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CONTENTS

STUDIES

- NATALIA PAȘENCIUC**
The dwelling of mammoth bones on the Upper
Palaeolithic site Climăuți II 9
- VICTORIA SURDU**
Iamnaia Culture in the Carpathian-Dniester region.
Historiographical issues and interpretations 19
- LIVIA SÎRBU**
Burial complexes of the Chișinău-Corlăteni culture
(XII-X Centuries BC) 32
- CRISTIAN OPREAN**
Preliminary analysis of the faunal remains discovered
as a result of the archaeological excavations from
Moșnita Veche - Objective 16 (Timiș County) 44
- AURORA PEȚAN**
The Dacian Fortress of Grădiștea Muncelului: from the Legend
of the White King to its Identification with Sarmizegetusa Regia 65
- JULIA LEITOLD**
Die Religion der Kelten und Germanen in den „Commentarii de
Bello Gallico“ 99

REVIEWS

- Ivan Drnić, Kupinovo, groblje latenske kulture, Katalozi i
monografije Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu, Svezak XII,
Zagreb, 2015/ Kupinovo, a La Tène Culture Cemetery,
Catalogues and monographs of the Archaeological Museum
in Zabreb, Volume XII, Zagreb, 2015 (ANDREI GEORGESCU) 133
- Alfred Schäfer, Götter, Gaben, Heiligtümer. Römische Religion
in Köln. Philipp von Zabern, 2016 (CSABA SZABÓ) 140
- Bărbulescu, Mihai, Arheologia azi, în România (Archaeology today
in Romania), Cluj-Napoca, Editura Idea, 2016 (CSABA SZABÓ) 144

THE DWELLING OF MAMMOTH BONES ON THE UPPER PALAEOLITHICAL SITE CLIMĂUȚI II

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Abstract. In this paper the research and determination of a contour of the dwelling on the Upper Palaeolithic Site Climăuți II located in the middle course of the Dniester river is carried out. The contour of the dwelling from the south-west side was reinforced with seven skulls of a mammoth stacked in the shape of a crescent. The western, eastern and northern contours of the dwelling were stacked with homogeneous groups of large bones of a mammoth (and other animals) representing primary building constructions on which later other bones as well as walls of the dwelling were stacked. Bone cluster (of the upper layer) forms a circle with a diameter of 7-8 m. Typologically, the dwelling is likely similar to the bone-type dwellings of the Middle Dnieper type, representing an earlier form.

Keywords: bones of a mammoth, dwelling, Climăuți II, Upper Palaeolithic, Middle Dniester.

The Upper Palaeolithic Site Climăuți II is located in the middle course of the Dniester river, on the right coast, in the village of Climăuții de Jos, Șoldănești district (Republic of Moldova) (Fig. 1). The surface which is occupied by the site is an uneven plot limited from the west by steep valley slope damaged by landslide processes.

The site was discovered in 1989 as a result of carrying out of construction works for expansion of the building of kindergarten, during which the large bones in dug trenches were found. Theodor Obade who has arrived at the destination

determined that the bones belong to a mammoth as well as found flint objects.

Archaeological researches were carried out in 1989 under the direction of Borziac Ilie as a result of which on the area of 164 sq. M (squares numbering was carried from east to west with Arabic numerals and from south to north with letters of a Cyrillic alphabet¹) two cultural layers with flint objects of Aurignacian shape were identified. From the sample of humus extract from the lower layer the date of 24840 ± 410 BP (LU-2351) was obtained. The lower cultural layer was separated from the upper by the layer of loess loam. From the sample of a mammoth tooth from the upper layer the date of 20350 ± 230 BP (LU-2481) was obtained².

Research and description of rounded clusters of large bones on the site Climăuți II has been widely discussed in many works³. In this paper, we will focus on the planigraphic analysis of the upper cultural layer on which area rounded clusters of large bones of mammoth and other animals was observed, as well as on the determination of the contour and typological characteristic of the alleged dwelling. In addition, attention will be paid to the description of more homogeneous groups of bones, as well as position of skulls.

The remains of the upper layer of the dwelling lay in the middle part of the light-yellow loam, on uneven surface decreasing in the south-western part. Bone cluster forms a circle with a diameter of 7-8 m (Fig. 2). In the south-western part of the cluster the remains of seven mammoth skulls were found which formed a semi-circle⁴, and the preservation of which is very bad.

¹ In our study we used the original squares numbering to no errors in the planigraphic description. Furthermore, I. Borziac in his studies using the original numbering of squares, only in paper of 2007 he introduced changes: he used letters of a Latin alphabet (after Borziac 2007, p. 80).

² Borziac 2007, p. 74.

³ Borziac, Obadă 2001, p. 13-15; Borziac 2007, p. 82-83.

⁴ Borziac 2007, p. 82.

On the square M⁵-4 fragments of the skull of a mammoth were found (the first skull), from which remained only the upper jaw, fragments of cranial vault bones, fragments of a frontal part. There also were identified fragments of the rostral part which, apparently, were slightly dug into the ground (or covered with earth).

On the square M-5 a fragment of a second skull of a mammoth was found, from which the upper jaw, roaster fragments remained. In a nasal part fragments of tusks remained. In this case, it is quite difficult to define whether the skull was dug into the ground.

The third skull was found at the border of the square П -5/6. Upper jaw with two teeth, fragments of the frontal part, fragments of the cranial vault remained from it. Nasal tubes with one fragment of the tusk were dug into the ground / covered with soil.

On the border of the square П/M-6 two teeth and the fourth tusk, from which fragments of nasal bones with tusk holes remained, were detected. Around teeth and nasal bones fragments of the cranial vault were identified.

The destroyed fifth skull was detected on the square M-7 from which fragments of the upper jaw, two teeth, fragments of a frontal part, fragments of nasal bones slightly dug into the ground, as in the previous cases, remained partially.

The sixth skull of a poor state was found on the square H-7/8, it is presented by fragments of rostral bones, also four teeth which lay a little to the north from a skull remained as well.

The seventh skull found on the square H-7 was partially destroyed by closely laid construction trench. Teeth of the upper jaw, the remains of the lower jaw with two teeth, fragments of rostral bones remained from it.

⁵ Transliteration of the letters of the squares: `Y` - `U`; `T` - `T`; `C` - `S`; `P` - `R`; `П` - `P`; `O` - `O`; `H` - `N`; `M` - `M`; `Л` - `L`; `K` - `K`; `И` - `I`.

In this case, skulls constitute enclosure of inhabited space. In a row with skulls of a mammoth also other bones were used. We will begin the description of a contour of inhabited space from the north side.

The group of bones and fragments was found on the square C/T/Y-8. There were identified several large mammoth bones, including pelvic bone, two fibulas, a fragment of a tusk which lay subparallelly, oriented to NW-SE. Presumably, they originally limited a dwelling wall on the north side, then fell into the inhabited space. The southwestern part of the cluster was cut off by a trench with the width of 1,3-1,4 m, therefore, a part of the cluster was demolished.

The eastern contour of the dwelling was partially destroyed by two construction trenches. On the square H-8 (adjoining a trench) two halves of the fibulas lying parallelly each other, oriented along the line of SW-NE were found. Together with the specified, two more fragments of fibulas on the square H/O-2/3 laid, under which two fragments of scapulas were found. Two other scapulas with cut crests were located on the square H/O-3/4, and on square H/O-3 two tubular bones lay. To the south, three calcareous flat stones were found nearby.

On the square M-8 and northward there is a cluster of fibulas. Nearby, in the square H-8 and partially on the square M/O-8 a large mammoth tusk was found which was oriented with sharp end to NE and with convex curve to NE. The most thickened part at the end of tusk was covered with scapula without crest. In the central part of the square it was covered by other mammoth tusk, which was oriented with sharp end to SW and with convex curve to the east, locating on the square H/O-8.

In the north-west direction, 4 femurs and 1 fibula, which were partially destroyed from the north-east during digging of a trench, were stacked parallelly each other. To the north-west from them, on the square OII-9 there was a flat rounded

calcareous stone, with a diameter of 45-48 cm. To the north-west from this stone on the square OII-10/11 lay two femoral mammoth bones which were located subparallelly each other and oriented along the line SE-NW. On the square P/T-11/12/13 laid six scapulas (three of them were with cut crests), a fragment of tusk, fragments of seven fibulas, femoral and elbow bones, the majority of which were destroyed in the epiphasic parts. Bones lay horizontally. Have been destroyed by roots of trees, vineyard. Also, at the same place two vertebrae and a fragment of a pelvic bone of a mammoth were identified. Orientation of bones along the line NS and NW-NE. This cluster contoured the western border of the cultural remains.

Skulls were located in the south-eastern part of the dwelling, forming a semicircle. Some traces of saw cut of tusks were found; are slightly deepened into the ground by rostral parts, but it is unclear whether they were dug into the ground, they were placed with a forehead towards the middle of the dwelling (position of skulls in the dwellings of the Middle Dnieper type or close to it⁶). This position allows to assume that skulls lost a support and fell. Why exactly on this site skulls were located? Skulls served as additional strengthening of a wall of the dwelling in the south-eastern part which, as it was already mentioned above, was lowered. Skulls were stacked on a wall, and then slightly covered with soil. Thus, skulls limited the dwelling from the southern and south-eastern part.

During construction of the dwelling all large bones of a mammoth were used. Moreover, fibulas, tubular bones, scapulas, skulls, tusks and other which form certain homogeneous clusters were used mostly in facing (Tab. 1)⁷. These groups are present in almost all space of a facing, except the south-eastern part, where skulls served as additional strengthening of a wall, as well as the eastern and north-eastern contours, strongly destroyed and hardly recoverable. The

⁶ Sergin 1979, p. 15-16.

⁷ Obadă et al. 1994, p. 254.

above-stated homogeneous groups of bones, apparently, represent primary structures to which other bones as well as wooden beams were attached, thereby forming the walls of the dwelling. Perhaps, for strengthening of a facing, walls were covered with soil, so without filling of gaps between bones with soil the facing couldn't protect the dwelling from slope flows, rains, winds, etc.

Thus, on the Upper Palaeolithic Site Climăuți II (the upper layer) the dwelling construction which structure consisted of large bones of a mammoth and other animals, forming a circle of irregular shape, with a diameter of 7-8 m, was investigated. Typologically, the dwelling is likely similar to the bone-type dwellings of the Middle Dnieper type (dwellings of the sites Mezin⁸, Dobranichevka⁹, Mezhirichi¹⁰ and others), representing an earlier form¹¹. The contour of dwelling space was shielded with skulls of a mammoth, as well as with groups of large bones. The above-stated groups are an additional (as well as indisputable) proof of existence of the dwelling construction on the site.

In conclusion, we will note that at this stage of our research it is necessary to carry out more detailed planigraphic analysis, both of osteological material of the site and stone tools, all of which will allow to determine more exact duration of habitation of ancient human on this Upper Palaeolithic monument.

⁸ Shovkoplias 1965, p. 266-267.

⁹ Pidoplichko 1969, p. 69-77.

¹⁰ Pidoplichko 1969, p. 139-144.

¹¹ If it is possible to consider the problem of the evolution of house building in the Upper Palaeolithic between certain sites without any genetic relationship between them.

Abbreviations

RA	Revista Arheologică, Chișinău, Republica Moldova.
SCIVA	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie, București, România.
KSIA	Kratkie soobshcheniia Instituta Arkheologii AN SSSR, Moskva.

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Mammoth		
Elements of the sceleton	Upper layer	Lower layer
Cranium	11	1
Mandibula	10	1
Dens	19	4
Vertebrae	26	-
Scapula	28	1
Humerus	14	1
Radius	5	-
Ulna	10	3
Carpal bones + Tarsus	8	4
Femur	11	-
Tibia	17	-
Fibula	2	-
Pelvis	28	-
Astragalus	-	-
Calcaneus	1	1
Metapodia	1	-
Phalanx	7	2
Undetectable fragments	992	52
Total	1100	70

Table 1. Bones of a Mammoth of the Site Climăuți II.

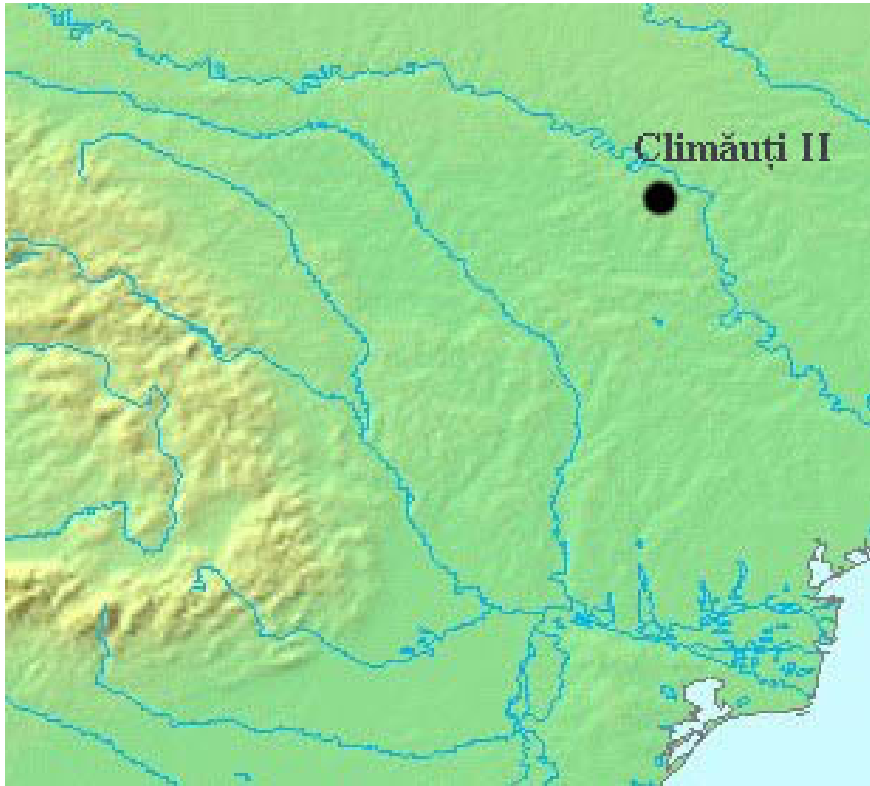


Figure 1. Situation of the Site Climăuți II.

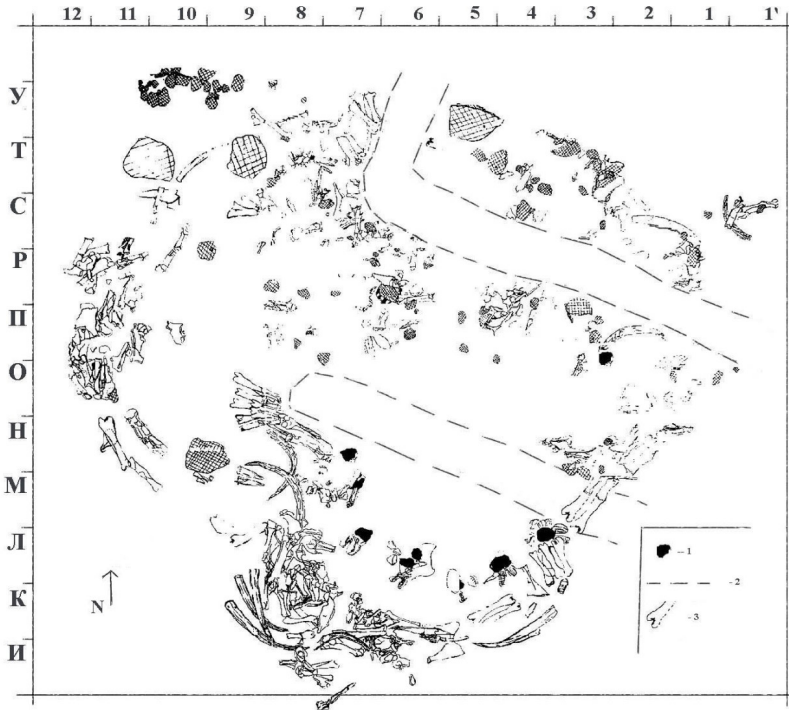


Figure 2. Part of the Plan of the Site Climăuți II: 1 - fragments of the mammoth skulls; 2 - contour of the construction trenches; 3 - bones.