

NEWS ON OLD SITES: THE MIDDLE PALAEO LITHIC OCCUPATION AT CHEIA – LA IZVOR (SOUTHEASTERN ROMANIA)

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Abstract: Our paper presents new information regarding the site of Cheia – La Izvor. New radiocarbon ages were obtained, and they confirm that the occupation was at around 36 ka BP (ca. 40 ka cal BP). The faunal analysis has revealed that the cave seems to have functioned as a shelter for carnivores, with the remains of cave bear predominating. Other carnivores, such as cave hyenas, wolves and foxes, most likely also contributed to the accumulation of bones, with large, middle and small prey species represented. No anthropogenic traces were identified on the bones. The very small lithic collection comprises mostly formal tools, thus accounting for a short-term, logistic occupation of the site.

Cuvinte-cheie: Dobrogea, Paleolitic Mijlociu, radiocarbon, analiză faunistică, industrie litică

Rezumat: Articolul de față prezintă noi date despre situl paleolitic de la Cheia – La Izvor. Au fost obținute noi date radiocarbon care confirmă vârsta sitului în jur de 36 ka BP (cca 40 ka cal BP). Analiza faunistică arată că peștera pare să fi funcționat ca un adăpost pentru carnivore, ursul de peșteră fiind predominant. La acumularea oaselor au contribuit cel mai probabil și alte carnivore, precum hienele de peșteră, lupii și vulpile care au introdus elemente de la animale de talie mare, medie și mică. Pe oase nu au fost identificate urme antropice. Industria litică, restrânsă numeric dar conținând aproape exclusiv unelte, indică una sau mai multe ocupări de scurtă durată.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history, the province of Dobrogea has been the setting of population dynamics, as it is testified both by numerous discoveries ranging from Neolithic settlements and Greek and Roman cities to medieval fortresses, and the present-day great ethnic diversity. Bordered by the Danube and the Black Sea, this territory is a very offering area for agriculture, shepherding, and naval trade. At the same time, Dobrogea proved fairly rich in Palaeolithic discoveries, many of them preserved under thick loess blankets, spanning from the Lower Palaeolithic to the end of the Pleistocene. The research on the Palaeolithic of Dobrogea, mostly carried out since the second half of the last century, has revealed numerous find-spots of scattered lithics, as well as about a dozen sites, both in open air and in caves (Dobrescu, Doboș in press; Nicolăescu-Plopșor *et alii* 1959; Păunescu *et alii* 1972; Cârciumar, Păunescu 1976; Valoch 1993; Păunescu 1999; Păunescu *et alii* 1972; Iovita *et alii* 2012; Balescu 2013; Tuffreau *et alii* 2013; Iovita *et alii* 2014; Balescu *et alii* 2015; Fitzsimmons *et alii* 2020).

In this paper we report on two new radiocarbon dates coming from the site, and provide a new interpretation of the lithic collection and the faunal analysis of the pieces that are still available in the repositories.

PUBLISHED DATA ON THE SITE

The Cheia – La Izvor site is a cave located in the central part of the Casimcei Plateau, a region rich in Jurassic and Cretaceous limestone concentrations (Posea *et alii* 1974). The cave itself is situated in the Dobrogei Gorge, on the right side of the Cheia River, near its junction with the Casimcea River (Fig. 1).

It is a small cave with a single chamber, ca. 14 m × 5 m, with the entrance facing east (Fig. 2).

Excavations covering ca 35 m² were carried out in 1956 and 1957 by C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, A. Păunescu, N. Harțuchi, and A. Bolomey; in 1970, another small excavation was made by P. Samson and C. Rădulescu. After 1970, the cave was completely emptied of sediment and turned into a bar (Nicolăescu-Plopșor *et alii* 1959; Păunescu *et alii* 1972; Păunescu 1999).

Stratigraphy described by Păunescu (1999) was as follows (Fig. 3):

- Humic deposit, 0.1 to 0.5 m thick
- Loessoid deposit, 0.04 to 0.27 m thick. At the bottom of this layer were found a few (unspecified number) lithics that were assigned to the Aurignacian.
- Reddish paleosol, 0.20 to 0.6 m thick, with numerous calcareous concretions. Throughout this layer were discovered the Middle Palaeolithic (MP) artefacts and faunal remains.