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FINDING OF THE REMAINS OF A FROG AND VARAN FROM THE PLIOCENE LOCALITY PRIOZERNOE

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During the 2021 season fieldwork, reptile and amphibian remains were found in the early Pliocene alluvial sediments of the Dniester River valley in a sandstone quarry near the village of Priozernoye (Moldova, Transdniestria).

The reptile remains, represented by a vertebra of the trunk, belonged to a large lizard, identified by us as *Varanus* sp. From the Pliocene deposits of Moldavia, there is only an indication of the presence of *Varanus* sp. from the localities Etulia and Suvorovo (Zerova & Chkhikvadze, 1984) (description and photos are not provided), which requires clarification. The closest Pliocene faunal localities from which remains of a representative of this family have been previously described are located in the Odessa Region, Ukraine (Kotlovina-1 and Kotlovina-2) (Ratnikov, 2002).

At the end of the field season, a torso vertebra of a large amphibian of the order Anura was found. The vertebra is very large, more than 2 cm wide. It belonged to a frog of the family Palaeobatrachidae. The *Palaeobatrachus* cf. *langhae* (biozones MN 14-15) was a characteristic species of the Pliocene of Europe (Hungary, Poland, Russia and Slovakia) (Ratnikov, 1997, 2002; Villa, Roček at al., 2016). The remains have been tentatively identified as *Palaeobatrachus* sp. Thus, for the first time for the Pliocene of the Republic of Moldova (Transdniestria) a new species of large frog of the family Palaeobatrachidae was identified. The presence of lizards of the family Varanidae in the Pliocene in the Dniester River valley was also reliably established.

These findings supplement our understanding of the fauna of our region during the Early Pliocene and allow us to clarify the paleogeographic and paleoecological conditions of the early stages of formation of the large paleo-river valleys of the Dniester and Prut rivers.

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