BIOARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CIS-BAIKAL:
BIOLOGICAL INDICATORS OF MID-HOLOCENE HUNTER-GATHERER
ADAPTATION AND CULTURAL CHANGE

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This bioarchaeological investigation of the Cis-Baikal skeletal and dental record focuses on health and lifestyle reconstruction of the region’s mid-Holocene foragers with particular interest in the circumstances surrounding an alleged fifth millennium BC biocultural hiatus (Weber 1995, Weber et al. 2002). The five cemetery populations considered – two representing the pre-hiatus Kitoi culture and three the post-hiatus Serovo-Glaskovo – provide an excellent opportunity not only to characterize boreal forest foraging adaptation, but also to investigate cultural change in the region. Research focuses on three discrete lines of bioarchaeological inquiry: dental enamel hypoplasia, osteoarthritis (degenerative joint disease), and paleopathology (both skeletal and dental). Results reveal several discrepancies between the pre- and post-hiatus peoples, lending some support to previous assertions of distinct Kitoi and Serovo-Glaskovo adaptive regimes, particularly the narrower subsistence base and lower residential mobility of the former (Katzenberg and Weber 1999, Weber 1995, Weber and Katzenberg 1998, Weber et al. 2002). For example, pre-hiatus individuals appear to have suffered greater physiological stress than their successors, likely reflecting seasonal or annual fluctuations in resource availability, and to have engaged in distinct activity patterns suggesting increased (and sexually disparate) logistical foraging in response to reduced residential mobility. However, remarkable parallels have also been observed between these two groups in terms of overall mobility, general health status, and numerous behavioral characteristics, suggesting a general pattern of continuity throughout the mid-Holocene period.
Skeletal and dental data indicate that all occupants of the Cis-Baikal employed variable but effective adaptive strategies: despite their documented differences, both pre- and post-hiatus peoples appear to have been more than successful in exploiting the region’s rich aquatic and terrestrial resources.