

THREE IN ONE: THE PRUT FLINT

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Abstract: In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the term Prut flint was established as an archaeological raw material category for the Palaeolithic assemblages in the Bistrița Valley (Ceahlău Basin, north-eastern Romania). This was based on visual characteristics and a handwritten petrographic note by the geologist Th. Joja. Since then, the Prut flint has been recognised and mentioned in other archaeological sites in Romania, Ukraine and Hungary, at distances of over 600 km from the occurrence area. In this contribution, the petrographic descriptions of Prut flint, published in archaeological and petroarchaeological papers from Romania, were reviewed and compared with the new data about this raw material. The most frequently mentioned information regarding the Prut flint is its range of colours (from black to grey-brownish) and its occurrence area along the Middle Prut Valley between Rădăuți-Prut and Liveni/Ștefănești. However, most papers featuring microscopic investigations on the Prut flint proved to contain insufficient information for a consistent characterisation and comparison between archaeological and geological samples, and hence a reliable provenience. Recent microscopic analyses of archaeological materials from Ceahlău Basin demonstrated that at least two distinct types were hidden within the Prut flint category. This contribution also brings fresh geological and petrographic data derived from new research carried out in the Middle Prut Valley (Botoșani County, north-eastern Romania) and the Middle Dniester Valley (Ocnița-Șoldănești districts, Republic of Moldova). Based on the new data, a petrographic classification of siliceous materials from the Prut and Dniester valleys is proposed.

Cuvinte-cheie: Prut, Nistru, Volhyno-Podolian, silix, silicolit, paleolitic, neolitic, România, petroarheologie

Rezumat: La sfârșitul anilor 1950 și începutul anilor 1960, termenul de silix de Prut a fost stabilit drept categorie de materie primă arheologică pentru ansamblurile paleolitice de pe Valea Bistriței (Bazinul Ceahlău, Nord-estul României). Aceasta s-a bazat pe caracteristici vizuale și pe o notă petrografică scrisă de mână de geologul Th. Joja. De atunci, silixul de Prut a fost recunoscut și menționat în alte situri arheologice din România, Ucraina și Ungaria, la distanțe de peste 600 km de aria sa de ocurență. În această contribuție, descrierile petrografice ale silixului de Prut, publicate în lucrări arheologice și petroarheologice din România, au fost examinate și comparate cu noile date despre această materie primă. Cele mai frecvente informații menționate despre silixul de Prut sunt gama sa de culori (de la negru la gri-maroniu) și arealul său de ocurență de-a lungul Văii Prutului mijlociu, între Rădăuți-Prut și Liveni/Ștefănești. Cu toate acestea, majoritatea lucrărilor care prezintă investigații microscopice asupra silixului de Prut s-au dovedit a conține informații insuficiente pentru o caracterizare și o comparație consistentă între probele arheologice și cele geologice și, prin urmare, pentru o proveniență credibilă. Analizele microscopice recente ale materialelor arheologice din Bazinul Ceahlău au demonstrat că în cadrul categoriei silix de Prut erau ascunse cel puțin două tipuri distincte. Această contribuție aduce, de asemenea, date geologice și petrografice proaspete derivate din noile cercetări efectuate pe Valea Prutului mijlociu (județul Botoșani, Nord-estul României) și pe Valea Nistrului mijlociu (raioanele Ocnița-Șoldănești, Republica Moldova). Pe baza noilor date, se propune o clasificare petrografică a materialelor silicioase din văile Prutului și Nistrului.

1. PRUT FLINT¹

You’ve probably heard of this term, used by archaeologists to designate the raw material associated with knapped lithics from Palaeolithic and Neolithic sites in north-eastern Romania. If you’ve heard of it, then you know Prut flint has a long research history, but here’s what I have to say about it².

The presence of this material was first noticed in the late 1950s by the archaeologists who discovered and excavated the Palaeolithic sites from the Middle (Nicolăescu-Plopșor, Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1959, p. 52; Nicolăescu-Plopșor *et alii* 1961a, p. 38–39; Nicolăescu-Plopșor *et alii* 1966, p. 23–24; Păunescu 1970a, p. 88)

of the flint and chert types occurring on the Middle Prut and Dniester valleys (Section 5). The information from previous publications is also contrasted with the new data on the Prut flint (Annex A), while the comparison in Section 5 is based on the petrographic data presented in: **Annex A**, regarding the geological materials collected from the Middle Prut Valley between Darabani and Ripiceni (MidPrut research perimeter, Botoșani County, north-eastern Romania); **Annex B**, regarding the geological materials collected from the Middle Dniester Valley between Naslavcea and Vadul Rașcov (MidDn research perimeter, Ocnița-Șoldănești districts, Republic of Moldova); **Annex C**, regarding the origin control samples from origin sites in the Khotyn area of the Middle Dniester Valley (MidDn research perimeter, Chernivtsi Oblast, Western Ukraine). Annexes A–C were written as stand-alone texts, containing all the information derived from the new field and laboratory work. The research strategy is briefly described in Sections 1–2 of Annexes A–C, and in more detail in **Appendix I**.

¹ In this paper, all raw material names mentioned are understood in their original connotations as referenced in relation to a researcher’s work. If applicable, their particular meaning can be derived, while reading, from the context. To put them in brackets or write them with italics each time they are mentioned would overburden the text. In the literature cited (written both in Romanian and French), the archaeologists use the term *silix* and this was translated as flint because it was associated with the material from the Prut. In Section 5 of the paper, the term flint is understood as a nodular chert from chalk deposits. For more information regarding this subject, see Ciornei 2023, p. 28, note 4.

² This contribution contains a review of archaeological and petroarchaeological publications in which the Prut flint is mentioned and described (Sections 1–4), followed by a petrographic comparison