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Historiography of the Upper Paleolithic research on Bistrița Valley (north-eastern Romania)

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Abstract: ***Historiography of Upper Palaeolithic research on Bistrița Valley***. The purpose of this work is the presentation, in as much detail as possible, of the Superior Palaeolithic research in the Bistrita Valley. In this article I will expose the factors that led to the intensive research of the area and I will interpolate the Austrian military map in 1910, to be able to obtain the exact coordinates of the sites, both GPS and Stereo70. This demarche is necessary for an exact location and for the creation of the spatial distribution of the sites.

Keywords: Upper Palaeolithic settlements, north-eastern Romania, research historiography, excavation methods, stratigraphy.

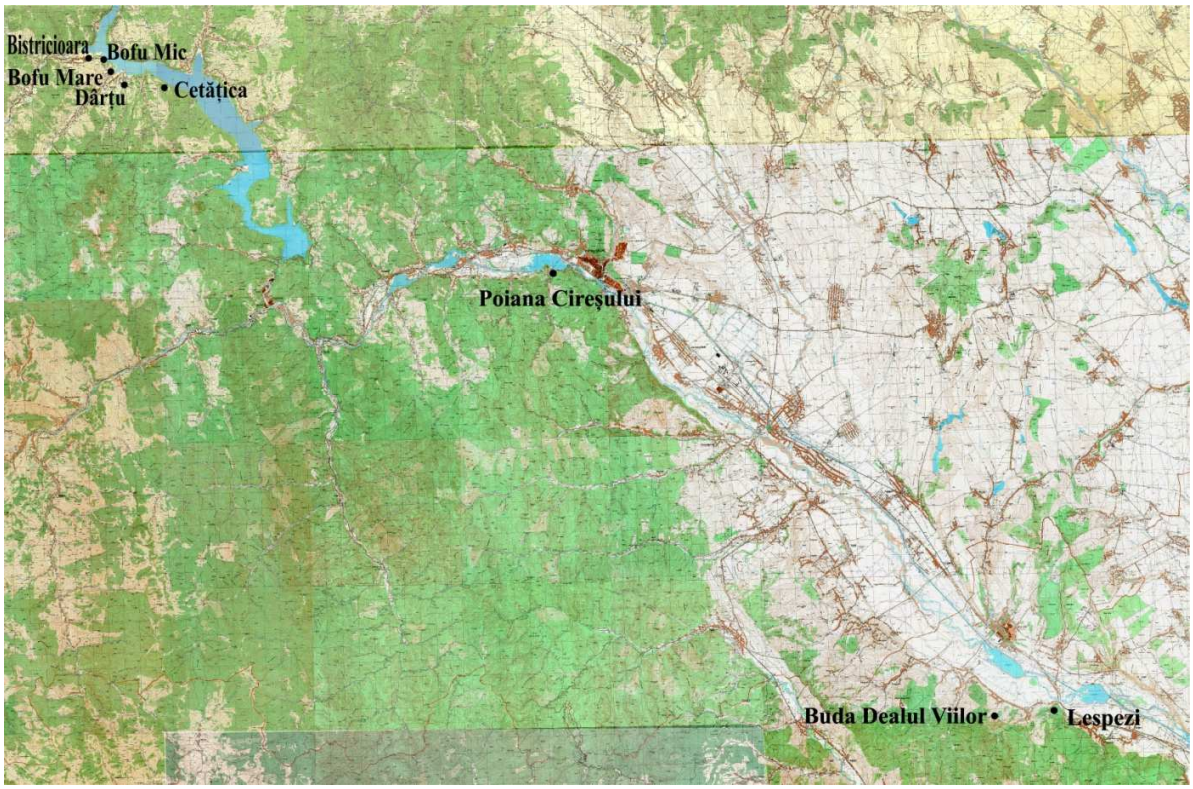
Introduction

The archaeological research that had been undertaken during the time in the north-eastern Romania (Moldavia) brought important contributions to the knowledge of the prehistory in this area. The new technological equipment, the exhaustive research over some sites, have allowed some estimations that would help us much easily revalue the environment in prehistory and have given us supplementary possibilities for a new and more exact repertoire of the Upper Palaeolithic settlements, regarding new approaches from the perspective of systematic, preventive and more efficient further diggings. Besides settlements historiography, we also introduced in Google Earth, a program that allows us to interpolate some virtual maps from different periods, on which we can fix the field coordinates, the settlements and the points with archaeological discoveries and the data that we gathered from the field (fig. 1).

Record of the discoveries

The archaeological research in the area of Moldavia (north-eastern Romania) have started in the second half of the 19th century, more precisely in 1885, when the geologist Gregoriu Ştefănescu discovered in Mitoc, Malul Galben point, at a depth of 2m, in the clay from the Prut shore, several pieces of flint (C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor et al., 1966). The archaeological research of the Palaeolithic from this area, in itself, started, on the other hand, after the First World War, in 1925, when the archaeologist N. N. Moroşan discovered, at Stânca-Ripiceni, an interesting Palaeolithic settlement, which he placed in the Upper Palaeolithic period (I. Simionescu, N. N. Moroşan, 1926).

a



b

Fig. 1 – The Upper Paleolithic settlements on the Bistrița valley (north-eastern Romania)

In 1955, the Palaeolithic research of this region receives a considerable enthusiasm, at the same time with the beginning hydroelectric reservoir building from Bicaz. The research started on this occasion attested the existence of human settlements in the area, dating from the beginning of the Upper Palaeolithic, until the 17th century.

The demarche of this work was based on a decision of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party of 26 October 1950, which established a complex program of electrification of the country by achieving hydropower system on the Bistrița Valley. After the completion of technical prospecting and the spatial planning of the future hydropower, in 1954 they have started a collaboration between the Ministry of Electricity and Electro-technical Industry and the Academy of the Romanian Popular Republic, under which the first organism was committed to finance a complex program of interdisciplinary research, assumed by the specialists of The Romanian Academy. The research teams were made up of renowned experts from the Institutes of the Academy of Bucharest, Iași, Cluj, Craiova etc., and experts from various museums, under the leadership of the academician Ștefan Milcu, deputy scientific coordinator being dr. C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor.

The team of archaeologists, directed by C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopşor and M. Petrescu-Dâmboviţa, conducted an ample complex research activity in the middle basin of Bistrița Valley. The results of archaeological and historical excavations have been presented in the pages of periodicals on the subject, and in parallel they have worked on a monograph on the whole research, a study of human evolution from the Palaeolithic to the modern age. During the execution of the first field surveys, it was thought that there were no traces of inhabiting older than the 17th century. Further research, however, debunked this hypothesis, the periodization of the human activity extending up until the Palaeolithic. The starting point of the Bistrița Valley Palaeolithic finds was represented by the digging in the yard of the Old Church of Răpciuni village, where they unearthed skeletons for anthropological studies. In these excavations were found flakes and flint blades older than the Neolithic (C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopşor, 1959). The locals that were hired in the digging indicated that there were also other places where they could find "flints of flash good to lightening" ("cremeni de fulger bune pentru scăpărat") (C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor, 1959, p. 45.). After all the data had been gathered, the frequency of this kind of discoveries being greater in the old cemetery and around it, on the Bofu terrace (fig. 2) they made small excavations that determined the beginning of ampler diggings. In the fall of 1955 excavations were carried out in a single point at Dârţu (fig. 2) on an area of 146 square meters, and the following year there was a wider research campaign.

The field archaeological research from the basin of Ceahlău included also the terraces from Podiș, Cetățica, the Curtea Bisericii Vechi, Secu-Curtea Boului and also, punctually at La Scaune, situated at over 1000m, in the Ceahlău massif (fig. 2).

After the excavations from the terrace from Dârţu during two campaigns, 1955-1956, there were identified five layers of Palaeolithic habitation, two belonging to the Aurignacian (middle and upper) and three belonging to the Gravetian (C.S Nicolaescu Plopşor et al., 1966). The excavated area was 461 square meters, consisting of sections of different sizes, placed in three sectors of the terrace: northeast, southwest and west. Their depth ranged from 1.20-1.90 m and 2.30 to 3.70 m (C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopşor et al., 1966).

In 1957-1958 were identified other new sites, such as those from Bistricioara-Lutărie, Ceahlău-Scaune, Cetățica, Bofu Mic, Buda. At the place called Lutărie, located in the south-eastern edge of the Bistricioara village, the excavations have brought to light an important and rich Palaeolithic settlement, with six levels of habitation, two belonging to the Aurignacian (middle and upper) and four belonging to the Gravettian (lower, middle, upper and late). Excavations made in points I and II, located at 50-60 m distance from each other, covered an area of 210 square meters (C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopşor et al., 1966).

The excavation of Bofu Mic was extended on an area of 688 square meters, and here were two levels of Palaeolithic habitation belonging to the late Gravettian. The Cetăţica site is located on a high terrace that dominated the Bistriţa Valley both

in upstream and downstream. The researched area was of 220 sqm, four Palaeolithic levels being identified, one belonging to the lower Aurignacian and three belonging to the lower, upper and late Gravettian. The first archaeological research in the point called Scaune was limited at a small excavation, executed in 1956. During the following years, 1957-1958, ample archaeological diggings were executed, the excavated surface reaching 710 sqm. Only one cultural level was identified, being situated in the Swiderian culture (C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor et al., 1966).

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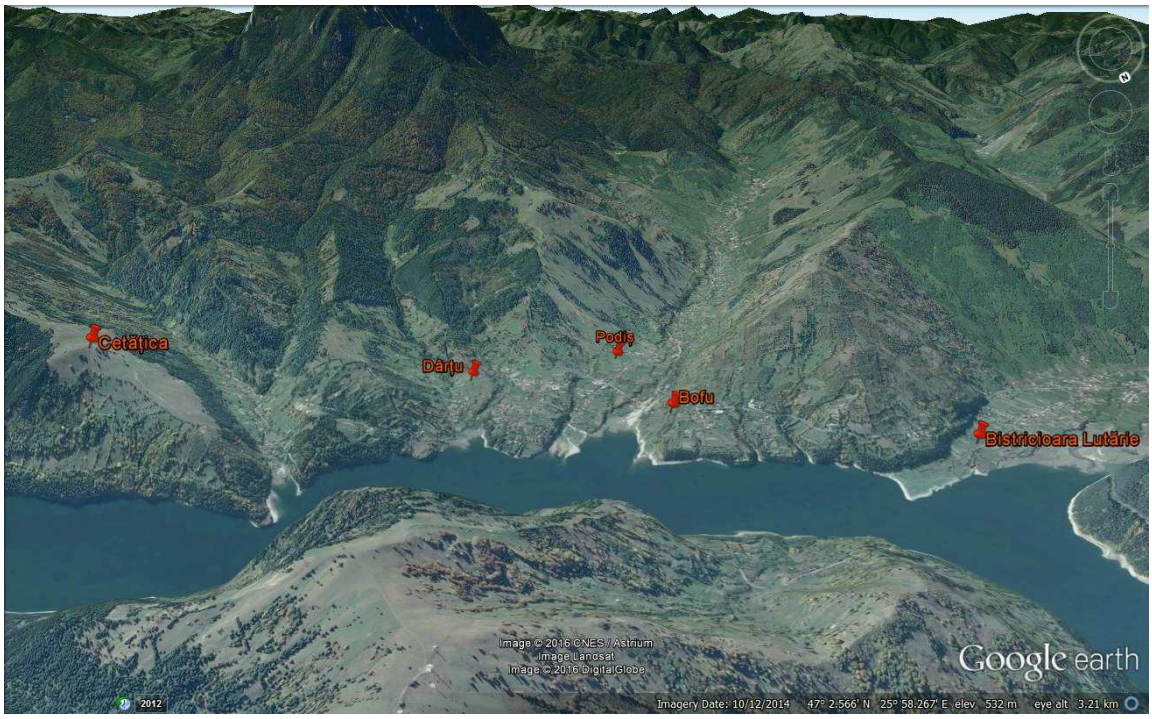

b

Fig. 2 - The Upper Paleolithic settlements of Ceahlău Basin (a - austrian military map 1910; b - Google Earth image).

In 1958, the research extends on the Bistrița Valley downstream, through the digging from Buda-Dealul Viilor (fig. 3). The stratigraphic sequence of the deposit resembling to the one from the Ceahlău Basin, and in terms of cultural sequence, several levels were attributed to the Kostenkian culture (C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor et al., 1960). The campaign from 1959 aimed the exhaustion of the sections from the previous campaign and the opening of two new sections (V. Căpitanu et al., 1962).

A specific element for the settlement of Buda is represented by the three faunal complexes consisting mainly of long bone extremities belonging to Bovidae, which, through their position, remain susceptible to multiple interpretations, among them also being the one of hunter's magic (M. Bitiri et al., 1989, p. 23). The position of the settlement, the character of the cultural layer with a confined number of hearths and the specific of the bone concentrations, the high percentage of the tools and the ratio between the types, are elements which individualize the settlement from Buda and it sets it between the settlements attributed to the middle Gravetian from the Bistrița Valley.

a

b

Fig. 3 – Location of Buda Dealul Viilor and Lespezi settlements (a - Austrian military map 1910; b - Google Earth image).

The archaeological research conducted in 1962 by the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest and Bacău County Museum led to the discovery of the settlement from Lespezi (fig. 3). At that time, the first excavations have been made, which continued every year until 1968 (M. Bitiri, V. Căpitanu, 1972). In 1963, in a note, the discovery of the settlement is being signalled (M. Bitiri, 1963). Six levels of Palaeolithic habitation have been identified, with an age varying from 16.070 and 15.670, according to the C_{14} data executed in Berlin (M. Bitiri, V. Căpitanu, 1972).

Between the Palaeolithic settlements discovered on the Bistrița Valley, the Lespezi one raised particular problems from the stratigraphic and chronological point of view, due to the tendency of the '60s to be framed in Wurm II, along with those of Ceahlău and Buda, this framing not being justified by the archaeological material nor by the character of the culture layers, which led to supplementary investigations. The archaeological diggings executed during 1962-1969 consisted of six successive sections placed towards the edge of the promontory and two sloping in the abrupt clay banks, having a total area of 837 sqm. The Palaeolithic settlement from Lespezi is characterized by short-term habitation, appreciated by Al. Bolomey (1989) as being seasonal, spring-autumn. The first five levels are deposited in the massive, slightly sandy loessoid sediment, in a time sequence between 16,000 and 15,000 years, which can be framed with the climatic oscillations Herculane II and Românești (Bitiri M. et al., 1989). Through the consistency and amplitude of the habitations, the mentioned levels are different and do not superpose integrally, but all of them represent a developed phase of the Gravetian culture, in a strictly individualized aspect (M. Bitiri et al., 1989).

In 1963, the site from Poiana Cireşului (fig.4) is discovered, on the occasion of some works executed on the road that linked the Doamna annex with the Piatra Neamț city (C. Scorpan, 1972-1973). On the occasion of these works, several flint pieces were recovered. The observations made on-site led to the conclusion that the pieces were brought by the rain water or by the water resulted from the melting of the snow from Cernegura hill (C. Scorpan, 1972-1973; V. Căpitanu, 1969). The researchers made confusion because Cernegura hill is located at 4 km SE from Poiana Cireşului (Fig. 5) and their hypothesis are not valid. Being pursued the coastal springs, they reached an altitude of 400 m, at a places called Poiana Cireşului (Cherry Glade), where a 10 x 1.5m section was made, managing to discover approximately 2,160 lithic pieces. Following this first excavation of the site, there were discovered, along the four stratigraphic units, hearths and faunal remains, considered as belonging to a single cultural horizon, defined, according to the accepted cultural scheme in the 60s, as "Eastern superior Aurignacian" (C. Scorpan, 1972-1973, p. 257). Another excavation was executed in 1968 by V. Căpitanu to a depth of 1,50m. This time, five stratigraphic units and three habitation levels, belonging to the Gravetian, are identified (V. Căpitanu, 1969). A small excavation was made in 1989 by Maria Bitiri-Ciortescu and Roxana Dobrescu, but the results they obtained remained unpublished.

Starting with 1998, the settlement from Poiana Cireşului entered a systematic research phase, the archaeological site being led by PhD Marin Cârciumaru (1998-2011). The resulting archaeological material was tridimensionally recorded, by reference to a unique zero point (M. Cârciumaru et al., 2005; 2006; 2007-2008). Since 2013, the research is led by dr. Elena-Cristina Niţu from the Princely Court National Museum Complex from Târgovişte, in collaboration with the History Museum from Piatra Neamț. From the three Gravetian levels, presented at Poiana Cireşului, the first layer (19.459 ± 96 - 20.154 ± 97 B. P.) delivered also the highest number of personal ornaments, art objects, tools and weapons made of organic materials (M. Cârciumaru, M. Ţuţuianu-Cârciumaru, 2011). Among the art objects discovered in this layer, there were discovered pendants made of different animal tooth, beads, incised bones and antler fragments etc. Since the research activity at Poiana Cireşului goes on, these data have a preliminary character.

Between 1980-1986, Al. Păunescu perform small excavations at Bistricioara Lutărie, Dârţu, Ceahlău Scaune, Cetăţica I and II, occasion on which charcoal and bone samples are collected for radiocarbon dating (Al. Păunescu, 1984). Thus, according to the obtained data, the first level from Dârţu is attributed to the middle Aurignacian and

a

b

Fig. 4 – Location of *Poiana Cireșului*, austrian military map 1910; b - Google Earth image).

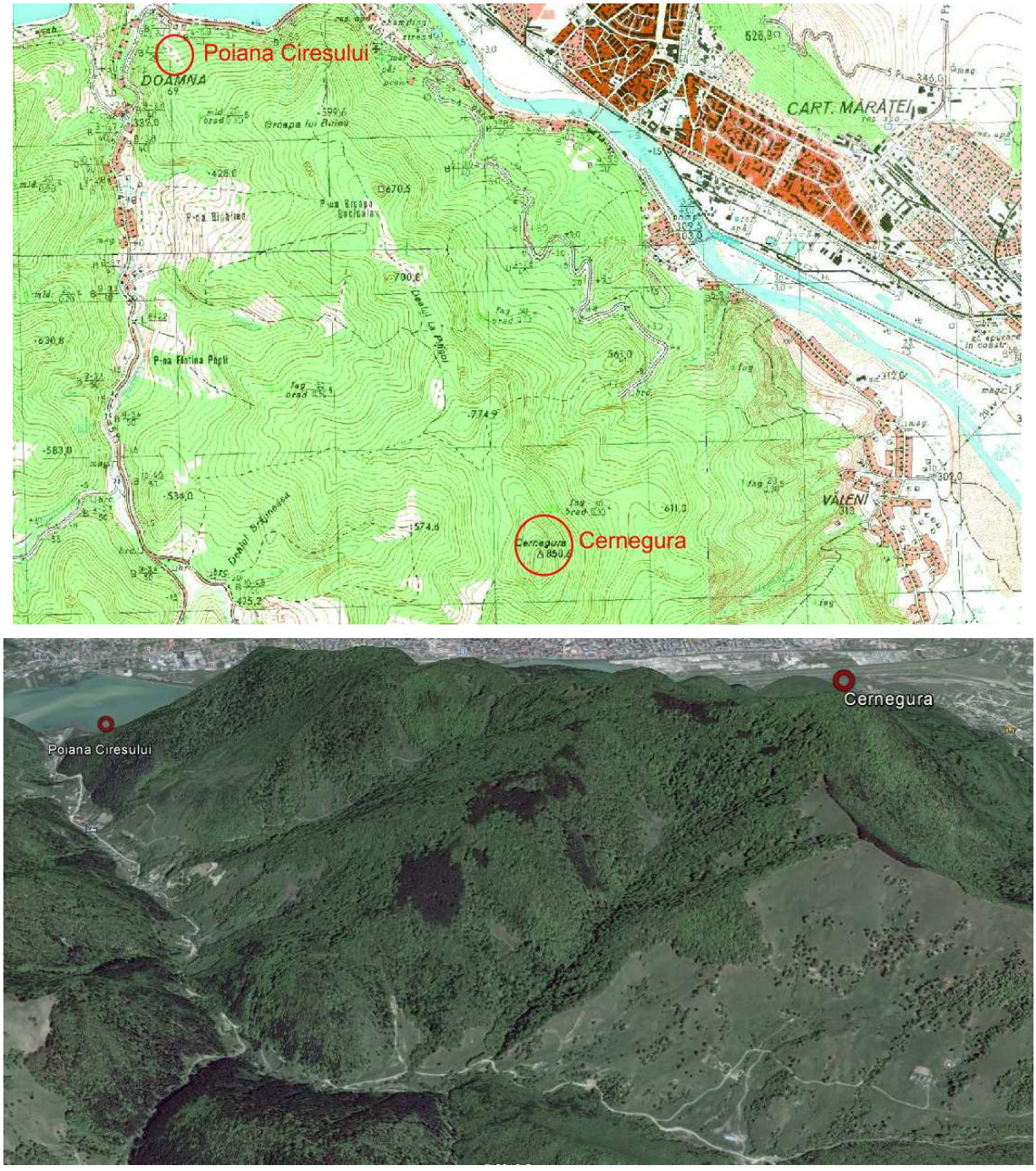

Fig. 5 - Placement of Poiana Cireșului and Cernegura on Romanian topographic map 1975 and Google Earth image.

has an age of 25.450 B.P. The first level from Cetăţica was placed in the lower Aurignacian and offered an age of 28.420 B.P. For Bistricioara Lutărie, the first level – middle Aurignacian – has the age of 23.560 B.P., level II has an age between 23.450 – 20.300 B.P., and the third layer of habitation belong to the period 21.000-16.000. The last layer would date to between 14.000-12.000 B.P. It should be noted that these radiocarbon dating only confirmed the results of pollen analysis made by Marin Cârciumaru. Other research had taken place on these sites between 2006 - 2007

(M. Anghelinu et al., 2012), but they hadn't brought anything new to what was known from the previous years.

In conclusion, we can say that the archaeological research from 1957-1958 had the purpose of marking the above mentioned Palaeolithic sites and establishing some staggered cultural sequences on the chronological landings belonging to the last Ice Age (C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, M. Petrescu-Dâmbovița, 1959). Thus, the studied repositories belong to the three stages of the Würm Ice Age and the afferent inter-stages. The inferior Aurignacian from Cetățica is placed in the Würm I-II inter-stage, and it represented the oldest Upper Palaeolithic from the Bistrița Valley (C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor et al., 1966). Two levels belonging to the middle Aurignacian from Dârţu and the Aurignacian level from Bistricioara Lutărie are assigned to the debute of Würm II stage. In the last part of the Wurm II stage and the first part of the Wurm II-III interstage stands the upper stage of the Gravetian, and the final part of this culture would develop during the last stage of Wurm III (CS Nicolaescu-Plopşor et al. 1966).

The geochronological scheme proposed by C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor and his collaborators will suffer, in time, a series of completions or corrections. A first revaluation of the scheme is represented by the publication, in 1977, of the results of the chemical, granulometric and palinological analysis, executed in three sites at Dârţu, Bistricioara Lutărie and Scaune (Al. Păunescu et al., 1977; M. Cârciumaru, 1980). The cultural sequence proposed by the synthesis published in 1966 stays the same, but the chrono-climatic sequence is changed. The loessoid deposit, previously defined as belonging to a phase of climate cooling, more specifically to the Wurm II stage, is placed in the interstage complex Ohaba. The pollen data indicate the first manifestations of the Aurignacian as being contemporary with the second half of the climate oscillation Obaha A at Dârţu and with the stage of tree pollen diminution between the climate oscillations Ohaba A and B at Bistricioara. The end of the Aurignacian is situated at the end of the climate oscillation Ohaba B at Dârţu and at the end of the climate oscillation Herculane I at Bistricioara (Al. Păunescu et al., 1977; M. Cârciumaru, 1980).

The Gravetian culture of the two sites was included during the cooling phase that preceded the climatic oscillation Herculane I cooling step that followed the climate oscillations Herculane II (Al. Paunescu et al., 1977; M. Cârciumaru, 1980) .

According pollen analyzes made by Marin Cârciumaru (1989), we should mention that the oldest Aurignacian at Ceahlău Basin, began in middle of Ohaba A climate oscillation and radiocarbon data indicates the age of 28.500 B.C.

In sites where were done geochronological studies, we find generally that the end of the Aurignacian is in the final part of the climate oscillation Herculane I (= Tursac). This applies to habitations located in mountainous areas, both in caves and outdoors. The only exception is found at Dârţu settlement where Aurignacian was manifested early and ended before the onset of climate oscillation Herculane I.

The Gravetian culture was manifested early on Bistrița Valley, as studies indicate existing geochronology, first appears during stage cold climate oscillations between Ohaba B (= Kesselt) and Herculane I (= Tursac) (25.000 - 22.000 B.C).

In accordance with the synthetic pollen diagram presented by Marin Cârciumaru (1989) geochronological scale that Upper Paleolithic cultures have evolved from Bistrita Valley is Ohaba A (= Arcy) – 29.500-27.200 B.C.; Ohaba B (= Kesselt) – 25.000-22.000 B.C.; Herculane I (= Tursac) – 21.000-18.000 B.C.; Herculane II (= Laugerie) – 16.800-16.000 B.C.

According to recent research (Cârciumaru M. et al., 2007) regarding the reanalysis of lithic material from Dârţu and Bistricioara Lutărie, the Aurignacian levels are totally devoid of elements *à dos*, is used local rocks with coarse grained and evolving in specific technological parameters. However, to put these differences on account of cultural reasons is unjustified. The Aurignacian is customized by the absence from the samples that have been assigned of characteristic forms: carinated grattoirs, cores for the production of twisted blades or rectilinear, Dufour bladelets, blades *étranglées* and *écailleuse* retouche. The radiocarbon data provides a young chronology (25.000-21.000 B.P.) for this cultural sequence. Although uncalibrated and poorly organized in concrete series and a possible wrong sampling, they were collected by reopening small sections and the chance of misidentification of cultural levels is very high (M. Cârciumaru et al., 2007). Those informations are enough to doubt the

affiliation to Aurignacian for Bistrita Valley's communities.

The difference between the two cultural traditions, Aurignacian and Gravettian, found in sites of Bistrita Valley, is limited to the use of different raw materials and different debitage strategies and the poverty of Aurignacian levels is equalled by the lack of typical tools. In this regard it remains necessary the explanation and a correct cultural award of the first archaeological levels in the sites from the Bistrița Valley.

The first well-documented Paleolithic technocomplex on the Bistrița Valley is the Gravettian, already present downstream at Poiana Cireșului B.P. and upstream at Bistricioara-Lutărie (M. Cârciumaru et al., 2005; 2006-2007; L. Seguweit et al., 2009; M. Anghelinu et al, 2012). As I said above, none of the currently known industries in the Ceahlău Basin could have been securely attributed to the Aurignacian. In contrast, a coherent Gravettian settlement network, using precisely the same locales and similar raw material categories, is documented from 28.000-26.000 B.P. at Bistricioara Lutărie and 27.321± 160 B.P. (Beta Analytic 244.073) -25.760± 234 (ER 11.859) la Poiana Cireșului.

Conclusions

The chronological amplitude of sedimentary sequences and cultural content of Bistrita Valley's sites enabled in the 60's the building of a regional schema of cultural development. In this age, the archaeological data from Bistrița Valley falls without difficulties on the whole broader cultural dynamics of Paleolithic from this part of Europe.

Through extensive research conducted in the settlements terrace from Ceahlău were identified phases of the Upper Palaeolithic evolution of amplitude due largely chronological sequence of sedimentary and cultural content sites and thus was allowed to building a regional schema of cultural development. In this study I tried to capture better the reasons that led to intensive research in this area rescue scheme, changes and modifications on dating settlements that were made by geochronological studies.

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