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Gvozdova, not Hvozdiv. Uncovering the Moldovan origin of one frequently cited Mesolithic flint collection

Key words: Mesolithic, Kukrek culture, lithic collection, archival data, historiographical revision, Ukraine, Moldova.
Cuvinte-cheie: Mesolitic, cultura Kukrek, colecție de artefacte litice, date de arhivă, revizuire istoriografică, Ucraina, Moldova.

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This article focuses on a collection of lithic artefacts first described by V. Danylenko in his 1969 monograph as material found at the Hvozdiv site on the Southern Buh River (Vinnytsia Region, Ukraine) in 1956. Subsequently, researchers frequently cited this site as being associated with the Kukrek culture. However, recent field investigations, discrepancies between published and archival data, and inconsistent inscriptions on the artefacts cast doubt on the published origin of the collection. An alternative hypothesis was proposed and tested by identifying locations meeting specific criteria designed to resolve these contradictions. As a result, the collection's origin was linked to the Mesolithic sites investigated in 1956 near the village of Gvozdova (Florești District, Moldova) in the Răut River basin. Archival materials indirectly confirm that V. Danylenko brought the collection from Chișinău to Kyiv in May 1964. By extension, this study highlights the necessity of critically examining even long-standing academic assertions that may prove erroneous.

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Gvozdova, nu Hvozdiv. Descoperirea originii moldovenești a unei colecții de silex din mezolitic, adesea menționată

Acest articol se concentrează asupra unei colecții de artefacte litice descrise pentru prima dată de V. Danylenko în monografia sa din 1969 ca fiind materiale descoperite în 1956 la situl Hvozdiv, situat pe malul râului Bug de Sud (regiunea Vinnytsia, Ucraina). Ulterior, cercetătorii au menționat frecvent acest sit ca fiind asociat cu cultura Kukrek. Cu toate acestea, investigațiile de teren recente, discrepanțele dintre datele publicate și cele de arhivă, precum și inscripțiile inconsistente de pe artefacte pun la îndoială originea publicată a colecției. O ipoteză alternativă a fost propusă și testată prin identificarea locațiilor care îndeplinesc criterii specifice menite să rezolve aceste contradicții. Ca rezultat, originea colecției a fost legată de siturile mezolitice investigate în 1956 în apropierea satului Gvozdova (raionul Florești, Moldova) din bazinul râului Răut. Materialele de arhivă confirmă indirect faptul că V. Danylenko a adus colecția de la Chișinău la Kiev în mai 1964. Prin extensie, acest studiu subliniază necesitatea examinării critice chiar și a afirmațiilor academice de lungă durată care s-ar putea dovedi eronate.

Introduction

Over half a century ago, Valentyn Danylenko proposed that the Neolithisation of large areas of Ukraine and Moldova resulted from the spread of populations associated with the Kukrek culture from the Azov region in the 7th millennium BCE [Danilenko 1969]. Subsequent studies supported and further developed this interpretation linking the emergence of the Kukrek cultural complex to broader population movements and/or cultural transmission from the Near East via the Caucasus into the Pontic region throughout the Early Holocene [Domańska 1990, 24-29; Man'ko 2013, 90-118]. Conversely, an alternative approach emphasises the local Upper Palaeolithic origin of Kukrek lithic technology in the North Pontic region and Crimea [Stanko 1982, 112-115; Telegin 1982, 118; Ianevich 1987, 16-17; Zalizniak 1995, 8; 1998, 180]. The trend towards distinguishing stages and regional variants of the Kukrek technocomplex [Stanko 1982, 115; Telegin 1982, 98-119; Ianevich 1987] has recently been further developed [Kiosak et all. 2022]. Consequently, the "Kukrek problem" remains unresolved, necessitating continued focus on individual regions and sites.

On the Southern Buh River, flint assemblages with distinct Kukrek traits have been identified alongside pottery of the Buh-Dniester sub-Neolithic culture (BDC). Such associations are documented at Melnychna Krucha, Pechera-1, Pechera-2, Haivoron-Polizhok, Mytkiv Ostriv, Gard, and Nova Mykolaivka-1, as well as in the aceramic lower layer of Zankivtsi II [Danilenko 1969; Gaskevich 2005; Gaskevich 2006]. However,

Revista Arheologică, serie nouă, vol. XXII, nr. 1, 2026, p. 204-219
https://doi.org/10.52603/RA.XXII.1.2026_15

recent fieldwork, radiocarbon dating, and stratigraphic reassessments suggest that at least some Kukrek assemblages in the region date – or may potentially date – to the Mesolithic (pre-ceramic) period, predating the 6th millennium BCE [Kotova 2003, 131-133; Gaskevich 2014; Kiosak, Salavert 2018].

For decades, the sites of Hvozdiv, Abuzova Balka, and Konetspil were considered the only genuinely aceramic (i.e., strictly Kukrek) sites on the Southern Buh River. The latter two, located at the boundary between the steppe and forest-steppe zones, have each been detailed in separate publications [Fomenko 1979; Stanko et all. 1981]. In contrast, surprisingly little is known about the site near the village of Hvozdiv (Vinnytsia District[1], Vinnytsia Region) or its finds, despite their frequent citation as the northernmost occurrence of Kukrek flint in the region. To address this gap, this study provides the first comprehensive account of the quantitative and typological composition of the cited lithic assemblage, along with unexpected conclusions regarding its provenance.

1. History of research

1.1. Field investigations in 1956

Pavlo Khavliuk discovered the Hvozdiv site in 1956. In his field report, the site is described in just three sentences: *"In the tract 'Polih', 500 m from the village of Hvozdiv, Nemyriv District, Vinnytsia Region, upstream along the Buh River near the rapids, flint blades, flakes, and animal bones are found on the above-floodplain terrace. On the opposite bank of the river, several flint blades and flakes are also found. Pottery is absent"*. The field inventory includes only four finds from Hvozdiv – a "flint hammerstone" and three "flakes". According to the accompanying documentation, the finds from the site, along with the field report, were transferred on 30 December 1956 to the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR in Kyiv [Khavliuk 1956, 1, 5, 6, 10].

1.2. Mentions in publications

In archaeological publications, the site is first briefly mentioned as "Gvozdev" (Russian: Гвоздев) in an article by P. Khavliuk [1959, 171] in a list of sites he discovered in 1956-1957. Citing this article, it appears as a single-line entry representing a settlement of the BDC in the published list of archaeological sites in Ukraine [Telegin (ed.) 1966, 40].

The Hvozdiv site became widely known when V. Danylenko briefly described its location and the composition of the assemblage in two paragraphs of his 1969 monograph "Neolithic of Ukraine". In particular, he noted: *"The settlement near the village of Gvozdevo* (Russian: Гвоздево – D.H.), *Shpykiv District[2], Vinnytsia Region, discovered and investigated by P.I. Khavliuk in 1956, (…) like other settlements of the Neolithic period in this area, is located not on the loess terrace of the Southern Bug, but on its above-floodplain terrace. (…) The collection from Gvozdevo (…) includes a number of distinctive forms: small prismatic cores, microblades, small rounded scrapers on flakes, angle burins on blade, some with ventral flat retouch similar to that observed on a cutter* (Russian: прорезыватель – a tool defined by V. Danylenko as approximately corresponding to the Kukrek-type insert – D.H.), *the cutters themselves, and finally a miniature elongated trapeze similar to some of Vasylivka ones"* [Danilenko 1969, 61].

Subsequently, the published overview of Mesolithic sites in Ukraine by Dmytro Telehin briefly repeated information from V. Danylenko's monograph [Telegin 1985, 112]. In addition, Hvozdiv is marked on maps and/or is briefly mentioned as a site of the Kukrek culture in publications by Viktor Fomenko [Fomenko 1979, 50], Dmytro Telehin [Telegin 1982, 84, ris. 20], Volodymyr Stanko [Stanko 1982, 114], Svitlana Smolianinova [Smol'ianinova 1990, 15, 66, 71], Leonid Zalizniak [Zalizniak 1995, 6, ris. 1; 1998, 144, 179; 2004, 4, 13, ris. 1; 2005, 147; Zalizniak *et all.* 2013, 253-254, ris. 35; 2016, 12], and other researchers. However, none of them provided precise data on the size and typological composition of the assemblage, with published illustrations restricted to only three artefacts (core, trapeze, and burin) in S. Smolianinova's monograph [Smol'ianinova 1990, 58, ris. 22: 41, 44, 45].

1.3. Field Investigations in 2005

The author visited the Hvozdiv site in 2005. It is located on the left bank of the Southern Buh

1. Formerly part of Nemyriv District (prior to July 2020).

2. In fact, the village of Hvozdiv was not part of Shpykiv District, which was dissolved in 1962.

River, on a meadow within the high floodplain between a river rapids and the northern outskirts of the village of Hvozdiv. The meadow lies 3-4 m above the summer water level. Finds of the BI phase of the Trypillia culture were collected from molehills in the northern part of the meadow (locality "a") and from the riverbank scarp at its southern edge (locality "b"). The distance between the outermost findspots is approximately 400 m.

Locality "a" corresponds to the site location described by P. Khavliuk. Surface finds include animal bone fragments and a subtriangular dart point with a straight base. The point is made of high-quality, semi-translucent dark grey flint with small white inclusions and features flat bifacial retouch. At locality "b", a small fragment of a thin-walled, burnished black ceramic vessel decorated with fluting was found, alongside a massive short crested blade of light grey opaque flint and animal bone fragments.

Thus, the recent survey of Khavliuk's site yielded no diagnostic Mesolithic material. However, the precise distance from the village and proximity to the rapids, noted in the 1956 report, preclude the possibility of a location error. This identification of locality "a" is further confirmed by Khavliuk's mention of an unnamed findspot of flint blades and flakes on the opposite bank. The author's fieldwork has confirmed the presence there of the BDC site, recorded as "Nova Mykolaivka-1" [Gaskevich 2006, 116-118].

1.4. Doubts regarding the provenance of the Kukrek collection

The rather unexpected results of the 2005 survey prompted a closer examination of mentions of Hvozdiv and the materials from the 1956 investigations. The analysis found no evidence linking P. Khavliuk's Hvozdiv site to the collection published by V. Danylenko as originating from there. Given its unclear provenance, the scholarly use of this collection was previously advised against [Gaskevich 2012].

Suspicions that Danylenko's collection was artificially assembled have so far precluded its publication. Nonetheless, efforts to determine its true provenance continued until a connection with Moldova was established. The following sections of this paper provide a detailed argumentation of this conclusion, including a description of the finds, identified contradictions, a hypothesis linking the collection to a site other than Hvozdiv, and the methodology and results of the search.

2. Composition of the two 1956 assemblages

At present, two groups of finds associated with the 1956 investigation of the Hvozdiv site are held at the Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (IA NASU). For clarity, they are hereafter conventionally referred to as the "first assemblage" and the "second assemblage".

2.1. The first assemblage

The first assemblage, comprising 13 flint artefacts, is housed in the scientific repository of the IA NASU. Together with other materials from P. Khavliuk's 1955 and 1956 survey, it forms Collection No. 332.

The assemblage includes all four numbered finds recorded in the field inventory: a core-like retoucher (recorded as a "hammerstone"); a single-platform core with flake scars, secondarily used as a retoucher; an irregular core for flakes; and a flake with use-retouch (the latter three recorded as "flakes"). In addition to their inventory numbers, two of these artefacts bear the inscription "Гвозд.", which is transcribed as "Hvozd" from Ukrainian or as "Gvozd" from Russian, while another is marked "Гвоздів" (the clear Ukrainian spelling of the toponym "Hvozdiv"). All four numbered artefacts also carry a second inscription, written in Russian: "Ю. Буг, Гвоздев, 1956" (Iu. Bug, Gvozdev, 1956). The same inscription appears on three unnumbered items: a flake with a retouched notch, a distal blade fragment, and a fragment of an indeterminate blank. The remaining six finds – two proximal blade fragments (one bearing flat ventral retouch), three flakes, and one unmodified small flint pebble – are unmarked.

Seven inscribed artefacts represent three groups of flint. The first comprises four specimens. Two of them were made of high-quality, translucent black flint featuring large, sinuous, grey opaque patches and sparse, small, light inclusions. Two further artefacts, made from a predominantly opaque mottled raw material ranging from very light grey to pale yellow. They likely represent the subcortical zone of the same concretions, because these exhibit sharply defined areas

of dark grey translucent flint with sparse light inclusions.

The second group consists of two finds made from opaque grey and light-grey flint lacking visible inclusions.

Finally, a single-platform core was produced from a semi-translucent, dark greyish-brown flint containing numerous light opaque inclusions.

It appears that the first assemblage broadly corresponds, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, to the 1956 field report. Its finds are weakly diagnostic and thus compatible with both Mesolithic and Trypillia flint industries (including the possibility that some artefacts originate from the BDC site of Nova Mykolaivka-1).

2.2. The second assemblage

The second assemblage, which includes the diagnostic Kukrek flint artefacts described by V. Danylenko, is housed in the Department of Stone Age Archaeology at the IA NASU. There is no field or curatorial documentation associated with it. Consequently, the completeness and state of preservation of this assemblage remain unclear.

Since the author's first examination in 2001, this assemblage has consisted of 33 flint artefacts and two small, undecorated body sherds of ceramic vessels. Twenty-six flint artefacts bear the inscription "Гвозд.-56 г." (Gvozd.-56 g.), while seven additional flint artefacts and both ceramic sherds are marked "ст. Гвозд.-56 г." (st. Gvozd.-56 g.). They are written in Russian, as indicated by the abbreviation "г." (for "god", meaning "year") but not "р." (for the Ukrainian "rik").

The assemblage contains four cores: one single-platform conical core with circular flaking (fig. 1,19), two single-platform cores with removals covering two-thirds of the platform perimeter (fig. 1,16,17), and one single-platform unidirectional end core (fig. 1,18). All are miniature in size. The end core, bearing negatives of short bladelets, was exploited using direct percussion, whereas the others are pressure cores with negatives of microblades. The assemblage also includes one rejuvenation flake from a bullet-shaped core with circular flaking (fig. 1,15).

Unmodified blanks are represented by one microblade with a broken end, one proximal and two medial fragments of microblades, one complete bladelet, three medial and one distal fragment of bladelets, two blades with broken ends, and two proximal fragments of blades.

The tool assemblage (15 items) comprises:

– one symmetrical elongated trapeze on a bladelet (fig. 1,1);

– two Kukrek-type inserts made on proximal fragments of a bladelet and a blade (fig. 1,2-3);

– eight scrapers: two end scrapers on proximal blade fragments; three end-side and one side scraper on flakes; and two end-side scrapers on fragments of indeterminate blanks (fig. 1,4-11);

– three multiple burins: one burin on three angles of a broken blade (fig. 1,12); one mixed burin on a flake, incorporating a dihedral angle burin and a transversal angle burin (fig. 1,14); and one flat-faceted mixed burin on a flake, incorporating a transversal concave-retouched burin, a transversal dihedral angle burin, and a burin on a break, as well as the wedge inherent in the chisel (fig. 1,13);

– one medial blade fragment with irregular, marginal lateral retouch.

The complete absence of unmodified flakes, fragments, and chips indicates that the assemblage was artificially sorted and lacks knapping debris.

Based on raw material, the lithic finds in the collection can be visually divided into three main groups. The largest comprises 28 artefacts made from flint that is semi-translucent on small fractures and ranges in colour from nearly black and dark grey to grey-yellow, very light grey, and pale greyish-yellow. It typically contains sparse, lighter opaque inclusions measuring from one to several millimetres. In some areas, these become finer and denser, forming a continuous mottled structure with reduced translucency. Several larger artefacts retain a semi-rolled chalky cortex, beneath which lies a thin brown layer, a grey-yellow to light-grey transition zone, and a dark, nearly black concretion core.

Two additional artefacts are made from opaque grey flint with a glossy, wax-like surface and no visible inclusions. Another end scraper was produced from semi-translucent, more granular, very dark grey flint with a rougher fracture surface and densely distributed minute light inclusions.

Two finds could not be assigned to a specific group. The first is an end scraper of rather Upper Palaeolithic appearance, partially covered by a thin bluish patina. It was produced on a massive semi-

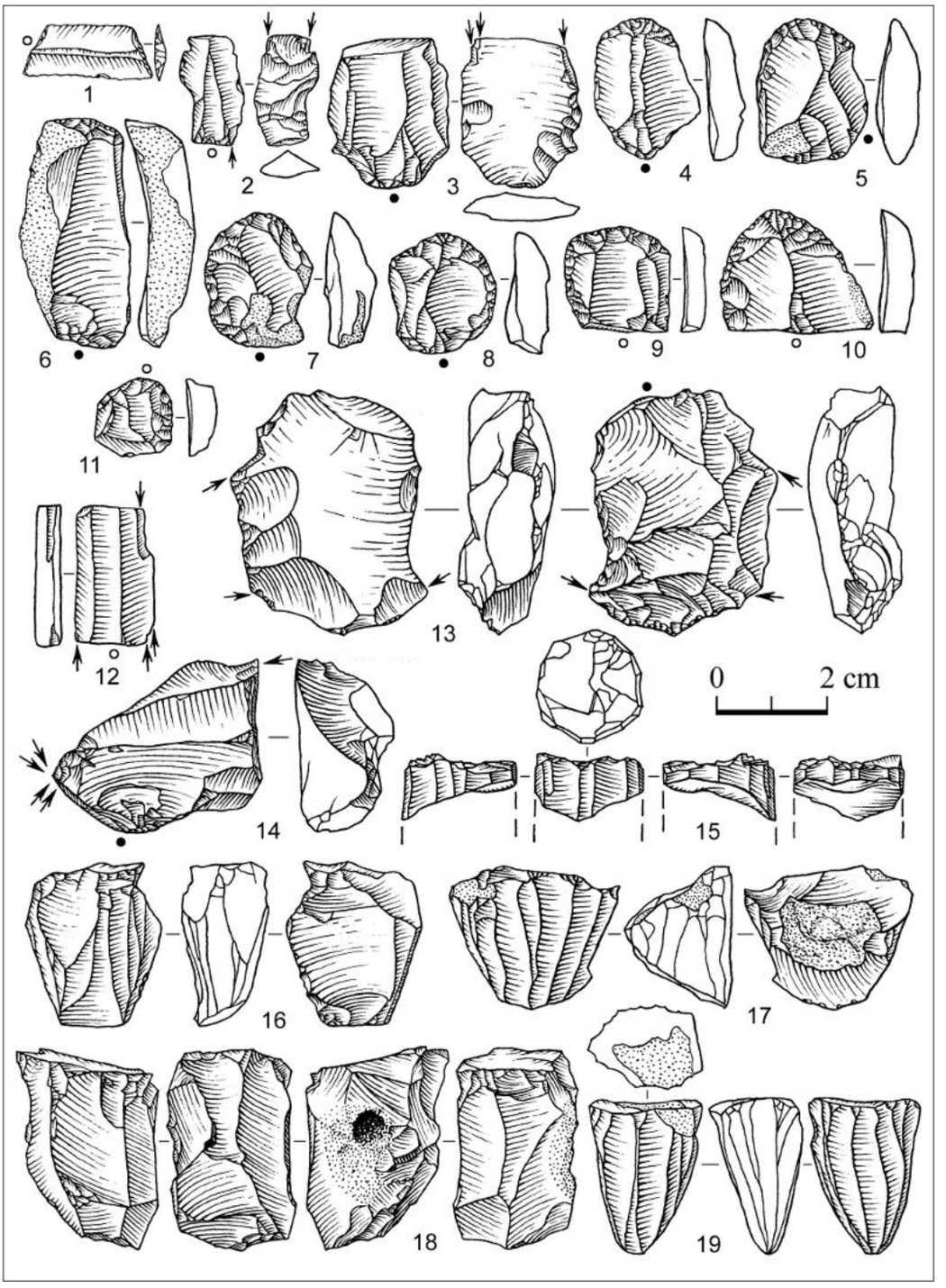

Fig. 1. Flint artefacts with the inscriptions "Gvozd. 56" and "st. Gvozd. 56" from the collection described in V. Danylenko's 1969 monograph.

cortical blade with a rolled greyish-brown cortex (fig. 1,6). The second is a heat-altered core showing thermal cracking and loss of its original colour.

Two ceramic fragments are small, undecorated body sherds. The first, 3-5 mm thick, is made of clay tempered with coarse sand and grit. Both surfaces are well smoothed; the exterior is brown, and the interior is dark greyish-brown. The second, 7-8 mm thick, is manufactured from clay tempered with sand and coarse grit (up to 5 mm).

The exterior surface is well smoothed and dark pink, while the interior is rough and dark greyish-brown. With due caution, this pottery may be attributed to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age.

2.3. Absence of a connection between the two assemblages

Aside from unmodified blades, none of the artefacts from the second assemblage correlates with the Hvozdiv finds recorded in P. Khavliuk's field report. Nevertheless, is it possible to assume that the materials published in Danylenko's monograph were collected by P. Khavliuk at the same site in 1956?

The history of the scientific repository as a distinct department within the IA NASU began only in the early 1970s. Before this, the institution's collections of finds lacked formal inventories and systematic oversight [Burdo, Son 2007, 6]. Consequently, had the Hvozdiv assemblage been divided into two parts in the 1950s-1960s, each of them could have followed an independent trajectory. This possibility is supported by the fact that both assemblages include flint artefacts made from similar raw materials. However, as the described flint varieties are predominant across all prehistoric sites in the region, this argument cannot be regarded as conclusive.

On the other hand, had the two assemblages once formed a single collection, it is improbable that such attractive and easily identifiable artefacts as scrapers, a conical core, and a trapeze would have escaped P. Khavliuk's attention and been omitted from his field report. Furthermore, the report makes no mention of the two ceramic fragments present in the second assemblage. Finally, both the content and handwriting of the inscriptions on the artefacts differ between the two assemblages. The language of the inscriptions is also distinct: while the first assemblage contains both Ukrainian and Russian, the second features Russian exclusively.

The problematic provenance of the second assemblage is also indicated by discrepancies in the site names within V. Danylenko's monograph. Specifically, in addition to the previously cited passage, when outlining the distribution of the "Azov-Kukrek impulse", he mentions two Kukrek sites in the Southern Buh area: Syniukhyn Brid and Vorob'evka [Danilenko 1969, 28]. "Vorob'evka" is evidently the Russian form of "Vorobiivka", the name of a village situated on the left bank of the river, immediately upstream from Hvozdiv. The distance from the southern outskirts of Vorobiivka to locality "a" of the Hvozdiv site is 2.7 km.

According to the 1956 field report, P. Khavliuk collected *"several flint flakes and a large broken fragment of developed Neolithic pottery without decoration"* on an eroded floodplain 300 m from the northern outskirts of the Vorobiivka village [Khavliuk 1956, 5]. Currently, the corresponding pottery fragment and eight flint artefacts are held in Collection No. 332. None of these finds is diagnostic of the Kukrek culture. Consequently, V. Danylenko used the name "Vorob'evka" as an alternative toponym for the provenance of the second assemblage, which in his monograph is described exactly after the finds from the Syniukhyn Brid site [Danilenko 1969, 61].

Further doubts arise from the two distinct variants of inventory inscriptions found on the materials of the second assemblage, specifically the marking "st. Gvozd.". The abbreviation "st." may derive from the Ukrainian or Russian words "staryi" (old) or "stantsiia" (station). The latter interpretation appears more plausible, as it is consistent with the inscription "st. Samchyntsi" on finds from the Stantsiia Samchyntsi site, also identified during the 1956 survey [Khavliuk 1956, 5-6, 11, 16] and later published as Samchyntsi II [Danilenko 1969, 118].

According to the official website of the *Verkhovna Rada* (parliament) of Ukraine (https://www.rada.gov.ua/zakon/new/ADM/)[3], no settlement named "Staryi Hvozdiv" currently exists or has previously existed in the Vinnytsia region. Similarly, data from the *Ukrzaliznytsia* (Ukrainian Railways) website (https://uz.gov.ua/passengers/suburban_train_schedule) indicate no railway station or halt named "Hvozdiv" within the region or elsewhere in Ukraine. Furthermore, while the Samchyntsi II site is located just a few hundred metres from a railway line, the Hvozdiv site lies over 13 km from Shpykiv, the nearest station.

These discrepancies call into question the association of the second assemblage with P. Khavliuk's 1956 investigations at Hvozdiv and Vorobiivka. Consequently, establishing the true provenance

3. Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022, access to these web pages has been temporarily suspended.

of these materials remains a pressing issue.

3. Ascertaining the provenance of the collection published by V. Danylenko

To address the problem of the provenance of the Kukrek flint collection described by V. Danylenko, a hypothesis was proposed regarding the existence of a site meeting a set of conditions that resolve the identified contradictions.

3.1. Search criteria

The hypothetical site in question must meet the following five criteria.

1. Its name contains a word beginning with the five-letter Cyrillic sequence "Гвозд" or "Гвізд" (possible transliteration: Hvozd, Gvozd, Hvizd, Gvizd). The latter spelling, although different from the form on the inscriptions, represents the root of many Ukrainian words corresponding to the Russian root "Gvozd". This is important, since, as a result of widespread Russification in Ukraine, almost all official documentation was written in Russian in the 1950s.

2. The site was investigated in 1956.

3. It is located near a railway station or a halt, the latter is also often referred to as a "station" in common usage.

4. It lies within the distribution area of the Kukrek flint industry.

5. It lies within the distribution range of artefacts made from varieties of flint raw material characteristic of Mesolithic and sub-Neolithic sites located in the forest-steppe Buh region.

3.2. Search methodology

To identify place names (oikonyms) containing the roots "Гвозд" and "Гвізд", the previously mentioned official website of the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine, atlases of the former and current administrative-territorial structure of Ukraine, as well as *Google Earth* search tools were used. To identify a broader range of toponyms, including hydronyms, printed dictionaries, as well as online search tools were consulted.

To identify archaeological sites with corresponding names investigated in 1956, all available publications were analysed, including printed catalogues of archaeological sites in Ukraine and its individual regions [e.g., Telegin (ed.) 1966; Gudkova *et all.* 1991], as well as documentation from the Scientific Archive of the IA NASU (Kyiv), the largest repository of field reports from expeditions operating in Ukraine since 1945. In particular, it holds reports on the work of 41 expeditions in 1956 and 39 expeditions in 1957. The latter were also examined, as it was common practice to combine the results of several years of research in a single report.

Railway stations and halts were searched using the aforementioned *Ukrzaliznytsia* website.

The distribution area of the Kukrek culture was defined on the basis of the occurrence of sites with Kukrek inserts – artefacts regarded by most archaeologists as the principal diagnostic feature of the Kukrek flint industry. In Ukraine, such finds are absent only in the north-east (Sumy, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv Regions), as well as in the west and north-west (Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil, Lviv, Volyn, Rivne, and Khmelnytskyi Regions). Accordingly, these territories were excluded from the search range.

Unfortunately, the sources of the flint raw materials characteristic of Mesolithic and sub-Neolithic sites in the forest-steppe Buh region have not yet been precisely identified [Stanko *et all.* 1981, 6-7; Kiosak 2019, 55-57]. Under these circumstances, a more effective approach to defining the distribution area of these flint varieties is to exclude from the already curtailed search range those territories where clearly attributed specific types of flint were used. Accordingly, the search excluded the Donets River Basin, the Azov region, the southern Left-Bank Middle Dnipro area, the Lower Dnipro, and Crimea (Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, and Poltava Regions, and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea), where high-quality semi-translucent Donets flint, as well as flint from the second ridge of the Crimean Mountains and small Dnipro alluvium flint pebbles predominate.

3.3. Search results

In addition to the mentioned Hvozdiv in the Vinnytsia Region, the specified linguistic criteria are also met by seven other villages within the previously defined geographical boundaries in Ukraine (fig. 2).

Hvozdiv (Russian: Gvozdev) in the Obukhiv District, Kyiv Region, 5.7 km from Pidhirtsi station.

Hvizdiarnia (until 1965 – Hvozdiarnia; Russian: Gvozdiarnia) in the Zhytomyr District, Zhy-

Fig. 2. Locations of the Hvozdiv and Gvozdova sites, as well as nowadays settlements: 1 – Hvozdiv; 2 – Hvizdiarnia; 3 – Hvizdava; 4 – Hvizdivtsi; 5 – Hvozdavka Persha; 6 – Hvozdavka Druha; 7 – Hvozdivka. Regions matching the specified criteria are highlighted in full colour.

tomyr Region, 14.5 km from Razine station.

Hvizdava (Russian: Gvozdava) in the Berdychiv District, Zhytomyr Region, 4.5 km from Reia station.

Hvizdivtsi (Russian: Gvozdovtsy) in the Dnistrovskyi District, Chernivtsi Region, 4 km from Sokyriany station.

Hvozdavka Persha and Hvozdavka Druha (Russian: Gvozdavka Pervaia and Gvozdavka Vtoraia) in the Podilsk District, Odesa Region, 5 and 4 km from Zaplazy station, respectively.

Hvozdivka (Russian: Gvozdovka) in the Berezivka District, Odesa Region, 33 km from Tokarivka station.

The 161 field reports on the work of 80 expeditions[4] operating in Ukraine in 1956 and 1957 are held in the Scientific Archive of the IA NASU (Fond 64). Only 45 of these expeditions operated in the regions that satisfy the established geographical criteria. After excluding excavations at hillforts, barrows, cemeteries, and ancient cities, the number of relevant expeditions was reduced to 27. An examination of the 36 reports produced by these expeditions revealed no references to sites whose names could have been abbreviated to "Gvozd." Nor do these reports mention work in the vicinity of the seven previously identified villages.

A targeted search for published mentions of archaeological sites in the vicinity of the seven listed settlements yielded only one result: a multicomponent site discovered in the village of Hvozdiv, south of Kyiv, in the 1980s [Petrashenko, Koziuba 1993, 27].

The search for railway station and halt names yielded only one result – Hvizdets station on the Zalishchyky-Kolomyia line, located in the eponymous village in Ivano-Frankivsk Region beyond the distribution range of the Kukrek flint industry.

4. A single expedition often resulted in multiple reports, submitted by separate detachments or individual researchers.

The absence of relevant results for archaeological sites meeting the established criteria within Ukraine prompted a shift in focus to the Republic of Moldova, where sites of the Kukrek technocomplex are also known. A targeted search there identified only one oikonym containing the root "Gvozd": the village of Gvozdova (Russian: Gvozdovo), situated on the Camenca River (a left tributary of the Răut) in the commune of Gura Camencii, Florești District. This locality fully meets all other criteria. In particular, the Gura Camencii railway halt is located 1.5 km from the historical centre of the village and only 500 m from its current southern outskirts (fig. 3). At least one site attributed to the Mesolithic period is known in the vicinity of the village. Most importantly, Vsevolod Markevich and Oleksandr Chernysh surveyed Stone Age sites in this area in 1956 [Chernysh 1959, 210; 1973, 98-99; Ketraru 1969, 25, 84-85; 1973, 118].

4. Verification of the Moldovan provenance of the collection

The striking convergence of toponymic, geographical, and chronological criteria identifies the area around the village of Gvozdova in Moldova as the most likely place of origin of the collection of finds inscribed "Гвозд.-56 г.". However, a firmer conclusion requires further verification and, if possible, the identification of a link between the collection and a specific archaeological site.

4.1. The Kukrek culture sites in the Răut River Basin

The investigation of the cluster of Mesolithic sites in the area of Florești was initiated by V. Markevich in 1954, when he was employed as a senior forester at the Florești forestry district. He continued the systematic collection of Stone Age materials in this microregion in 1955-1960, concurrently with his studies in history at Chernivtsi University. During this period, he closely collaborated with the Moldavian Expedition led by Tatiana Passek, which investigated Neolithic and Trypillian sites in the Dniester region [Manzura, Tserna 2003-2004]. The expedition team also included Nicolae Chetraru from Chișinău and Oleksandr Chernysh from Lviv.

In 1956, V. Markevich and O. Chernysh conducted surface collections of archaeological materials at numerous locations near the villages of Vărvăreuca, Gvozdova, Gura Camencii, and Bobulești. The following year, N. Chetraru and O. Chernysh revisited these locations while conducting excavations at the Mesolithic Kukrek culture site of Frumușica I [Reilianu 2003-2004, 10]. Subsequently, N. Chetraru and V. Markevich conduct-

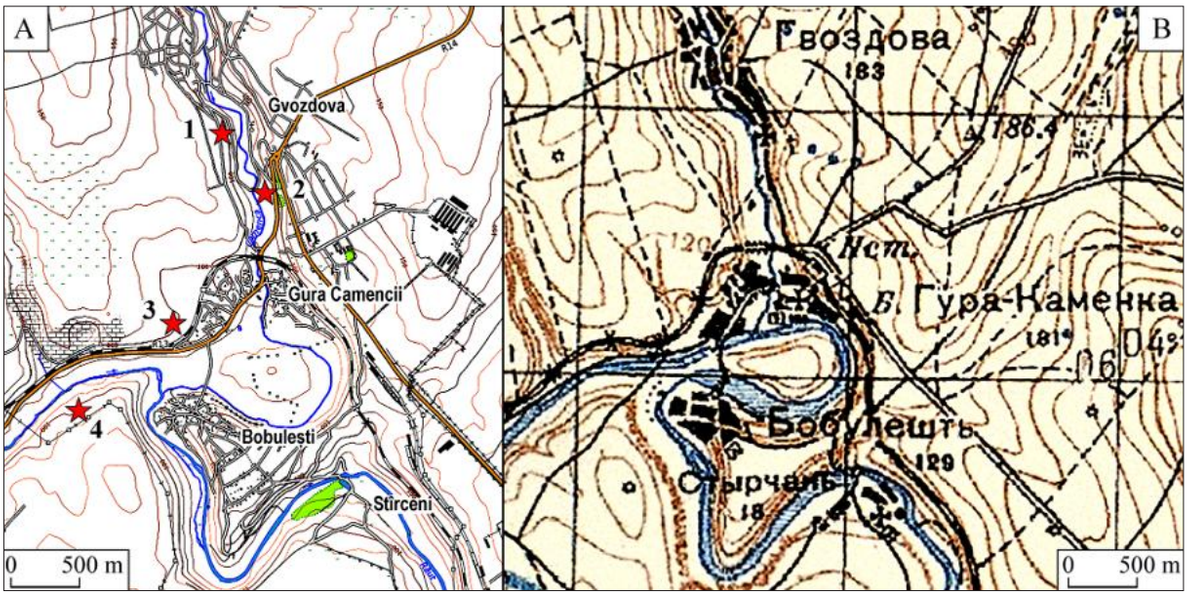

Fig. 3. The area around the mouth of the Camenca River on topographic maps: A – modern (https://www.opentopomap.org); B – 1940. Stars indicate the sites mentioned in the text: 1 – Gvozdova right-bank Palaeolithic site; 2 – Gvozdova left-bank Palaeolithic site; 3 – Gura Camencii VI; 4 – Vărvăreuca IX. Location of the sites after N. Chetraru [Ketraru 1969; 1973].

ed both independent and joint research in this area.

Three Stone Age sites bearing names associated with the village of Gvozdova are mentioned in the records. According to O. Chernysh, later repeated by N. Chetraru in 1973, these are the Upper Palaeolithic site Gvozdova I to the south of the village, the Upper Palaeolithic site Gvozdova II to the west of the church, and the Mesolithic site Gvozdova III on the northern outskirts of the village. The first and third are located on the left bank of the Camenca River, while the second lies on the right bank [Chernysh 1973, 98-99; Ketraru 1973, 118, 149]. However, an earlier publication by N. Chetraru refers to the Mesolithic site as "Gvozdova I", and the two Palaeolithic sites as "Gvozdova II" and "Gvozdova III" [Ketraru 1969, 84]. The 1956 field report by T. Passek designates the site on the right bank as "Gvozdova I" [Passek 1956, 11].

Thus, there are at least three numbering schemes for the sites in the vicinity of the village. The confusion in the numbering, localisation, and dating of prehistoric sites in Florești District has been repeatedly noted by N. Chetraru [Ketraru 1969, 28; 1983, 3-4]. Therefore, in what follows, the sites near Gvozdova will be referred to as the "Mesolithic site", the "right-bank Palaeolithic site", and the "left-bank Palaeolithic site".

The Mesolithic site of Gvozdova was discovered by V. Markevich in 1955. Its materials comprise 35 flint artefacts: two small, roughly bullet-shaped cores, an atypical trapeze, small blades and blade fragments (including specimens with retouch and traces of use), as well as flakes and debitage [Ketraru 1969, 84-85; 1973, 149].

Notably, according to N. Chetraru's publications, only part of the materials from the sites investigated by V. Markevich in the 1950s were handed over to him in 1960 [Ketraru 1983, 3]. As of 1973, these were held in the archaeology sector of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Moldavian SSR, including the finds from the Mesolithic site of Gvozdova. In contrast, N. Chetraru did not specify the whereabouts of materials from sites investigated jointly by V. Markevich and O. Chernysh, nor did he provide descriptions of those specific finds [Ketraru 1973]. It seems that these collections remained inaccessible to Moldovan archaeologists. Unfortunately, information on the location of these materials is also absent from the works by O. Chernysh.

However, in May 2026, eight unsigned patina-covered flint artefacts bearing four-digit numbers were found in the scientific repository of the I. Krypiakevych Institute of Ukrainian Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in Lviv, accompanied by a paper label reading "Гвоздово I, 9/VIII, 56" (Gvozdovo I, 9/VIII, 56)[5].

Currently, the National Museum of History of Moldova (NMHM) holds at least two collections of flint artefacts from the village of Gvozdova, documented photographically by Sergiu Bodian[6]. The finds in one collection are inscribed "Гв I" (Gv. I) and "Гвоздово I" (Gvozdovo I), without indicating the year. The inscriptions on the finds of the other collection are "Гвозд. II, 60" (Gvozdovo II, 60) and "Гвоздово II, 60" (Gvozdovo II, 60). Given the confusion in site numbering, these collections may relate to the Mesolithic site, the right-bank Palaeolithic site, or both. This is supported by a thick white patina, previously noted in descriptions of these two sites [Passek 1956, 11; Ketraru 1969, 85; Chernysh 1973, 99]. This characteristic excludes these sites as potential sources of the Kyiv collection, whose artefacts, with one exception, lack patina.

It is also noteworthy that a comparison of modern and historical maps is essential to determine precise distances. For instance, the 1941 Soviet military map (1:100,000 scale, Sheet L-35) places the halt closest to Gvozdova not on the north-western outskirts of Gura Camencii (as it is today), but on the opposite, left bank of the Camenca River (fig. 3B). Specifically, it was situated on the village's north-eastern edge, 150 m west of the Codrul Nou – Soroca road. From this historical halt, the distances to the Mesolithic and right-bank Palaeolithic sites are approximately 2 km and 1.2 km, respectively. The left-bank Palaeolithic site is the nearest, at roughly 0.6 km. Distances from the modern Gura Camencii halt to these sites are nearly identical: approximately 2.1 km, 1.2 km, and 0.8 km (fig. 3A).

Thus, the left-bank Palaeolithic site would have been considered the most plausible source

5. The author sincerely thanks the institute's research fellow, Ruslan Koropetskyi, for his assistance in searching for these materials.

6. The author sincerely thanks the museum's Director General, Eugen Sava, for his kind permission to take photographs, as well as Sergiu Bodian for valuable advice and for conducting the necessary on-site work.

for the Kyiv collection, being closest to the railway halt and having yielded finds described without mention of patina. However, publications indicate that only *"flakes, fragments, and scrapers"* were recovered there in 1956 [Chernysh 1973, 119], which contradicts the typological composition of the Kyiv assemblage.

Given the distinctly Kukrek character of the Kyiv collection, the materials most typologically similar to it near the village of Gvozdova derive from the Vărvăreuca IX and Gura Camencii VI sites in the Răut River valley, near the mouth of the Camenca River (fig. 3A). Both sites were investigated in 1956. The absence of patina on their artefacts [Ketraru 1969] further aligns them with the Kyiv collection. Notably, the distance from Gura Camencii VI to the present-day Gura Camencii railway halt does not exceed 0.5 km.

With respect to the raw material criteria, N. Chetraru notes occurrences of Cretaceous deposits with fine-grained flint nodules in *"various shades of gray"* in the Răut valley near the villages of Vărvăreuca, Gura Camencii, and Bobulești [Ketraru 1969, 87]. According to a personal communication from Bohdan Ridush, the flint from the Răut Valley is indistinguishable from the Cenomanian flint of the Dniester Valley, where the primary raw material types present in the Kyiv collection are well known[7].

A comparison of the flint from the largest group of the Kyiv collection with published photographs of lithic artefacts from the Early Trypillia settlement of Isaiia – Balta Popii (Răducăneni commune, Iași county, Romania), located near the confluence of the Jijia and Prut Rivers, confirms a visual similarity to the Group A1 raw material described by Diana-Mariuca Vornicu [2017, 193, Pl. I/1-6]. She describes this variety of flint as part of the sedimentary cover of the Moldavian Platform, specifically from *"the right side of the Prut between the nowadays localities of Miorcani and Mitoc and on the left side of the same river between the localities Lipcani and Bădragi"* [Vornicu 2017, 193]. Following Viktor Petrun, Dmytro Kiosak refers to this material as the Upper Cenomanian Middle Dniester flint and mentions its outcrops on the Dniester near the town of Mohyliv-Podilskyi [Kiosak 2019, 49].

Thus, the nature of the flint raw material does not contradict the hypothesis of a Moldovan origin for the Kyiv collection. The presence of analogous raw material at numerous sites in the Southern Buh River region may be explained either by the import of such flint from the west or by the existence of local sources formed in the same deposits as those on the Prut and the Middle Dniester. For instance, D. Kiosak notes that the most abundant flint at the Kukrek culture site of Melnychna Krucha on the Southern Buh is likely Upper Cenomanian [Kiosak 2019, 55-56]. However, until extensive comparative petrographic, chemical, micropalaeontological, and spectral analyses are conducted, the question of the provenance of raw materials at specific sites can hardly be definitively resolved.

Thus, while the evidence supports the proposed hypothesis, it does not allow for identifying a specific site as the source of the Kyiv collection. This is primarily due to the previously noted confusion in naming the sites investigated by V. Markevich, N. Chetraru, and O. Chernysh near Florești. Another difficulty is the lack of data regarding the current whereabouts of certain finds from the Camenca River mouth area. Consequently, it can only be concluded that the Kyiv collection was either assembled at an undocumented site near the village of Gvozdova or derives from a known local Kukrek site later published under a different name.

Another important observation supports this conclusion. Despite the lack of typological and visual similarity between the artefacts from Kyiv and those from the NMHM, the photographs taken at the latter reveal a striking match in the style of inventory markings (fig. 4). In our view, based on a visual assessment, the probability that they were applied by the same hand is remarkably high.

4.2. Circumstances of the collection's arrival in Kyiv

Given that the evidence for the Moldovan origin of the Kyiv collection is largely indirect, data regarding the timing and circumstances of its transfer from Chișinău to Kyiv may provide additional support for the hypothesis.

Notably, a detailed description of the Kyiv collection appears in the 1966 typescript of V.

7. The author sincerely thanks B. Ridush for his valuable advice.

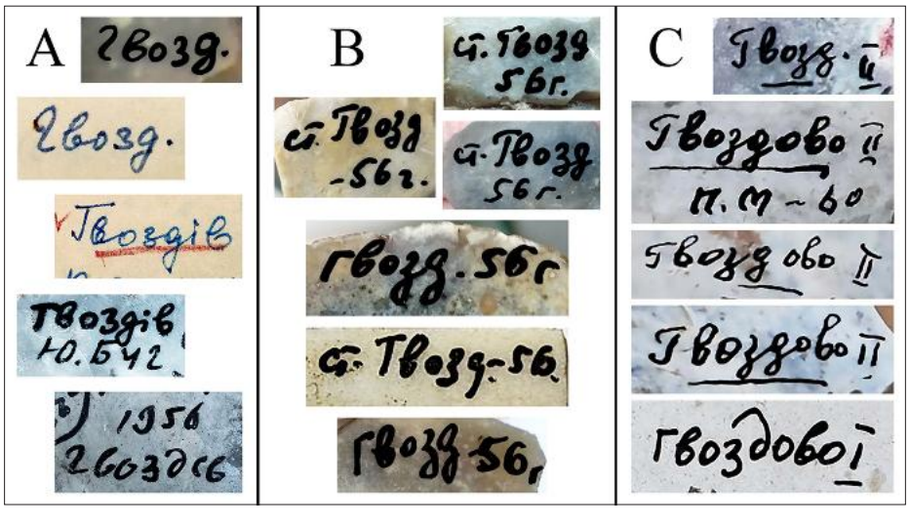

Fig. 4. Handwriting style of the site names: A – in P. Khavliuk's field documentation and on finds from Hvozdiv; B – on artefacts from V. Danylenko's collection; C – on finds from the settlements near Gvozdova village. A, B – photos by D. Haskevych; C – photo by S. Bodian.

Danylenko's monograph [Danilenko 1966] but is absent from the earlier 1962 version. In the latter, a passage about the Syniukhin Brid site is followed only by a handwritten note: *"Probably, the settlement near the village of Gvozdev, discovered by P.I. Khavliuk in 1956, belongs to the same type of sites"* [Danilenko 1962, 64]. The *terminus post quem* for this note is established by references, written in the same ink, to an article by T. Passek published in the autumn of 1963 [Danilenko 1962, 25, 164].

The time of the first appearance of the "Vorob'evka" site in the monograph can be determined more precisely. V. Danylenko mentioned it in a revised manuscript of the first chapter, completed on 20 July 1964 [Danilenko 1964, 78]. Notably, "Vorob'evka" appears there in the same paragraph as the Moldovan Kukrek sites – Vărvăreuca IX, Bădragii Vechi, Costeşti II, and Gura Camencii – which were absent from the 1962 typescript.

Thus, the "Vorob'evka-Gvozdevo" collection likely attracted V. Danylenko's attention between autumn 1963 and July 1964. This is somewhat unexpected, as the finds from P. Khavliuk's survey in Hvozdiv had already been held in Kyiv for six or seven years. Furthermore, between 1957 and 1961, the two researchers maintained close contact, conducting annual joint fieldwork on the Southern Buh. What, then, occurred during this brief interval of less than a year?

The answer to this question can be found in a note accompanying the above-mentioned list of Kukrek sites in Moldova: *"The materials were examined in the repository of the Archaeological Museum of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Mold. SSR. We express our sincere gratitude to the author of the finds, I.A.* (in fact, N.A. – D.H.) *Ketraru*" [Danilenko 1964, 151; 1969, 28, 243]. Indeed, during this period V. Danylenko visited Moldova to participate in the First Symposium on the Archaeology and Ethnography of the Southwest of the USSR, held in Chișinău on 15-24 May 1964.

At the symposium, V. Danylenko's report, titled "Common Tasks in the Study of the Neolithic of Moldova and Ukraine" provoked discussion, particularly, *"concerning the author's attribution of a number of Mesolithic sites in Moldova to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic"* [Beilekchi 1965, 133]. This statement clearly referred to the Kukrek sites, as V. Danylenko's held the view that the Neolithisation of the territories of Ukraine and Moldova was driven by an *"eastern Azov-Kukrek impulse"*.

Thus, V. Danylenko first mentioned the "Vorob'evka" site in a manuscript completed just two months after the symposium. It appears that at the same time, or shortly thereafter, notes concerning the "Gvozdevo" site were added to other chapters. Moreover, this site was used in the monograph to support his attribution – extensively debated in Chișinău – of the Northwest Pontic Kukrek sites to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic.

In particular, Danylenko emphasised that all

other Mesolithic sites he considered (Hrebenyky, Zavallia, Volodymyrivka, Syniukhin Brid, Frumușica, Sărăteni, Costești II, Vărvăreuca IX, Bădragii Vechi, and Gura Camencii) are located on high loess terraces. In contrast, Hvozdiv was the only pre-pottery site situated on the high floodplain directly by the river. In his view, such a location was a clear indicator of a Neolithic economy, as floodplains offered opportunities for livestock grazing and for cultivating loose alluvial sediments after seasonal floods [Danilenko 1969, 51, 57-62, 157].

Taken together, the evidence presented leaves no alternative but to conclude that the collection of the Kukrek artefacts from the vicinity of the Gvozdova village in Moldova was brought to Kyiv by V. Danylenko in late May 1964. This explains why these artefacts were not included in the published corpus of Mesolithic sites in the Răut River basin [Ketraru 1969] and remained unknown to subsequent generations of Moldovan archaeologists.

The circumstances under which the Gvozdova materials were transferred from the museum to V. Danylenko remain unclear. However, the fact that the collection began to be incorporated into scholarly circulation during the next two months suggests that he equated it with P. Khavliuk's finds deliberately, rather than through forgetfulness or oversight. The initial reference to the collection under the name "Vorob'evka" may be explained by certain doubts and an attempt to conceal its true provenance. Subsequently, however, the conviction that he had brought back to Kyiv the finds from Hvozdiv on the Southern Buh appears to have prevailed. The identical inscriptions ("Гвозд."), the same date ("1956"), and the similar character of the flint raw material may have contributed to this.

Conclusions

V. Danylenko's 1969 monograph provided the first description of a small but diagnostic assemblage of Mesolithic Kukrek flint artefacts, stating they were discovered by P. Khavliuk in 1956 at the Hvozdiv site on the Southern Buh in the Vinnytsia Region, Ukraine. Subsequently, researchers reproduced this information and published illustrations of several of these artefacts currently held at the IA NASU in Kyiv. However, the published provenance of these materials has been called into question by recent field surveys, inconsistencies in the site's designation within the monograph, the lack of mention of the assemblage in archival records, and differences in the inscriptions on the artefacts. Furthermore, the marks refer to a railway station that does not exist in the vicinity of the site.

To explain these gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions, a hypothesis was proposed linking the collection to a Kukrek site investigated in 1956, located within a predefined geographical range near a settlement with a name beginning with "Gvozd-" or "Hvizd-", and situated in proximity to a railway station.

A targeted search within Ukraine failed to identify any sites meeting the specified criteria. In contrast, several such localities are known in the Florești District of the Republic of Moldova. Situated along the Camenca and Răut rivers, these sites lie near the village of Gvozdova and the Gura Camencii railway halt; they were investigated between 1956 and 1960 by V. Markevich, O. Chernysh, and N. Ketraru.

While a Moldovan origin for the Kyiv collection is likely, a definitive association with a specific site remains elusive due to the duplication of site names, frequent renaming, and inconsistent boundaries established by various researchers. Another obstacle is the lack of information on the present location of some of the finds from these sites. However, the raw material of the Kyiv flint artefacts shows clear visual parallels with that from the territory of Moldova. Furthermore, the inscriptions on the Kyiv artefacts closely match those on two collections from the Gvozdova village vicinity, currently housed at the NMHM in Chișinău.

Scrutiny of several drafts of V. Danylenko's monograph has established the first mention of the collection in question in July 1964. Only two months earlier, the scholar had visited Chișinău, where he participated in the Symposium on the Archaeology and Ethnography of the South-West of the USSR and examined collections from Kukrek sites in the Prut and Răut river valleys, including Vărvăreuca IX and Gura Camencii.

Taken together, this indirect yet mutually consistent evidence strongly suggests that the Kyiv collection of flint artefacts, labelled "Gvozd.-56 g.", was assembled in 1956 in Moldova near the village of Gvozdova, located 114 km south of Hvozdiv. This likely occurred either at a Mesolithic site undocumented in field reports

and publications, or at one of the well-known local Kukrek culture sites subsequently published under a different name. In late May 1964, V. Danylenko brought these materials from Chișinău to Kyiv, though the exact circumstances of the collection's transfer from the museum to his possession remain obscure.

In 1969, the publication of the Moldovan finds as materials from the Hvozdiv site on the Southern Buh was of considerable significance. They served as the principal evidence supporting V. Danylenko's claim regarding the existence of pre-ceramic (in essence, Late Mesolithic) sites on river floodplain terraces, and, by extension, the Neolithisation of the region influenced by Kukrek industry bearers. Since then, the exploration and radiocarbon dating of both new and previously known localities have confirmed the presence of Kukrek sites in analogous topographic contexts. Therefore, establishing the Moldovan origin of the Kyiv collection does not substantially alter the current discourse on the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition in the Southern Buh basin.

Nevertheless, this conclusion is of scholarly importance, as it restores the factual record and underscores the need to critically reassess even long-published, deeply entrenched, and frequently repeated assertions. Careful collection and comparison of evidence, combined with the formulation and testing of alternative hypotheses, can transform a routine historiographical review into a near-detective investigation, leading to unexpected results.

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