

Current issues in Romanian Paleolithic chronology

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In the recent decades, our understanding of the dynamics of Paleolithic occupations in Romania has greatly improved thanks to advances in research methods ranging from excavation techniques to isotope-based analyses. One area where a major improvement has been achieved is the improved absolute ages of the Paleolithic sites.

Traditionally, Romanian scholars employed the Alpine chronology and used the river terrace system to assess the ages of open air sites; this system was subsequently extended to the dating of the loess-paleosol sequences. A misinterpretation in the position of the MIS 5e paleosol in the province of Dobrogea (southeastern Romania) prompted the idea that all of the deposits were much younger.

Radiocarbon ages derived from materials sampled during the 1960s and later, were analyzed through conventional radiocarbon method mostly during the 1980s and 1990s. Because of the method's limitations, unacknowledged at the time, and the likely contamination of samples stored sometimes for decades, the interpretation of the results endorsed a 'short chronology' for the Paleolithic throughout Romania.

New advances in dating methods (AMS radiocarbon, luminescence-based methods, etc.) have revealed that the occupation of the Romania's territory in the Pleistocene is much older than previously estimated.