

LE MINISTÈRE D'EDUCATION NATIONALE  
L'UNIVERSITÉ "VALAHIA" TARGOVISTE

# ANNALES

## D'UNIVERSITÉ "VALAHIA" TARGOVISTE

SECTION  
d'Archéologie et d'Histoire

**Tome I**

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**ANALLES  
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## The prehistoric cave-bear cultic site gold cave, Transylvania. Romania

*Cristian LASCU\**

In 1987, during a far exploration of a downstream, post-syphon gallery in Gold (fig. 1/1) Cave, a team of speleologists, found rich deposits of cave-bear remains (*Ursus spelaeus*). In the center of the final part of the gallery (fig. 2/3), a formation of four bear skulls, which the occipital part in an in position, was found. In an isolated spot close to the wall, three more skulls were discovered. They had long bones perpendicularly placed in front of them. The peculiar layout of these bones was so intriguing that we took b/w and color 616 slides of them. A careful survey of the surrounding area was also made. On a small ledge 2m, above the gallery floor a piece of mammoths'tooth was found (*Elephas primigenius*). No further mammal remains were found, neither was there evidence of human remains.

The photographs and some bone samples were examined by the paleontologists, Dr.Costin Radalescu (Director of the Speleological Institute) and Dr. Petre Samson, and the archaeologists. Dr. Marin Cârciumaru and Dr. Maria Bitiri (specialists in Paleolithic culture at the Archaeological Institute of Bucharest). Their main opinion was that the positioning of the remains was unusual and could not be explained away by chance. Some aspects pinpointed were:

- The gallery, where the skulls are situated, is a fossil one and for a long time has remained undisturbed by natural factors such as flowing water, terra in slide and collapse.
- A slight film of seeping water, over-saturated with calcium carbonate, has covered the floor and the lower part of the walls with a blanket of calcite sometimes measuring more than 5 cm thick. Therefore the bones are well embedded in the petrified crust and some of them are covered with coral-like crystals.
- The dripping water has generated soda-straw stalactites, 250 cm long and stalagmites, that cover some of the bear skeletons; on the other hand the dripping water has excavated nearby soft sediment (composed of clay and fine sand) forming a pelicular microrelief of pillars, 35 cm high, with bones on their tops. All of these features are extremely

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sensitive and prove, the theory that there has been no climatic disturbance of the caves environment.(fig./3)

- There seems to be no natural explanation of how the mammoths tooth got onto the ledge, 2 m above the floor.

According to these circumstances, the idea of deliberate human intervention in the positioning of some of the skulls and bones was advanced.

Later on further investigation was undertaken:

1. Because the first team had to pass over 3 km of very difficult cave passages (including vertical pits, restricting passages and a sump), it was clear that there would have to be another entrance, one that had been used in the past by the bears and actually by hunters. Using a topographical map, a team of local caverns found in the indicated area a large entrance that had partially collapsed. After digging in the sediment they found, beyond the entrance, a hall 20m/10m/5m, with cave-bear skulls and three human footprints. The hall was affected by dripping water and elastic sediment.
2. A new expedition organized in 1989 extracted a piece of calcite crust that contained cave bear traces and sent it to the USA for radiodating (courtesy of Serban Sarbu).

### **The importance of the discovery**

Computing all the facts so far in the case, the idea of "non-human" intervention in the placing of the bones seems less reasonable than that of deliberate arrangement.

In the latter idea, the main question is was it a cave-bear puzzle for some prehistoric children, or did the positioning of the bones have particular significance for our ancestors?

Information received so far seems to support the latter assumption.

1. Recent detailed, research, undertaken, by a team of archaeologists led by Prof. dr. Marin Cârciumaru,<sup>1</sup> in Cioarei Cave Southern Carpathians, uncovered a similar case. In the mustertian level a cave-bear burial site was found. Skulls were arranged in patterns with long bones. The area was also rich in mustertian industry and radiodating of this proved it to be in excess of 47,000 years.
2. A visit to the Smithsonian Institute's Museum in Washington D.C. revealed a room especially designed to present "the cave-bear cultic place" in Regourdou Cave, Montignac, Dordogne, France. This deposit is radiodated at 70,000 years.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Cârciumaru, *Evolutia omului in Cuaternar*, partea a III-a (sub tipar);



3. In the Cabrerete Caves, France, in 1965, Andre Cheynier described the presence of four bear skulls put together in a hidden corner, as a ritual feature.
4. Petersshohle, Franconia. Five cave-bear skulls and long bones were found in an arrangement, in a pocket 1,25cm above the soil of the gallery.
5. Drachen loch-sur-Wattis. Small stone walls surrounding bear skeletons. The skulls are arranged in a parallel position.
6. In Bear Cave, Monti Lessini, Italy, Dr.Marco Agus found, (1965) in a musterian deposit, a cave-bear skull with a tibia on the right side, and a humerus on the left, surrounded by a stone wall (Professor Ugo Sauro, University of Padova, personal communication).

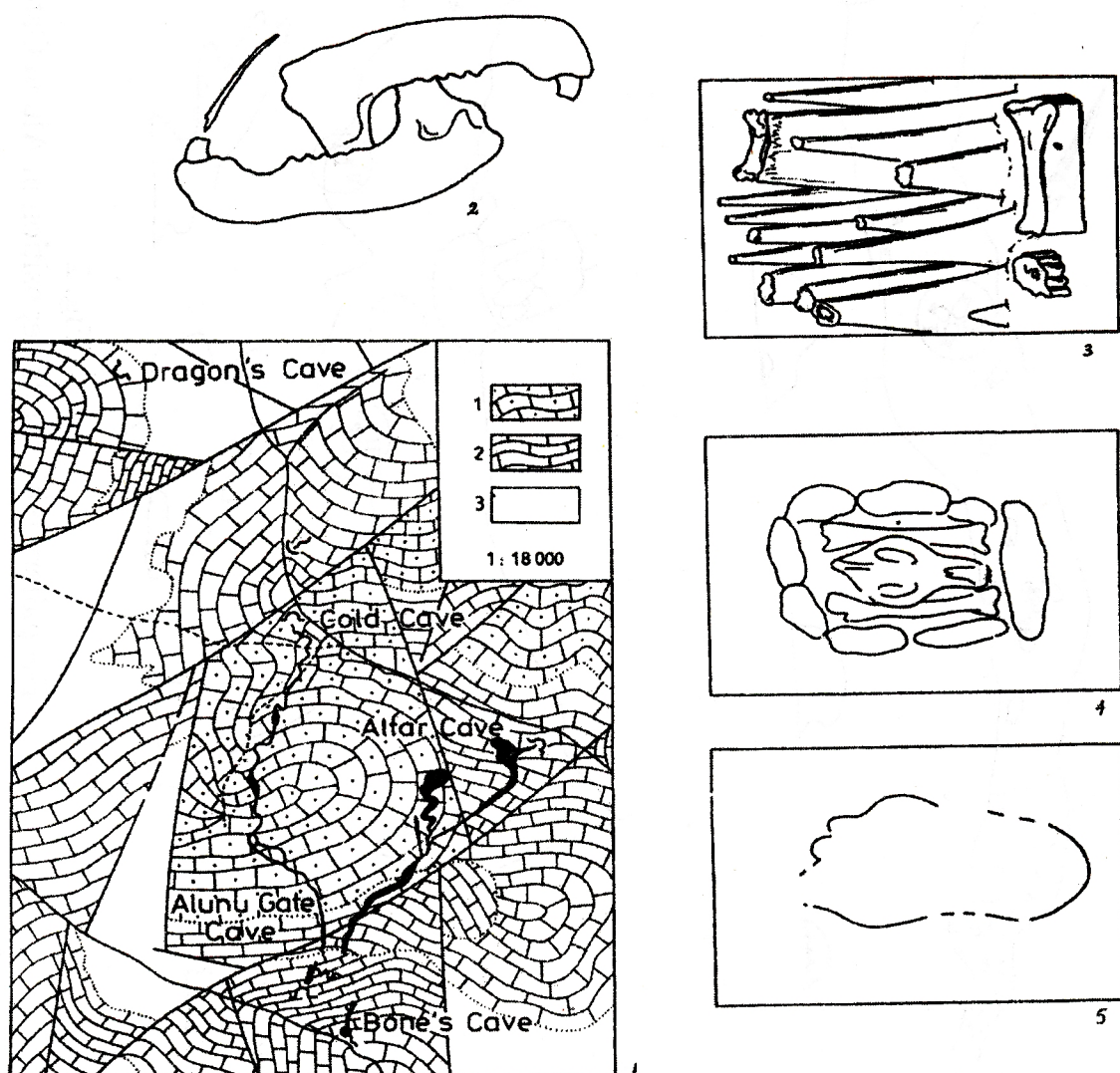


Fig. 1

The geographical portion of the cave and some of the situations found in the galleries with skulls deposition

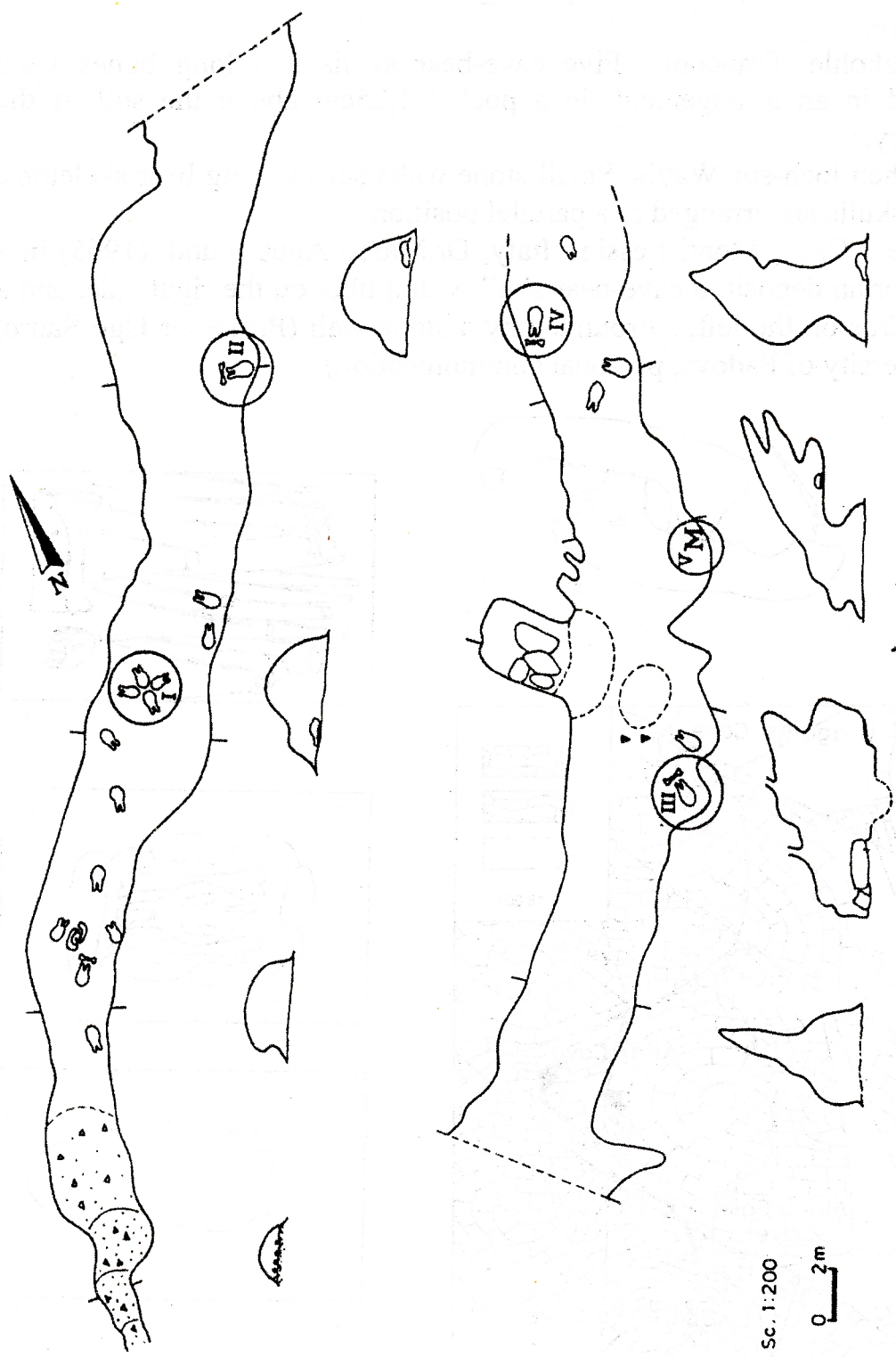


Fig. 2  
The gallery with skulls deposition in Alunu Gate Cave



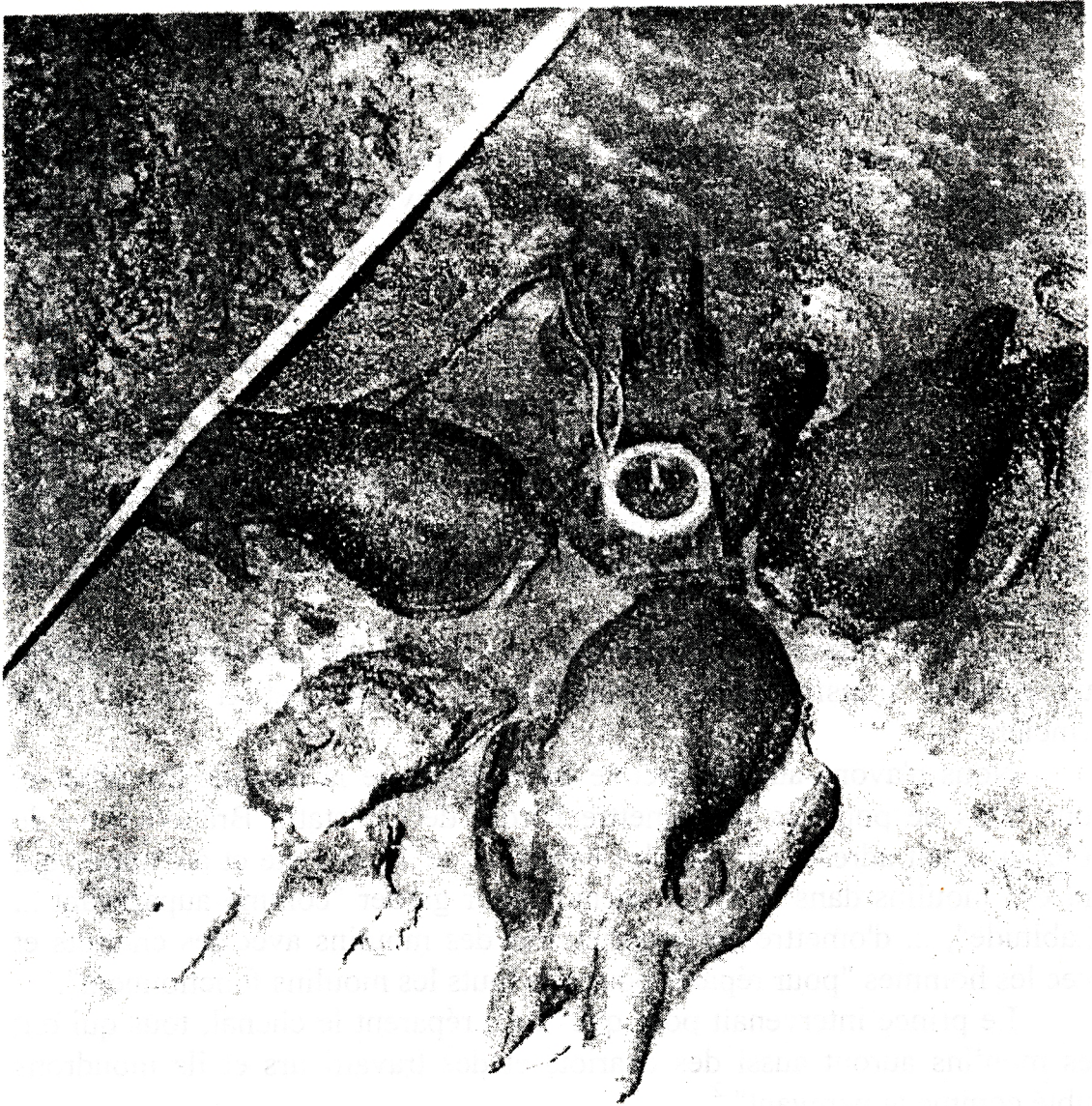


Fig. 3  
Cave bears skulls tropped in calcite cavit