage of the Middle Pleistocene. Unfortunately, later most of this early collection was lost. However, subsequently Vladimir Petrovich continued his efforts at this locality, and managed to restore a representative collection from this site. He used to visit the site after high water stands that washed out new bones from the deposits. Litvinenko also curated a network of local collectors. One of Vladimir's "horror" stories was about a huge collapse of nearly vertical section's wall just seconds after he collected a valuable fossil and how he hardly managed to run away and escape fossilization himself. In 1973 he defended a graduate thesis (diploma) "New discoveries of fossil animals of the Upper Paleolithic complex in the Rostov Region".

After graduation from the university in 1973, Litvinenko could not find a job of professional paleontologist. He worked in the Rostov Horticulture Trust and then in the administration of the Taganrog municipal Maxim Gorky Park of Culture and Recreation. During this period he continued paleontological survey of the region and fossil collecting. At this period Litvinenko did not accept an invitation to join a PhD program in the Far East and continued his work in Taganrog. One of the bright characters of Vladimir was his teacher's talent. He kept on working with youth as a popularizer of science, advocated the theory of evolution, paleontology, and the regional natural history. For several years Vladimir Petrovich headed a section of young paleontologists at the station of young naturalists. This substantially built, physically strong man with his constant winning smile and devotion to natural history easily attracted school children to share his paleontological activities. During these years Litvinenko and his students collected in summer trips numerous mammalian fossils from the Rostov and Taganrog areas. Most of his students retained a strong sympathy to natural sciences and to paleontology in particular.

In 1993 Litvinenko got a job in Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute, the department of natural sciences. Starting from 2007 he headed the Laboratory of Archaeology and Paleontology at the History Department of the Institute. In 2010 Litvinenko founded the institute educational museum of archeology and paleontology. In a very short time it became a real educational center. The materials of the museum include a unique collection of stone artifacts and invertebrate and vertebrate fossils, most of them collected personally by

Litvinenko. Currently the museum is a meeting place of the students and teachers with the authentic local natural history. Vladimir was also the organizer of the paleontological and archeological tours and paleontological expeditions. The dearest dream of Vladimir Petrovich was to find remains of early Paleolithic humans in the Azovian region. According to his profound conviction, the region must have traces of the very first immigrants from Africa. Many of his field trips he devoted to inspections of sand and loam pits, coastal cliffs and areas of known Paleolithic sites.

From his student years and until his demise, Vladimir Petrovich was a devoted biologist, nature explorer, focused on his favorite discipline, the paleontology. He was continuously involved in all kind of smaller and larger research projects, field trips and excavations. In the prime of his intellectual and physical abilities Vladimir had extensive plans for future research. He suddenly died on July 30, 2011 due to thrombosis a few days before his 60th birthday.

The material collected by Vladimir Litvinenko from the Sea of Azov Region, the Lower and Middle Don area, and Tsimlyansk Reservoir is stored in the collections of the Rostov regional museum, the Azov museum-reserve, Institute of Arid Zones of the Southern scientific centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute. Colleagues and students will always remember Vladimir Petrovich Litvinenko as energetic and enthusiastic researcher, intelligent and sympathetic person, and as a real and true friend.

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