

VASILE CHIRICA, CRISTIAN ICHIM (eds),
Les Aurignaciens. Leur creation materielle et spirituelle. Actes du colloque international de Iași (28-31 janvier 2016), Ed. „Cetatea de Scaun”, Târgoviște, 2016, 369 p.

As an unfortunate testimony of the precarious situation in which the Palaeolithic research in Romania finds itself, the recent literature on the subject is highly rarefied. Moreover, regular or singular national scientific gatherings focused on this subject are, at best, uncommon. In this context, the international colloquium, dedicated to the cultural and spiritual creations of the Aurignacian communities, held in Iași between the 28th and the 31st of January 2016 was a rare and welcomed occurrence, as well as the subsequent volume edited by V. Chirica and C. Ichim. The book was printed in Târgoviște by the Cetatea de Scaun publishing house and in its 369 pages reunites ten studies dedicated to aspects revolving around the above-mentioned main subject.

The opening word, addressed by V. Chirica to the researchers attending the colloquium, intends to set the tone of the scientific event and of the present volume. The nature of Aurignacian expressions in Europe is briefly presented, as well as potential new approaches to old problems.

The first study (*Nouvelles recherches de terrain a Mitoc-Malu Galben 2013-2015*), signed by Pierre Noiret, Paul Haesaerts, Măriuca Vormicu, George Bodi, Transy Branscombe, Timothée Libois, Marjolein Bosch and Philip Nigst, is in fact a review of the recent archaeological investigations conducted at Mitoc – *Malu Galben* in 2013, 2014, and 2015. The thorough methodology and objectives of each campaign are well described, followed by several general considerations in regards to the preliminary results. The use of precise spatial markers in data registration is a useful novelty, with positive implication in interpreting site formation processes and the analyses of the lithic artefacts. It is worth mentioning that the data obtained in these occasions also represents the basis of two studies conducted by students from the universities of Liège and Cambridge.

The subsequent paper (*Mitoc-Malu Galben et l'Aurignacien Recent en Europe Central: nouvelles perspectives*), submitted by Luc Moreau, is centred on the comparative analyses of lithic artefacts assigned to EUP layers from two supposedly contemporaneous

habitations located in Central Europe: Mitoc-*Malu Galben* (eastern Romania) and Britenbach (eastern Germany). The method, which is based on identifying quantitative and qualitative criteria of each lithic artefact, attempts to offer a better understanding of the characteristics pertaining to the late Aurignacian stage and its relation to the first Gravettian habitations. Although hindered by acknowledged limitations, the study succeeds in offering fresh directions for further examinations.

A similar topic, the transition from the Aurignacian to the Gravettian techno-complex, is also encountered in the third study, signed by Olivier Touzé (*De l'Aurignacien au Gravettien dans le nord-ouest Européen*). Nevertheless, the focus area is represented by the north-western part of continental Europe. Several representative sites are discussed, with an emphasis on the so-called Maisierian sites, which stand out as a potential link between the two main UP European techno-complexes.

The paper submitted by Philip Nigst (*Early Upper Palaeolithic before the Aurignacian*) addresses the thorny problem of EUP before the occurrence of classical Aurignacian in Europe. The potential interactions between LMP assemblages, so-called transitional techno-complexes, and Aurignacian assemblages are analysed based on a theoretical model derived from the framework advanced by Tostevine. Focused mostly on sites located in the Middle Danube area, the method shows great promise and applying it to other regions might prove beneficial in understanding the emergence of EUP in Europe.

Mircea Anghelinu (*Caught in the middle? The Aurignacien in Romanian Banat*) tackles, as well, the sensitive subject of Proto-Aurignacian and Early Aurignacian traditions in Europe. His study is based on the recent reassessment of three EUP sites (Tincova, Românești-Dumbrăvița, and Coșava) in the Banat region, area best known for its important paleo-anthropological finds. While the discovery from Oase Cave was often used as an argument supporting the theory of a Danubian route followed by AMH into Central Europe, the archaeological data obtained in the three above mentioned sites seem to reflect a different situation. A Central European origin of the EUP communities in the area should be considered.

The extensive study signed by Vasile Chirica (*La presence des pieces careens dans les technocomplexes du Paleolitique Superieur de l'espace Carpato-Dnistréen*) evaluates the role of certain UP types of crenated lithics as diagnostic artefacts, based on assemblages assigned to different periods and covering all important investigated areas in Romania and the neighbouring regions. Traditionally assigned to the Aurignacian techno-complex, this type of artefact is nevertheless encountered in a variety of contexts. Therefore, their role as diagnostic

artefacts may not as reliable. Other aspects, such as intra-assemblage associations and data provided by complementary investigations should be taken into account.

The following paper submitted by Diana-Măriuca Vornicu (*On the wear from carinated artefacts in the Aurignacian I layer in Mitoc-Malu Galben*) neatly adds to the previous one. The role of Aurignacian carinated artefacts from Mitoc-Malu Galben is brought up again, but from a different angle. Using experimental archaeology and traceology, the function of these artefacts is put to the test. The results are comparable to those of previous studies, concluding that these artefacts were primarily used as bladelet cores and not as domestic tools. The potential of such studies is once again confirmed, stressing the necessity for further similar approaches.

The eighth contribution, signed by Monica Mărgărit (*L'art de l'Aurignacien Européen*), shifts the focus towards another important aspect of the European EUP: the emergence of artistic behavior. The main theoretical trends concerning the significance of Paleolithic art are briefly reviewed, as well as the most important European discoveries of Aurignacian art (including adornments, figurines and rock art). The areas covered by modern-day Romania and the Republic of Moldavia are discussed separately. Although some of the discoveries mentioned in these regions might be disputable, several are undoubtedly of great importance, such as the rock art form Coliboaia Cave.

The importance of faunal remains in Palaeolithic research is highlighted in the study signed by Valentin-Codrin Chirica (*La chasse dans le Paléolithique Supérieur de Roumanie. L'utilisation des ressources*). The article reviews all faunal remains recovered in sites assigned to the UP located in Romania and the area between the Prut and the Dniester. Such discoveries can reveal many aspects in regards to the subsistence strategies adopted by UP communities. In addition, hard animal tissue (antler, bone, ivory, shells, etc) was also used as raw material for tools, adornments and possibly even dwellings. Therefore, the recovery and analyses of faunal remains have a significant role in understanding the world of prehistoric hunter-gatherers.

The volume is concluded by Marcel Otte with a delicate subject worthy of his reputation: the mythological dimension of the Aurignacian art. The significance of composite representations sharing anthropomorphic and zoological features, such as the famous figurine from Stadel, is far from our reach, yet their powerful symbolism can hardly be disputed. For the moment, one may only wonder if such representations could have been recognizable depictions of mythological creatures.

The well-rounded studies published in this volume address a wide range of topics (methodology, lithic

analyses, experimental archaeology, subsistence strategies, art, mythology, etc) and are welcomed additions to the subject of Aurignacian/EUP communities in Europe. Although the contributions are diverse in regards to their chosen subject and style, they all fit together, like small pieces in an extremely old puzzle.

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