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The lost art.
An overview on the Romanian Palaeolithic art

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Abstract: At the moment, a simple inventory of the objects that can be considered „art" objects or presenting intentional traces of processing without having a utilitarian motivation found in Romania would include 65 objects. Out of these, almost a quarter (23%) has disappeared. Nothing is known about the existence of the ten objects discovered before 1940. Among the existent 50 objects, more than a half (33) was discovered after 1990. Thus we can state that more than half of the Palaeolithic artistic objects existent on the Romanian territory were discovered in the last 15 years.

The Palaeolithic art in Romania is represented by a series of portable artifacts and some cave paintings found in only one cave. Regionally, the existence of this reduced number of objects is of an extraordinary importance. Excluding the Lower Palaeolithic, all the other Palaeolithic periods are represented by a lesser or bigger number of elements which can be considered as being the vestiges of a symbolic behavior.

The growing interest for the symbolic Palaeolithic expression is demonstrated by the considerable number of articles published after 1990 and focusing on this subject. Many of these articles have been presented at international conferences and published in specialty reviews, in international languages. The information regarding the Palaeolithic sites and the artifacts discovered in Romania was mostly unprecedented; this was also the consequence of the growing interest of the foreign specialists for whom, the research made in Romania was little known. In these articles, new discoveries are described or the information on the research made before 1989 is revalued.

The modern methodological approach concerning the archaeological excavations which has been lately applied, mostly after 1990, led to the discovery of an impressive number of artifacts (in comparison with the previous discoveries). The modern equipment and machines and, most important, more efficient excavation techniques have led to the discovery of a great number of artifacts in a very short period of time. All these come up as the result of the fact that the Romanian researchers try to integrate their discoveries into the great European context; and one should not forget mentioning the fact that their attempt is successful since their discoveries are "spectacular" indeed.

This attitude regarding the Palaeolithic art started at the same time with the discovery of the well-known „Cuciulat little horse", to which many articles and even a book were dedicated. The wide word presentation of this discovery was realized in a really western

manner for that time and for the context given. (M.Carciumaru, Bitiri – M.Ciortescu, 1979; M.Carciumaru, M. Bitiri – Ciortescu 1983, M.Carciumaru 1981, M.Carciumaru 1987, M.Carciumaru 1988, M.Carciumaru 1989). This discovery practically introduces the Romanian territory on the map of the Palaeolithic artistic discoveries and determines the specialists to rethink the whole matter over and do serious research. Starting with this point, the potential of the Palaeolithic archaeological sites increases its value. It was an unprecedented thing. The archaeologists who had done excavations in the Palaeolithic sites totally neglected this aspect, considering it too „exotic" to be present in this Eastern European area. A typical example of this attitude is that of those researchers who, while the excavation works at Bordu Mare Cave, discovered a decorative object. It was a perforated wolf canine. The first remark on it is published in an article and it refers to a perforated canine belonging to the superior cultural level – the Neolithic (C.S. Nicolaescu- Plopsor, N.Haas, Al.Paunescu, Al.Bolomey, 1957 p. 46, fig. 5.3). Only after a few years and after the discovery of the two perforated canines in „Gura Cheii Rasnov" Cave belonging to the „Final Gravettian" level, the canine which had been discovered some time before was reconsidered and included in the Aurignacian level Neolithic (C.S.Nicolaescu- Plopsor, Al. Paunescu, I. Pop, 1962 p. 116). This happened not as a consequence of a minute analysis but due to the fact that the two objects found in Gura Cheii Rasnov Cave belonged beyond doubt to the Palaeolithic level, and consequently, the existence of the Palaeolithic art was possible on the Romanian territory, too. *„The late Kostenkian inhabitation in Gura Cheii Cave is also important because of the discovery of two decorative objects, teeth with perforated roots out of which one is a fox eye-tooth and the other is a stag incisor. We also mention the presence of a wolf eye-tooth having the root perforated as well, discovered in the Aurignacian level in Bordu Mare Cave at Ohaba Ponor. These three pieces are, at the moment, the only decorative objects discovered in our country.* (C.S.Nicolaescu- Plopsor, Al. Paunescu, I. Pop, 1962 p. 116)*."*

Complex archeozoological studies on the material discovered in the Palaeolithic sites were not done in most of the cases. This might be the consequence of the small number of artistic objects discovered. As an example, the description made by V. Căpitanu, C. Buzdugan şi V. Ursche referring to the excavation works at Buda (Bacau County), is very relevant: *"The excavation works, especially those realized in the 2nd section, situated at almost 150m North from the old excavation works, have disclosed new bone agglomerations, arranged intentionally in a certain way – as it seems – by the Palaeolithic man. Chopped extremities of long bones, concentrated on a few square meters as well as broken bones in order to take out the marrow were discovered this time, too.*

The fact that these bones agglomerations, disposed in a certain position, is repeated in a few places of the terrace, strengthens the belief that, at Buda, we deal with some worship expression referring to the haunting magic." (V.Căpitanu, C.Buzdugan, , V.Ursache, 1962). This description is a very frustrating one, since there is no plan, no drawing of the pieces or any - zooarchaeological study on the bones attached to it; thus, this „certain position" and „these chopped extremities of long bones" do not reveal anything else but the fact that there was something "interesting" in that place.

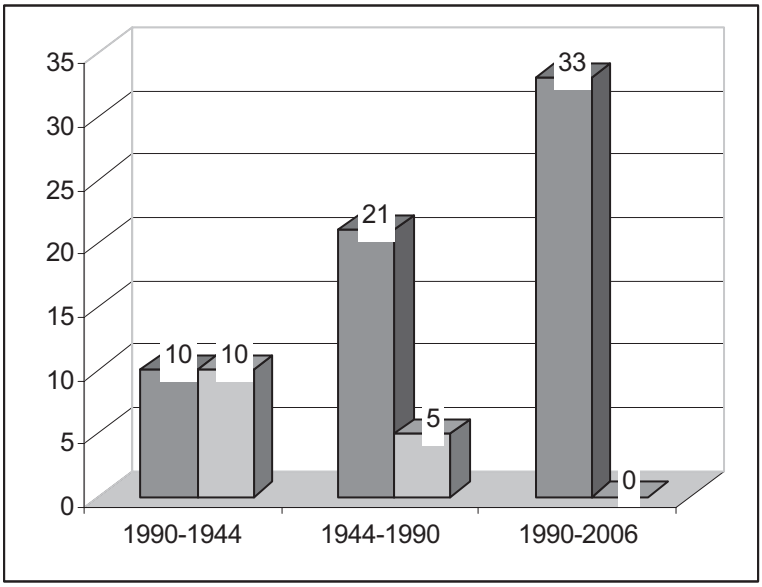
During the cave excavations, the illumination was made by means of lanterns or lamps on calcium carbide, so that its quality was insufficient for a precise determination of the objects in the sediment, especially if they were of small sizes; the analysis of the layers as well as the color stains in the cultural levels was also poor. The use of the electrogenic group was done late, after 1990 and not many research teams could afford such a luxury so necessary for the realization of relevant investigations in the cave. *„...having an electrogenic group represented a great gain, as the research work started to become more laborious. In those few years, many lithics were retrieved, the stratigraphy was better deciphered, the inhabitation structures were more consciently discerned, the interdisciplinary research was*

more efficient." (M.Carciumaru, 2000). In only two years time, 1995 and 1996, all the artistic objects belonging to the superior Palaeolithic in Cioarei Cave were discovered, the role of illumination by means of electrogenic group being very important since the objects have small dimensions.

The lack of adequate spaces for depositing the organic material pieces, the rudimentary preservation and restoration possibilities (if existent) as well as the destructions provoked by the second world war represented the main causes that determined the disappearance of the objects discovered before 1944. There are some of their descriptions and sketches in some articles published during the inter-war period (H.Breuil, M. 1925; Roska 1925; N. Morosanu 1938, C.S. Nicolaescu Plopsor 1938).

At the moment, a simple inventory of the objects that can be considered „artistic" objects or presenting intentional traces of processing without having a utilitarian motivation would include 65 objects. Out of these, almost a quarter (23%) has disappeared. Nothing is known about the ten objects discovered before 1940. Among the existent 50 objects, more than a half (33) was discovered after 1990. Thus we can state that more than half of the Palaeolithic artistic objects existent on the Romanian territory were discovered in the last 15 years.

Total objects	65			100%	
Lost objects	15			23%	
Extant objects	50	17	1940-1990	26%	77%
		33	1990-2006	51%	



THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC

Aurignacian

Cioclovina "Peştera Mare"

Ciolcovina cave is situated at nearly 1.5 km distance from Ciolcovina village, Bosorod commune, on the right side of Luncanilor valley, in the Sebesul limestone massif (Paunescu A., 2001). In 1911, Marton Roska did the first research in Cioclovina cave. In 1924 the cave is visited by the abbot Breuil who studies the lithic and osteologic material discovered during the 1911 - 1924 campaigns; Marton Roska's team also confirms the cultural classification as belonging to the recent Musterian and Aurignacian periods (Breuil H., 1925; Roska M., 1925). Between 1940-1941 the rich phosphates deposits are industrially worked, and it was then that a human skull of *Homo sapiens fossils* was accidentally found in the guano's 1st sector inside the cave; it is assigned to be a 30-40 year-old woman's skull (C.S. Nicolaescu-Plopsor, 1968). Bony material tests were taken and dated at the laboratory of Lund (Sweden) at 29.000+/-700 B.P. (LuA-5229) (Olariu A. and colab. , 2003, A.Paunescu, 2001).

Among the fauna resources belonging to the Aurignacian level, M. Roska mentions the presence of many bones with processing traces such as a spear point, a perforated *Ursus Spelaeus* shin fragment, a split and shaped bear eye-tooth, as well as three bear calf's teeth, perforated or maybe in an incipient phase of perforation (as it does not appear at the apical extremity of the root, but in the middle of the piece). These were considered decorative objects by their discoverer (C.Beldiman, 2004a). Unfortunately, M. Roska does not offer any further information or images referring to this object (C.Beldiman, 2004b).

"Pestera Igrita" Cave

It is situated in the south-western side of Pestera village, on the left side of Crisul Repede slope, in a limestone massif. Beginning with the second part of the XIX-th century, the cave has been known among the speologists and paleontologists; the Pleistocene fauna remains, found in its sediments, have contributed to this as well (A.Paunescu, 2001; C.S. Nicolaescu Plopsor, 1959). The archeological research was started in 1913 by M. Roska. In 1924, during their visit in Transylvania, Henri Breuil and Marton Roska did four tests on the front and interior cave terrace, determining the presence of two/three Musterian levels and an Aurignacian one (H.Breuil, 1925; M. Roska, 1925; C.S. Nicolaescu Plopsor, 1938).

Fig.1. Igrița Cave Spear point . Detail (after C. Beldiman 2004b, p.107,

In the fauna remains, procceding from the Test nr. 2 in the superior Aurignacian level of inhabitance, H. Breuil signals and publishes a fragmented spear point (or a stabber)made in bear bone, presenting a very well processed oval section, having a series of 16 short line-shaped impressions on one of its sides; they are transversally and obliquely disposed, on two parallel rows (Fig. 1). (H.Breuil, 1925; C.Beldiman, 2004a).

In what concerns the reindeer antler spear point presenting processing traces, discovered at Baia de Fier and the one discovered at Pestera, many analogies with the

European superior Paleolithic have been made. In the more recent Aurignacian sites, there is a greater number of pendants made of perforated teeth. From this point of view, there are two very important sites: Mladec cave, situated close to Olomouc in Moravia and Mamutowa cave situated in Northern Cracovia. As well as this, approximately 50 other bone objects were found at Mladec. Three of them can be considered awls and they have minutely rounded refined perforated extremities. Having the extremities much broader than the long parts, a question raise: aren't they more pendants like than awls? (J. Kozlowski 1992).

Topalu

In 1928, Nicolae N. Morosanu informs on the existence of a cave in the eastern extremity of limestone quierries situated on Danube right shore, at nearly 5 km distance from Topalu village, Constantza county (C.S. Nicolaescu – Plopsor, 1938; 1999a). The cave was more than 12 m long and almost 7 m wide, made up of two compartments. During the jurasic limestone working, the cave was destroyed. A considerable quantity of archeological material (lithic equipment, flow and fauna remains) was recuperated by N. N. Morosanu without digging. Besides, he makes a series of startigraphic observations and, from the typological point of view, he attributes the hand-made objects to the Aurignacian period (C. S. Nicolaescu – Plopsor, 1959). A. Paunescu considers that the lithical pieces could be attributed, typologically speaking, both to the belated Musterian period and the early Aurignacian period. Among the published objects, there are two other bone objects which present processing traces. The first one is 17,6 cm long and 6 cm wide and presents few intentional traces and a very well polished side, implying the fact that it was long used (A.Paunescu, 1999a). On one side of a section, the bone was polished and N. N. Morosanu could notice the presence of some pronounced incisions, more or less parallel and disposed perpendicularly on the bone length.

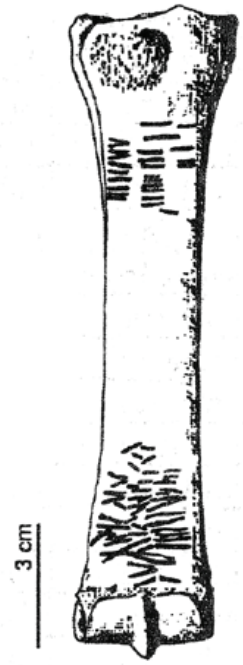


Fig.2. Topalu, Metacarpian III de *Equus caballus fossilis,* (After Beldiman 2004b:106, fig. 2:3)

The second object is represented by a III-rd metacarpal bone of *Equus caballus fossilis* which presents some short incised lines on the fore side (Fig. 2). On the proximal side of the metacarpal diaphysis one can distinguish the presence of 26 short transversal or oblique incisions, disposed in three rows of 10, 12 or 4 graphic elements, some of them being quite deep and well separated. On the distal part of the diaphysis there are 48 lines, structured on three columns with 11, 22 and 15 incisions which are not as regularly disposed or straight as those on the proximal side. The lines dimensions are between 5 – 25 mm long, 1 – 2 mm wide and 1 – 1,5 mm deep (C.Beldiman, 2004a). Nicolae N. Morosanu stated that it is about a retoucher presenting specific traces of use. C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopsor and A. Paunescu consider that the incisions are not the result of an intentional anthropic action. Following the research and the comparisons with other resembling object recently discovered, Corneliu Beldiman asserts that we can talk about a decorated object which utility cannot be determined.

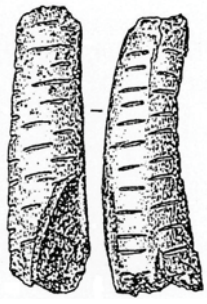


Fig.3. Climăuți II Bone with incisions (After I. Borziac 1994:27-28, fig. 7;5)

Unfortunately, the two objects were lost in 1940'. Their observations, made subsequently their discovery, started from the photographies in N. N. Morosanu's article, "A Paleolithic site in Dobrogea – Topalu", written in 1928, Romanian Accademy – The Scientific Section Memories, III-rd series. V-th tome (C.Beldiman , 2004a).

A décor resembling this one appears on an object discovered at Climauti II, level that can be attributed to the final Aurignacian period. The object presents incised parallel lines disposed on two columns (Fig. 3). (I. Borziac, 1994: 27-28).

The metapod incised décor from Topalu presents similitudes with the shale object as well, which was discovered in Temnata cave, in a level anterior to the Aurignacian period. Its décor is made up of two series of carved parallel lines, distributed in two registers. Each register contains 21 incisions which, inside the section have a V or U shape. (Fig. 4). (M. Cremades, 2000: 320-332).

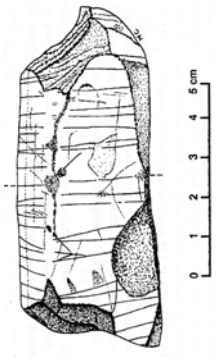


Fig.4. Temnata, Engraved chert (After M. Cremades 2000:320-332, fig. 5)

For this décor type, there have been put forward some assumptions regarding their interpretation as being a rudimentary counting system, a calendar, etc. All these can be easily dismantled; their true interpretation fails to be grasped, being merely subjective.

Ohaba Ponor "Bordu Mare Cave"

Bordu Mare Cave is situated at the south-eastern end of Ohaba Ponor village, at nearly 650 m altitude (A. Paunescu, 2001). In 1918, J. Mallász remarks the cave archaeological importance (C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopsor, 1938) and in 1923, he and M. Roska dig for the first time the entrance area of the cave and the terrace in front of it (M. Roska, 1925; H. Breuil, 1925). In 1954-1955, C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopsor stars digging again and emphasizes the V level of inhabitance attributed to the Aurignacian period. While digging a decorative object was discovered - a perforated eye-tooth which was first considered to belong to the Neolithic level (C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopsor, N. Haas, A. Paunescu, A. Bolomey, 1957; M. Carciumaru, 1999) and which was subsequently assimilated to the Aurignacian level (C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopsor, A.Paunescu, I. Pop, 1962; M. Carciumaru, 1999) (Fig. 5). According to the present available data, this object seems to be the oldest decorative object made of animal material which has been discovered in Romania so far. From the paleotechnological point of view, the discovery certifies the oldest use of alternative rotation on both sides and the bilateral preparation by central curettage or by grataj "en cuvette" (C. Beldiman 2004b). We are not in possession of an absolute dating for the Aurignacian level, but the superior part of the Musterian level situated immediately under this one, was dated at 28.780+_290 (GrN-14627) (A. Paunescu, 2001 p.297).

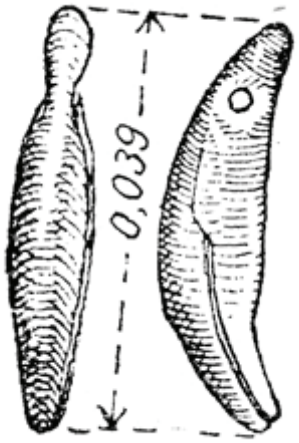


Fig.5. Bordu Mare Cave. Wolf canine. (C.S.Nicolăescu-Plopşor, Haas N., Bolomey A., 1957)

Before 36.000 B.P., a considerable number of pendants were discovered in the Central and Eastern Europe. Intentionally perforated fox and bear teeth, resembling those found at Cioclovina and Bordu were discovered in the 11th layer of Bacho Kiro cave, situated in vicinity of Drianovski Monastyr, Bulgaria; they were dated at 42.000 years B.P. (J. Kozolowski, 1992) (Fig.12). These are objects that were intended to be worn suspended, as the wear of the edge orifices certifies. At the same time, in Istallöskö cave in the Bükk Mountains (Hungary), two pendants were found in the 1st layer , dated at 44.300+_1900(Gr. N – 4659) and 39.800+_900 (Gr. N – 4658), which imitates a stag tooth made of deer antler and a pentagonal lamella cut in ivory. Both are minutely perforated. In the same site there was

discovered a point that can be a correspondent of the one discovered in Romania at Baia de Fier and Paestera (V. Dobosi, 1991). The decorative objects are well represented by the discoveries made at Mamutowa cave, too. This collection contains 13 perforated teeth, among which 4 are wolf teeth, 3 - fox teeth, 3 - bear teeth, 1 is horse tooth, 1 - stag tooth and 1 - horned cattle tooth (J. Kozlowski, 1992).

Gravetian

Somesul Rece

The cave is situated at approximately 2 km distance from the village, in the superior part of Cetate Massif, at 540 m absolute altitude and at 100 m above Somesul Rece's level. The first archaeological research took place in 1891 and it was realized by the geologist A. Koch who discovered a great number of micro and macro mammals as well as bird bones (Paunescu, 2001). These fauna remains were studied by the abbot Breuil as well when he visited Transylvania in 1924. According to his view, most of the bone remains belong to the *Capra Ibex, Rubicapra rubicapra, Boss sp., Canis sp., Cane vulpes fossilis, Lepus europeanus, Equus caballus fossilis* species. At the same time he identifies a blade discovered by A. Koch as being Magdalenian, and which Al. Paunescu, having in view the fauna discovered, considers it as belonging to the late Gravetian (Epigravetian). (H. Breuil, 1925; C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopsor, 1938; Paunescu Al., 2001). Among these fauna remains, H. Breuil mentions two long wolf bones, a shin and a humerus, on which he distinguishes processing traces (H.Breuil, 1925; A.Paunescu, 2001). The first object is a walking-stick perforated near the proximal joint, the anatomic morphology not being modified by making an oval-shaped orifice; the only information and a drawing referring to this object, originate in the description made by H. Breuil (Fig.6). At the second object, a wolf humerus, the olecranian natural perforation was widened. (H. Breuil, 1925; A.Paunescu, 2001; C.Beldiman, 2004a).

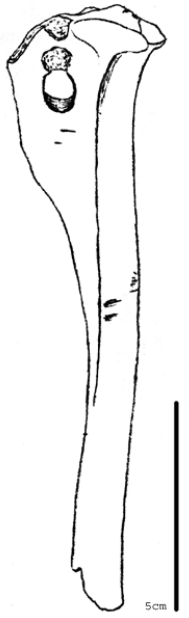


Fig. 6. Someşul Rece
Pierced tibia of *Canis lupus*
(After H. Breuil, 1925)

Stânca-Ripiceni Cave

During the excavations realized in 1925-1926, N. N. Morosanu signals the presence of three objects in the Vth level (subsequently attributed to the oriental gravetian) which can be considered pendants: a fragment of a fox mandible, a wolf eye-tooth and a *Helix* shell; all of them seem to have been perforated. Unfortunately, no other information or images are offered. (N. Morosanu, 1938).

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