

Obituary: Andrey E. Dodonov
(January 29, 1940 Moscow – May 7, 2008 Moscow)

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Before my collaboration with Andrey Dodonov, the head of the Quaternary Laboratory of the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow, began, I had often heard his name and occasionally read his publications. Andrey Dodonov was particularly well-known for his work on the loess stratigraphy of central Asia¹. In 1999, in connection with the Tübingen research project on the Paleolithic of western Syria, I asked my colleague, Prof. Paul Haesaerts of Brussels, who would be the best Quaternary geologist and geoarchaeologist for our team in Syria. Without hesitation, Paul emphatically told me that Andrey Dodonov was the best person for the job.

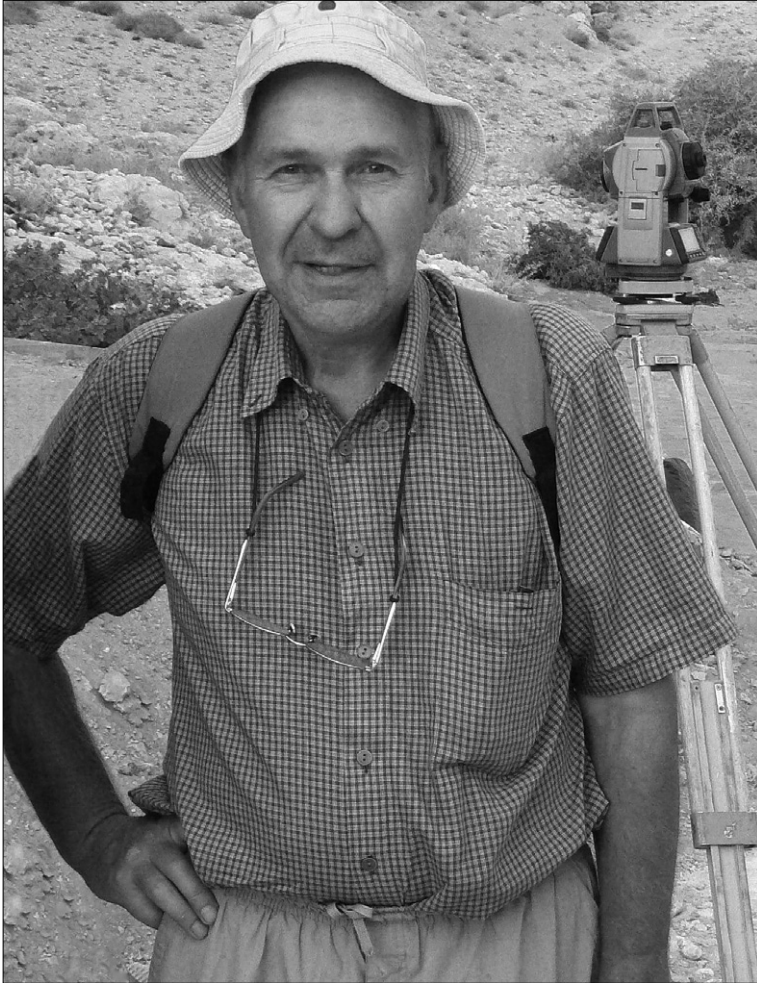
I followed his advice and never regretted it. Andrey joined our team in Syria immediately. Using his vast knowledge of geology and long days of detailed survey on foot, Andrey, over the better part of a decade, produced a high resolution basemap of our 500km² research area in the Damascus Province of Syria.

Every year Andrey flew from Moscow to Damascus and arrived with gifts of caviar and Russian specialties. The next morning, after drinking a large pot of peppermint tea, he would begin survey, either by himself or in the company of one or more of the members of the team. All of the serious students and researchers on the team relished the days in the field with Andrey. He rarely brought much water or food with him, but he always brought good cheer, a wealth of anecdotes, and seemingly limitless knowledge and experience. Typically, I would drop him off in a remote and often picturesque spot and, on his training, would call out, Ни пуха, ни пера! To which he would reply, К черту! And so the day would begin.

Andrey was tougher and heartier than anyone else on the crew. He never complained about the food, drink or living conditions regardless of how bad they were. He preferred to sleep outside on the large balconies of the dig house in Ma'aloula, even on the cold autumn nights in the highlands of western Syria.

Without Andrey's work, the team would never have been able to make sense of the complicated geology of the region. He identified and mapped numerous flint sources and located many new archaeological sites. He mapped ancient water sources, including Pleistocene Lake Dodonov above Ma'aloula, which the crew named after him. In the

¹ A biography and list of publications can be found on the homepage of the Geological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences.



Andrey E. Dodonov at the excavation at Wadi Mushkuna, Damascus Province, Syria, October 2007. Photo: N. J. Conard.

weeks before his unexpected death², Andrey had finished working on his new geological map of the region around Yabroud. He also completed his models for the Quaternary stratigraphy of Wadi Skifta, where the famous Yabroud sites are located, and the adjacent Wadi Mushkuna, where the Tübingen team has been digging. Just after receiving Andrey's last report for the Syrian project, I heard the news of his death. Given Andrey's vitality, the news came as a shock to our team and to the scientific community.

Andrey Dodonov was committed to science, and perhaps for that reason always took time to teach students and colleagues. He was also a good listener and always a good

² Andrey died of a heart attack in the presence of his wife Marina just after breakfast on a sunny morning in the orchard of their dacha near Moscow.

person to have in a pinch, such as during the all too frequent periods spent in police detention, when our survey activities caught the suspicious eyes of the Syrian authorities. This being said, Andrey had no qualms about sampling next to missile sites and military bases, where a less committed scientist would never set foot.

Andrey was old school and did not cut corners in his research. His knowledge of geology in general and Quaternary geology in particular flowed into a coherent whole that allowed him to reconstruct the natural history of the landscapes he studied. He made few assumptions, always preferring to check all occurrences in detail himself. He often chose to work with Paleolithic archaeologists, and I know that our positive experience characterized his long career of collaborative research. Andrey Dodonov was a wonderful and generous man and an outstanding scientist, whose contributions to Quaternary research and Paleolithic archaeology will be of lasting value.