Reassessing site formation processes at several Upper Paleolithic settlements in the Ceahlău Basin (Northeastern Romania): Some chrono-cultural implications

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The rich open-air record of the Ceahlău Basin (North-Eastern Romania) has been long considered as providing a rather continuous and complete chronicle of the regional Upper Paleolithic cultural succession, allegedly including several Aurignacian, Gravettian and Epigravettian substages. However, most reassessments attempted in the last decade to have questioned this picture drawn between the 1950's and 1990's.
Apart from the obvious theoretical and methodological improvements and the newly gathered empirical data, a crucial aspect of explaining the contrast between the initial and the more recent interpretations is the very understanding of site formation processes. Three-dimensional single find recording with artifact orientations, current topographic recording, core drillings, correlated with accurate litho-stratigraphic descriptions and a reexamination of old documentation in some key sites in the area (Bistricioara-Lutărie I-III, Ceahlău-Dârțu), point to much more complex and locally variable depositional contexts where the local geomorphology and various post-depositional factors (e.g. slope processes, differential erosion/accumulation) played key roles. As a consequence, the integrity, consistency and comparative relevance of many previously defined archeological 'assemblages' remains doubtful. At the same time, recent work confirms the paleoenvironmental and paleocultural breadth of some of the local geological archives, pointing to promising future research prospects.