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NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE AGE OF THE FOSSIL VERTEBRATE SITE FROM STĂUCENI (MOLDAVIAN PLATFORM, NORTHEASTERN ROMANIA)

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Extensive Sarmatian (Middle Miocene) marine deposits occur on the Moldavian Platform, in Eastern Romania. Several vertebrate fossil sites have been described from this area in the past century. Recently, a new fossil site was reported at the Stăuceni open pit, in Botoșani County. It has yielded numerous marine vertebrate fossils since 2017, which support a Volhynian (late Middle Miocene) age. However, further excavations led to the discovery of terrestrial vertebrate remains belonging to terrestrial ungulates, including indeterminate equids and bovids, in the same gravel bed from the top of the analyzed succession where the marine vertebrates were found. Additional investigations have been carried out to get a better understanding of the depositional setting and the age of the fossiliferous deposits. Screen-washing of silty sandstones, which overlie the macrofaunal fossil beds, has allowed the recovery of a few small mammal remains, tentatively assigned to the arvicolid *Borsodia* sp. and to the sciurid *Spermophilus nogaici*, which indicate a Late Pliocene–Early Pleistocene age. The different taphonomy of the two sets of fossil remains suggests that the better mineralized Miocene fossils were reworked and redeposited in younger Plio-Pleistocene deposits, possibly in a fluvial or alluvial depositional setting. Preliminary palynological studies have identified a scarce number of freshwater algae which include *Sigmopollis laevigatoides*, characteristic of the Pliocene and which would support the small-mammal based correlation. Although only preliminarily studied, the succession from Stăuceni is an intriguing occurrence for the Moldavian Platform, where Upper Pliocene–Lower Pleistocene deposits are rare.



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