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Preliminary data on the child's tomb discovered in the Paleolithic site of Cosăuți (Republic of Moldova)

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Abstract: *Preliminary data on the child's tomb discovered in the Paleolithic site of Cosăuți (Republic of Moldova).*
The study presents an exceptional anthropological discovery made in 1987 in the upper paleolithic site from Cosăuți
by Ilie Borzic. Due to unfavorable circumstances, the child's tomb remained properly unexploited scientific until
present. Are given the preliminary results obtained by interdisciplinary research team formed especially for
conservation and investigation the child's tomb from Cosăuți.

Key words: Child's tomb, Cosăuți, Moldova, Upper Paleolithic, conservation, anthropological analysis.

The Paleolithic site of Cosăuți, located at about 500 m northwest of the homonym village on the bank of the Dniester River, in the northeastern part of the Republic of Moldova (Fig. 1), has won a meritorious place within the study of the prehistory of the European space and within the international archeology due to the relentless efforts made by the regretted colleague Ilie Borzic (1948-2010). Discovered in 1978, the archeological site was systematically researched during the period 1981-1997, providing remarkable archeological finds, reflected in artifacts of special value, both artistically and in terms of symbolic and spiritual meaning.

Together with the settlement of Mitoc-Malul Galben, the one of Cosăuți can be quoted among the few Paleolithic settlements of the east-European area where interdisciplinary, complex and systematic archeological researches were

carried out. Results obtained here contributed to the understanding of the evolution of the human communities and of the habitat at the end of the Upper Paleolithic.

Unfortunately the early death of Ilie Borzic left the results of the archeological researches unpublished within a monographic volume, many of the discoveries made here remaining without a proper scientific valorization. Among these, the identification, in 1987, of a child's tomb, a unique find within this geographic area.

According to the excavation report of that year, written in Russian, submitted by Ilie Borzic and registered under no. 201108 - inv. no. 265 at the Archeological Archive, which is nowadays preserved within the National History and Archeology Museum of Moldova, the author of the research would mention that the tomb was identified in square K1, the upper part of the skull

being at the depth of 872 cm compared to the zero level of the settlement.

In the same report, Ilie Borziac also noted that the tomb is connected to Layer 2B (layer which is also dated through C14), more exact the rounded stain-shaped agglomeration, with the traces of a hearth in the middles, interpreted as a habitation complex (dwelling). The tomb was located in the northern part of this complex, at a depth 7-10cm smaller than the one of Layer 2B, but without

having the possibility of identifying clearly the traces of a pit. The cultural remains of Layer 2B (small animal bones, flint items, charcoals) fully covered the surface above the skeleton. In the southern part of square K1, in the hypothetical location of the basin and leg bones, the culture layer was slightly colored in red, through very fine ochre particles, fact that determined the author of the discovery state that ochre would have been spread above the tomb.

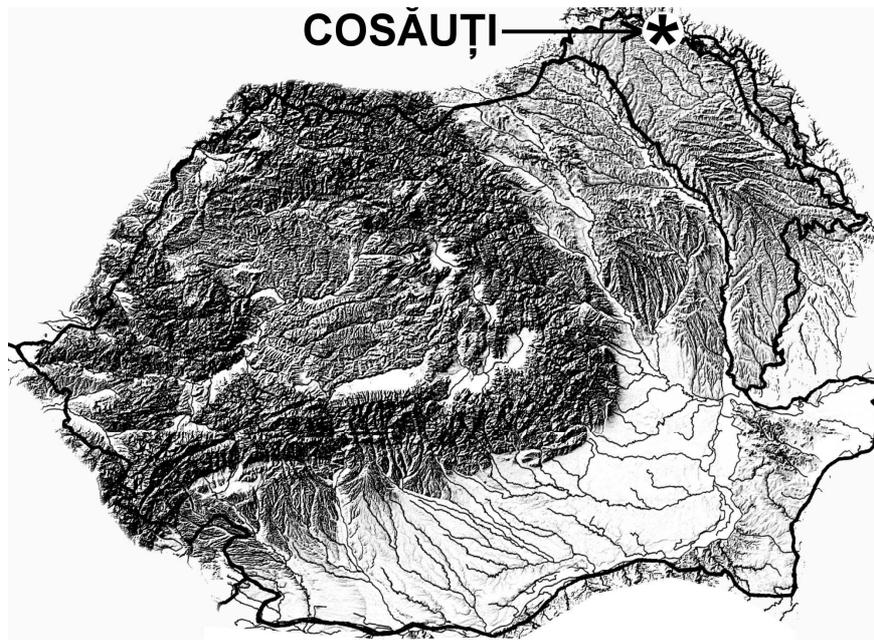


Fig.1 - Map with location of archaeological site from Cosăuți.

The skeleton was partially researched, being unveiled in the upper part, in the area of the skull, arm bones and at the level of the thorax. The author of the report also noted that during the process of coming to light phalanges of the right hand were dislocated and possibly the knees were partly touches when digging the culture layer, as they had an upper location. The bones of the basin and of the feet were not unveiled, the tomb being extracted *in situ*, for later research.

About the position of the body, the report specifies expressly the fact that the skull was northwest oriented and that it was initially thought that the position would be folded, lying on the right side, but the later cleaning brought to light the fact that the skeleton was lying on the back, with a

slight turn to the left, and the face was directed towards the thorax. The bones of the right arm were lying along the skeleton, and the left arm was slightly bent from the elbow.

The author of the report also mentioned it was a child's tomb, probably *infans I*, mentioning the fact that the discovery was drawn and photographed, referring to the illustration annexed to the report (drawings 22-24 and photographs 26-28 of the report) (Fig. 2-6).

The discovery was announced by Ilie Borziac to the scientific community within the conference organized at Tashkent in 1988, dedicated to the celebration of 50 years since the discovery of the tomb in the cave Teshik Tash. In the short note published in the papers of the event*, the author

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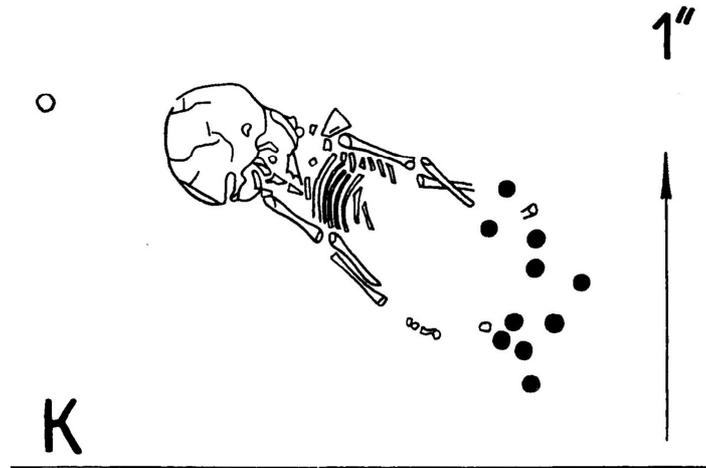


Fig. 2 - Child's tomb discovered at Cosăuți. Drawing from excavation report submitted by Ilie Borzic (1987)

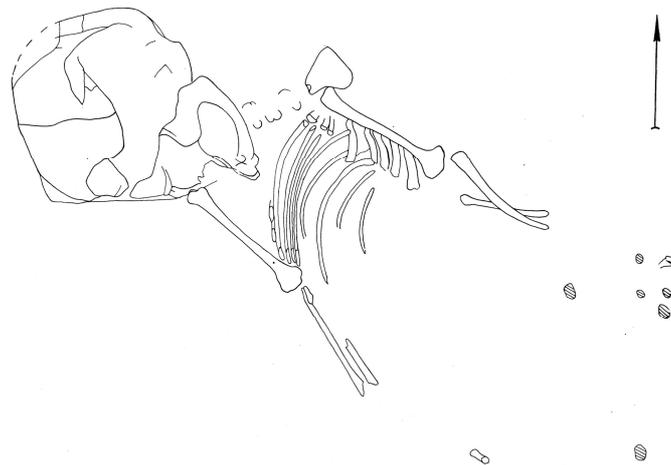


Fig. 3 - Child's tomb discovered at Cosăuți. Drawing from excavation report submitted by Ilie Borzic (1987)

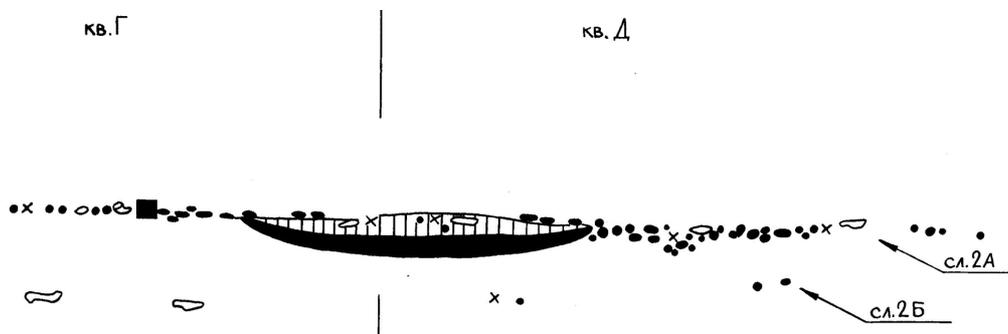


Fig. 4 - Child's tomb discovered at Cosăuți. Drawing with stratigraphic section from excavation report submitted by Ilie Borzic (1987)

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Codrin Lacătușu

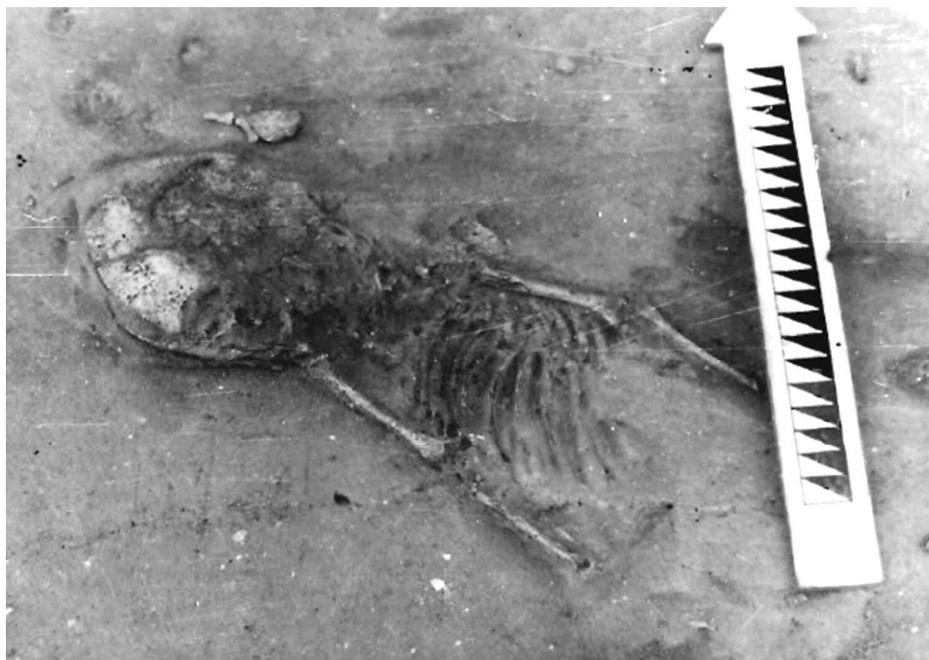


Fig. 5 - Child's tomb discovered at Cosăuți. Photo from excavation report submitted by Ilie Borzian (1987).



Fig. 6 - Child's tomb discovered at Cosăuți. Photo from excavation report submitted by Ilie Borzian (1987)

repeats some of those highlighted in the report archaeological, making some clarifications on ages of cultural layers.

Later on, within the study entitled *Quelques données préalables sur l'habitat tardipaléolithique pluristratifié de Cosseoutsy*, published in 1991 in the volume edited by V.Chirica and D.Monah – *Le Paleolithique et le Neolithique de la Roumanie en context européen*, Ilie Borzic specified approximately the same elements as those contained in the initial report on the discovery, with the difference that the red ochre was indicated as a sure presence and with the mention that elements of the inventory were missing.

In the wide volume published in 2009, Pierre Noiret mentioned about this discovery at pages 252-253 that it would be the tomb of *a male child, discovered at 17 cm under the level of Layer 2B*, taking over correctly the other information specified above, regarding the orientation, the position of its body or the intention for a detailed research through the *in situ* extraction.

Another note on this tomb is the one provided by Serghei Colavenco in 2010 contained in the

wide volume *Istoria Moldovei*, at page 155. Having participated in the excavations of Cosăuți of 1987, he mentioned the fact that the position of the skeleton was folded on the right side, above it red ochre being spread, advancing the hypothesis that its location at the extremity of the dwelling was due to the fact that, probably, in winter, the soil was frozen and did not allow digging too deeply. He also added the fact that this discovery has not been satisfactorily researched until then.

As Ilie Borzic would put down in his report of 1987, and also in the study of 1991, the tomb was extracted in the form of a monolith block (*in situ*) so to allow a later research. After discovery, the tomb was exhibited within the permanent exhibition of the History and Archeology Museum of Chișinău, being then withdrawn and temporarily stored in one of the working offices of the researchers, according to the information provided by Ion Tentiuc Ph D. Later on, it was moved to the underground level of the main building, in a room meant for the processing of the archeological material.



Fig.7 Detail of the Child's tomb discovered at Cosăuți with dust and other materials that have accumulated over time (May 2012)

Paradoxically, for almost 25 years, this important archeological discovery, has not drawn the attention of the researchers in the field,

remaining practically unknown, although the scientific potential thereof is huge, being a unique discovery in the east-European areal. In relation to

the year of the discovery, the development of the methods of scientific investigation allow now a complex investigation hereof, but one should take into consideration the fact that the long period of time elapsed since the discovery, and the preservation conditions in which it was kept might have led to an irreversible decay thereof.

Many references were made to the potential of this discovery in the recent study regarding the anthropological Paleolithic finds on the territory of Romania and of the Republic of Moldova (M. Văleanu 2012, p. 25), in relation to another interesting subject for the scientific debate more precisely the matter of the transition from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic within the Carpathian – Dniestrian space. This discovery can represent an important link between the Paleolithic environment and the human communities of this area and those connected to the later Neolithic habitation of the region. With the occasion, the author of the study mentioned expressly the “delicate” matters pertaining to this important scientific heritage

Taking into account the links and the previous collaboration between researchers from Romania and those from the Republic of Moldova, attempts were made to try to create an interdisciplinary team for the study of this important find.

The sustained efforts resulted into the conclusion of a collaboration protocol between the National History and Archeology Museum of Moldova, the Institute of Cultural Heritage within the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Moldova, “Al. I. Cuza” University in Iași and “Moldova” National Museum Complex of Iași, being made of a team of specialists formed of M. C. Văleanu, L. Bejenaru, V. Burlacu, S. Covalenco, C. Lacătușu, I. Tentiuc. We should mention in this context the special support we received from Eugen Sava PhD, director of the National History and Archeology Museum of Moldova, and by colleague Aurel Zănoici PhD.

The main objective of the new team was to assure the best conditions for the conservation of the discovery. In this regard, mention should be made of the fact that a meticulous cleaning of the tomb was undertaken, removing the dust and other materials which were accumulated throughout time (Fig. 7). The loess in which the skeleton was incorporated as a result of the environmental conditions which led to the evaporation of water,

acquired special hardness. Detachable bone fragments were picked from the geologic layer and stored in special bags (Fig. 8-9). The tomb was covered with a textile material, on top of which a wooden case for protection was placed.

Regarding the state of conservation of the skeleton, we can state that in the archeological level its condition until the moment of its discovery was rather good, taking into account on one side the age of its laying and on the other hand the deceased child’s very young age and therefore the higher degree of bone immaturity. After the skeleton was extracted from the archeological level, although it remained in the initial position of the discovery in the middle of a considerable amount of sediment, bones turned very brittle during the 25 years of preservation, following the exposure conditions to the large differences of humidity and temperature. Also, comparing the photographs taken upon discovery with the current situation, we could notice the fact that certain bone fragments have not been preserved.

The skeleton was anthropologically only preliminarily examined, *in situ*, without extracting, cleaning and restoring the bones from the sediment (Fig. 6-9). The *in situ* skeleton appears in a folded position on the right side, some of its bones being covered by sediment and consequently inaccessible. In the current phase of the research, it was not possible to achieve the complete inventory of the skeleton elements, the corresponding measurements and neither were identified distinct taphonomic or paleopathologic signs.

Among the skull bones the mandible is missing, only the cranial calotte being better preserved with a longitudinal diameter (glabella-opistocranium) measured *in situ* of about 105 mm (fig. 9). From the vertebral column the thoracic vertebrae are visible and only impressions of the cervical ones. Several ribs also appear from the right side of the skeleton. We also have only few elements of the upper limbs skeleton: the right shoulder blade, the two humeruses, blades and impression of radius and of cubitus from both arms.

The age at the time of death, appreciated based on the maximal length of the humerus (right and left – an average of circa 69 mm), is the one of a new born – 6 months (M. Stloukal, M. Hanakova, 1978). The stature, appreciated on the

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basis of the maximal length of the same anatomic element, is of about 607 mm (E. P. Visser, 1998). It is not possible to tell the child's gender.

Regarding the dating of Layer 2B, in the report of 1987, Ilie Borziac mentioned expressly that it was dated using the C14 method. In the note published in 1988, he indicates two dates, $18200 \pm$ (GIN – 4148) and 19.020 ± 925 (SOAN 2462). In

the study published in 1991, was indicated only $19\ 020 \pm 925$ (SOAN 2462) obtained by V. A. Panytchev.

In the study published in 2003, the age of 16.620 ± 210 BP is indicated for Layer 2C, and 17.230 ± 140 BP for Layer 2A, data obtained at the laboratory of Groningen (P. Haessart *et al.*, 2003, fig.6-7).

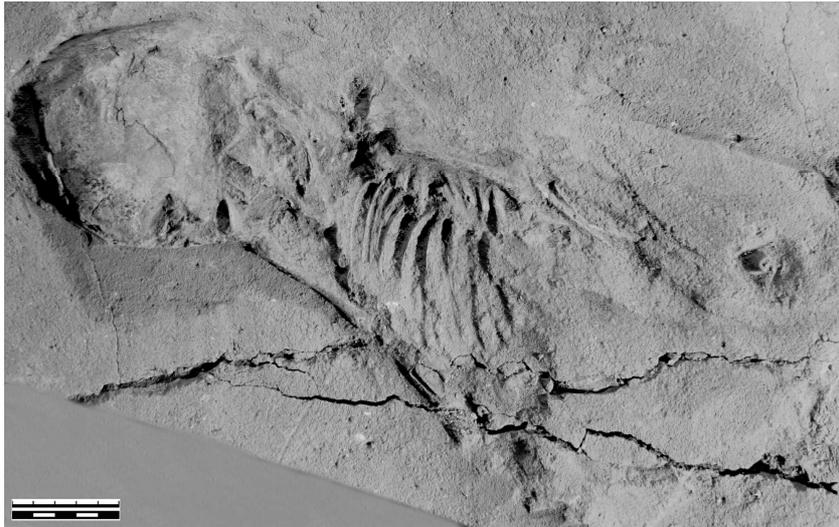


Fig.8 Child's tomb discovered at Cosăuți after cleaning (May 2012)

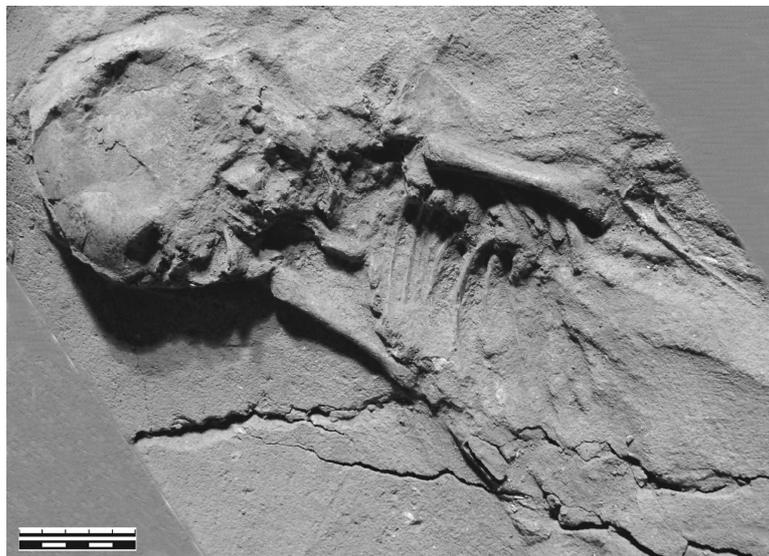


Fig.9 Child's tomb discovered at Cosăuți after cleaning – detail (May 2012)

The discovery of the child's tomb of Cosăuți sustains the similar discoveries dated to the

European Upper Paleolithic. First of all, we would like to indicate the three child's tombs of Krem-

Wachtberg (Austria) (T. Einwögerer *et al.* 2008, p. 15; M. Händel *et al.*, 2008, p. 187), but parallelisms can also be invoked to other similar finds such as those of Kostenki, Sungir or Lagar Velho, and last but not least La Grotte des Enfants (V. Formicola 2007, p. 448).

The tomb of Cosăuți clearly denotes the voluntary deposition and the existence of religious manifestations pertaining to this gesture, through the presence of red ocher. Together with these manifestations, the adult's tombs of the European Gravettian which show connections pertaining to social structuring, shall constitute, in fact, the background for the following major social revolution that is neolithisation (O. Bar-Yosef 2002, p. 379). For this reason, the child's tomb of Cosăuți must also be analyzed in the context of the prefiguration of the behaviors of the next phase, the Neolithic.

Or, in this context the discovery of Cosăuți shows its real scientific potential, as it provides the opportunity of investigating the effective support of the cultural transmissions, represented by man.

Still, the task of the team created for the research of the child's tomb of Cosăuți is a difficult one, to identify the most adequate means of scientific investigations thereof, taking into account its current situation and its possible deterioration in the 25 years since discovery. Given the fact that at present it has been assured the best passive conservation conditions, taking a decision on the manner of investigation must be the subject of a rigorous analysis.

*

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Note

*In the papers of the event, Проблемы взаимосвязи природы и общества в каменном веке в Средней Азии: докл. конф., посвящ 50-летию открытия погребения в гроте Тешик-Таш, Ташкент, 1988, the note is published on

pages 14-16 and is entitled *Детское погребение на многослойной позднепалеолитической стоянке Косочыц на среднем Днестре*. In volume published in 1991, I. Borziac indicated another title for this note, with reference to page 18. In his reference list in *Homage* volume published in 2008, is given another title for this paper, with reference to page 34-40.

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