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ROMANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA: FRAGMENTS

RADU-ALEXANDRU DRAGOMAN*, SORIN OANȚĂ-MARGHITU**

“The intellectuals, who should be the people’s enlighteners, will account for all their lapses.”

Father Justin Pârnu, Petru Vodă Monastery, Neamț county, Romania;
former political prisoner between 1948 and 1964¹.

Keywords: archaeology, politics, Romania, neoliberalism, critical practice.

Abstract: The present paper is the continuation of an article written by us about archaeology in communist and post-communist Romania (Dragoman and Oanță-Marghitu 2006). In this article we discuss discourses and practices of archaeology in Romania during the neoliberal era, in the context of the Romanian state having accepted the conditions for accession to the European Union and for integration to its political structure. Starting from the premise that neoliberal ideology affects people’s lives in a negative way, we critically analyze a series of topics such as: the “apolitical” archaeology; the adjusting to the System of the archaeologists; the political aspects of methodological imports from centres of the great powers; the “comfortable ideas” of the present that confer “ideological respectability” (e.g. anti-nationalism, multiculturalism, feminism); the preventive and rescue archaeology as new forms of practice in Romanian capitalist society; the lack of academic interest in contemporary material culture; and the new language introduced inside the archaeological field by managers. We make a plea for archaeologies that might counteract globalist neoliberal ideology and render alternative interpretations, as opposed to the official ones – interpretations that might contribute to a critical understanding of the world we live in.

Cuvinte-cheie: arheologie, politică, România, neoliberalism, demers critic.

Rezumat: Textul de față reprezintă continuarea unui articol pe care l-am scris despre arheologia din România comunistă și postcomunistă (Dragoman și Oanță-Marghitu 2006). În acest articol discutăm despre discursuri și practici ale arheologiei din România în perioada neoliberală, în contextul acceptării de către statul român a condițiilor de aderare la Uniunea Europeană și a integrării în această structură politică. Pornind de la premisa că ideologia neoliberală afectează în chip negativ viețile oamenilor, analizăm critic o serie de subiecte precum: „arheologia apolitică”; adaptarea la Sistem a arheologilor; aspectele politice ale importurilor metodologice din centre aparținând marilor puteri; „ideile confortabile” ale prezentului ce conferă „onorabilitate ideologică” (e.g. antinaționalismul, multiculturalismul, feminismul); arheologia preventivă și cea de salvare ca noi forme de practică în societatea capitalistă românească; lipsa interesului academic pentru cultura materială contemporană; și noul limbaj introdus de manageri în cadrul câmpului arheologic. Pledăm pentru diverse arheologii în măsură să combată ideologia globalistă neoliberală și să producă interpretări alternative față de cele oficiale – interpretări care să contribuie la o înțelegere critică a lumii în care trăim.

Introduction

The present paper is the continuation of some ideas expressed in an article written by us about archaeology in communist and post-communist Romania². In that text, we shifted the emphasis from the

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¹ Pârnu 2007, p. 136.

² Dragoman and Oanță-Marghitu 2006.

means of control and/or repression instrumented by the political power over the academic and university environment to the manners in which archaeologists have legitimated the official ideologies at a given time. In this article we shall focus on the relations between the archaeological field in Romania and the currently dominant ideology, *i.e.* neoliberalism.

After 1989, throughout the so-called “transition period” (the end of which was symbolically marked by Romania’s accession to the European Union and by the President’s condemnation of the communist regime, based on a report drawn up by specialists), neoliberal ideology was gradually legitimated by the entire political class and by the mainstream cultural elites by adopting an anti-communist discourse (often intended to validate their message and gloss over their own compromise-tainted biographies), as well as a pro-capitalist and pro-European discourse³. Albeit not termed as such in the political environment, neoliberalism is presented as the only possible alternative to the providential state of the communist era, as the freedoms and rights gained by the 1989 Revolution are due, according to the official economics discourse, to the existence of a free, competitive, global market that self-regulates without state intervention. Beyond the left-, center- or right-oriented discourses, the implementation of neoliberal economic policies has been a constant throughout the post-revolution period, the role of the state being narrowed down to providing a good business climate through massive privatizations (often a preamble to bankrupting factories and subsequently selling them as scrap iron) and through laws ensuring a flexible labor market. However, Romania’s stark turn to capitalism was almost coincidental with the beginning of the crisis of capitalism’s neoliberal version. Thus, the state’s economical policies aimed at reducing social costs and imposing sacrifice curves. After two decades of implementing neoliberal economic policies, we acknowledge the massive migration of people towards Western countries as a consequence of the destruction of Romanian industry and agriculture, a process with serious demographic consequences⁴, the escalation of poverty and social inequality⁵, the alienation of national resources to corporations or to other states (the case of mine operating rights at Roșia Montană awarded in 1999 to the company Roșia Montană Gold Corporation SA, respectively the case of the gas company Distrigaz Sud București, sold in 2004 to Gaz de France), the continuation of the communist-era originated policy of destroying old Bucharest monuments⁶, this time traceable to the real estate business, or the mutilation of the urban landscape by erecting hideous buildings nearly abutting historical monuments (*e.g.* office buildings next to the Armenian Church and to St. Joseph Cathedral in Bucharest; a branch office of BRD Groupe Société Générale SA next to the mosque in Constanța), etc. Neoliberal ideology turns the social space into a market where everything becomes a commodity, ideas and people included.

The neoliberal ideology and practices became easily and soundly established in a public space where politics, far from being “an artifact of thinking”, a method to represent society, is contrived as “taking possession of the social reality”: “For present-day Romanian politicians, politics is mainly a method to continue their businesses in other ways” and the act of governing is regarded as a bureaucratic piece of engineering⁷. In this space of feeble tradition of protest (the one during Ceaușescu’s communist era is nowadays pompously styled “resistance by culture”) and an anemic political action of the trade unions (a fact which was visible upon the enforcement of the governmental austerity measures in 2010), the opposition to neoliberalism consists of “left-wing” intellectuals of (neo-)Marxist inspiration, such as the social and political critique group gathered around the *Critic Atac* website, and of “right-wing” intellectuals inspired by the critical virtues of Christianity, as with the distributists of the website *A Treia Forță. România profundă (The Third Force. The Deep Romania)* or Mircea Platon (see his websites *Pentru o cultură a discernământului și o Românie la scară umană / For a culture of discernment and for a Romania at human scale; Focuri în noapte. Note. Istorie. Clarificări / Fires in the night. Notes. History. Clarifications*).

We shall endeavour to discuss here discourses and practices of archaeology in Romania during the neoliberal era, in the context of the Romanian state having accepted the conditions for accession to the

³ For a different-perspective criticism, see Hurduzeu and Platon 2008; Țichindeleanu 2009; a brief history of neoliberalism, Harvey 2007.

⁴ Cf. *Recensământul* 2002; 2011.

⁵ *E.g.* Wolff 2009; Leetmaa *et al.* 2011.

⁶ Derer *et al.* 2009.

⁷ Barbu 2005, p. 13-14.

European Union and for integration to its political structure. Along the same lines as other archaeologists⁸, we have maintained and continue to maintain that archaeological practice cannot be apolitical, because it is permanently influenced, in various forms, by the social-political context in which it is conducted⁹. We are of the opinion that a “political” archaeology does not mean to adhere to a certain doctrine or to activate in a political party, but to employ the instruments specific to the discipline in order to oppose ideologies that affect people’s lives in a negative way. As already shown by Randall McGuire, archaeology can not change the socio-economic conditions peoples live in, but it can play an important role in the ideological battle¹⁰. The archaeological practice is to us a space to confront different views, not only with respect to the past, but also to the present. This text is an expression of our political perspective.

On the “neutrality” of “apolitical” archaeology

As it is easily noticeable in published archaeological writings, most of the archaeologists in Romania persist in ignoring the social-political context where they carry out their work, as well the official ideologies that structure social life. Such archaeologists claim the possibility of a strictly scientific practice, that is to say neutral and apolitical, for which reason they are preoccupied solely by their research topics. In one form or another, they operate with a disjunction between the past (defined as “scientific” object of study) and the present (defined as subjective and political). It is noteworthy that this dichotomy was also specific to the German archaeologists of the SS-Ahnenerbe during the Third Reich, whose works, save for some details or popularization articles, were irreproachable; it was precisely due to their rigorously “scientific” and “neutral” nature that such works contributed to the prestige and legitimation of the Nazi organization, thus gaining political value¹¹. Similarly, the communist leaders responsible of transforming the academic environment in Romania after 1945 employed the separation between scientific and political activity, and encouraged this separation. Even in the case of archaeologists regarded by the regime as “tainted” or “former reactionaries”, such as Vladimir Dumitrescu, it was considered that, as long as they ceased to be politically active after the Soviet occupation of the country (23 August 1944) and were “good experts”, they might be recuperated for the communist regime “for scientific reasons”¹².

The gap between the scientific works and the social political background against which they were created may also be identified in the manner of dealing with archaeological items. A most obvious example is that of exhibition catalogues. The dominant vision underlying these catalogues was an aestheticizing one; the exhibits were taken out of the contexts they used to belong to and reduced to the status of “objects of art”. De-contextualized, the items were transformed in merely illustrative material within meta-narrations – general presentations, by categories of occupations/materials, regarding an entire age, a certain “archaeological culture” or a particular population. As for the items themselves, all that was mentioned was the “type” under which they had been classified, the material of which they were made, the place of origin, the “archaeological culture” to which they belonged, the relative and the absolute chronology, the institution where they were exhibited or deposited and, possibly, the journal/book in which they had been published. Nothing was said about the context of the discovery, the materials with which those items had been associated at a given time or about the biography of the exhibits from the past until the present. Separated entirely from their own memory, the archaeological items could be attached any message. For instance, in the 1970s–1980s, a series of (E)Neolithic items were included in an exhibition organized at the History Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania (currently the National Museum of Romanian History in Bucharest); judging by the leaflet presenting the theme of the main exhibition, the message transmitted to the visitors was that of the Romanian people’s multi-millennarian history, which reached its summit in the so-called “Golden Age” of Nicolae Ceaușescu¹³. In 2008, some of these items were included in the catalogue of the exhibition organized between June 3rd and October 5th

⁸ *E.g.* McGuire 2008 with literature.

⁹ For the Romanian case, see Dragoman and Oanță-Marghitu 2006; Dragoman 2009a; 2009b.

¹⁰ McGuire 2008, p. 21.

¹¹ Haßmann 2000, p. 121-122.

¹² See, for instance, Pleșa 2006, p. 172, note 25.

¹³ *Schiță tematică* 1970.

at the Historisches Museum Olten, in Switzerland, dedicated to the (E)Neolithic period in Romania¹⁴. The images of the archaeological items were accompanied by texts signed by members of the political or cultural elite of Romania. Several of those texts approached the exhibits as mere pretexts for legitimating Romania's accession to the European Union and for bestowing praises upon the Union's political structure; for instance, these were the words of the general secretary of the Ministry of Culture and Cults at that time: "The mosaic of Neolithic cultures in Romania prefigures, paradoxically, the cultural landscape of modern Romania which is as diverse as it is symbolic for the essence of Europe today"¹⁵. In conclusion, the so-called "neutral" approach promoted by some archaeologists in Romania is an illusion, because separating the item (be it scientific work or archaeological artifact) from its social background (of past or of present) leaves room for the dominant ideologies.

On archaeologists and adjusting to the System

The neoliberal discourse in Romanian archaeology maintains that "adapting and applying certain planning, coordination and control techniques – which have proved their efficiency in the sphere of competitive economy – to the specific of archaeology may have positive effects", that "the increasing pressure of the economic factors, the unremitting competition for public funding and the increase of labor force value have generated a currently widening gap between the 'economic system' of archaeology and the global economic system, which has modified/restructured itself in order to adapt and turn into a mechanism that operates on the basis of market economy rules", that it is necessary "to adjust the operating mechanism of archaeology to contemporary economy and to its management systems", that "we should identify all means, methods and leverages to render us efficient and aware of social reality, to employ intensively the available resources", that we should consider "developing a promoting marketing strategy, a strategy for convincing the public that this work is extremely interesting and beautiful and that it is worth being known and appreciated by the large public", that "Passion and commitment [...] no longer suffice"¹⁶.

This rhetoric aims at transforming the discipline from a medium of reflection, critical thought and contemplation into a market where ideas may be circulated and vended similarly to any other products (like a commodity), thus also ensuring the control over the "academic market". Consequently, archaeological institutes tend to become similar to private companies, hence the increasing consequence of "cultural managers" or "project managers". Contrary to any solidarity around some ideal, the archaeological field is fragmenting into groups of individuals or into institutions united by direct interests, which compete with one another for securing the desired funding. This trend is paralleled by the emergence of a specific language: "tenders", "grants", "implementation", "targeted public", "feedback", etc. Following EU accession, Romanian archaeology entered "the era of academic capitalism", to use the words of Yannis Hamilakis¹⁷. We reproduce below Hamilakis's description of the university environment in the Western Europe:

"It is not only the close links between universities and large corporations, the diversion of public funds towards research that will benefit primarily private interests; it is also the notion of 'entrepreneurship' as the primary value of the university; the establishment of an internal market within universities and, among the sector as a whole, the notion of relentless competition for funding, resources, students and staff, and positions in league tables. Above all, it is the colonization, the attempt gradually to take over one of the last spaces that has been reserved for social critique, for the questioning of authority and of the established orders, by mentalities and practices that valorize individualism above everything else, practices that establish as one of the main goals of all university activity the maximization of profit, be in the terms of university income, spin-off company share values or graduate earnings."¹⁸

¹⁴ Wullschleger 2008.

¹⁵ Virgil Nițulescu in Wullschleger 2008, p. 66; for further exemplification, see Dragoman 2009a, Appendix 2.

¹⁶ Angelescu 2005, p. 5-6.

¹⁷ Hamilakis 2004, p. 289.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

In part, at least, Hamilakis's remarks are also suited for the archaeological sphere in nowadays Romania; at any rate, they should ring a warning bell for the Romanian archaeologists. However, some of the allegedly "neutral" and strictly "scientific" papers written by Romanian archaeologists, though lacking any references to the socio-political context in which they have been created, are identifiably a result of adjustment to the system. Subsequent to Romania's accession to the European Union, the Ministry of Education and Research has adopted some capitalist economic criteria ("efficacy", "quality") for assessing research, including in the field of archaeology. According to the established criteria, when assessing promotion documentation, as well as for project competitions, articles are graded mainly based on how well the journal or book is rated on the global academic market. The journals and books indexed by the Thomson Reuters Web of Science (ISI) are regarded as among the most prestigious. The "quality" of the works is also verified by how frequently an author is quoted. In order to be granted certain ranks in the academic hierarchy, the archaeologists' lists of publications are assessed by an institution established for this very purpose: The National Council for Scientific Research (*Consiliul Național al Cercetării Științifice*). For instance, within the Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy (Bucharest), from the first degree up to research scientist III, an archaeologist is evaluated in-house; however, for upper ranks, the documentation is to be evaluated by the Council. The ISI criteria for assessment are useful rather for the market policies of great publishing corporations, because, as may be remarked upon visiting the website of Thomson Reuters, the indexation facilitates measuring the impact of a paper within a discipline, identifying results that are "relevant" for a discipline, identifying possible high quoting-rate authors, identifying emerging trends, etc. And yet, the Romanian authorities have turned these market economy values into "objective" criteria of evaluation of the academic environment, which are not related, where archaeology is concerned, with the value judgment within the field. Writing in Romanian and not in an "international language" (especially English), publishing in "unrated" Romanian journals or addressing a research topic specific to the Romanian area is by virtue of ideology labeled as provincialism, fear of competition and masked un-professionalism. Thus we were presented with the aberrant case of papers published in Romanian in books released under the patronage of prestigious forums, such as the Romanian Academy, that were not rated in project competitions, unlike papers (sometimes written by the same author) published abroad in an "international language".

Instead of opposing to such measures, many Romanian archaeologists humbly obeyed. The argument for this compromise is the need for a better living, which is understandable (yet not justifiable) under the living conditions in Romania. In order to be promoted, archaeologists "pursue" journals/books with the highest possible ratings. Interestingly, within the archaeological field in Romania, "quality" (on the authority of evaluation) "increases", but the research philosophy remains the same as before changing the criteria. Thus, for instance, in a book dedicated to the most recent trends in the field of cultural heritage and tourism we came across an article, based on traditional research philosophy, about the research stage of La Tène brooches in Romania¹⁹. The article has no connection whatsoever with the theme of the book: not once does any of the words "heritage" or "tourism" occur within the whole text. Obviously, the reason for the author to have delivered that paper for such a book cannot be a "scientific" one. The answer is contained in the book's foreword: "The accepted papers for this conference are published in this Book that will be indexed by ISI"²⁰.

Publishing an article in a volume for the sole reason of its high rating is a choice identical in spirit with another type of practice, also stimulated by the Eurocentric political discourse. Even before Romania's accession to the European Union, some Romanian archaeologists resorted to working politically-charged words into the titles of their research projects or exhibitions, such as "Europe" or "European", in order to improve their chance at obtaining desired funding and institutional support, as with the projects *Dimensiunea europeană a civilizației eneolitice est-carpătice* (*The European Dimension of the East-Carpathian Eneolithic Civilization*)²¹, *Începuturile civilizației europene. Neo-eneoliticul la Dunărea de Jos* (*The Beginnings of European Civilization. The Neo-Eneolithic at the Lower Danube*)²² or of the exhibition *Nașterea unei mari expoziții: "A l'aube de l'Europe". Les grandes cultures néolithiques*

¹⁹ Zirra 2010.

²⁰ Mladenov and Bojkovic 2010.

²¹ Ursulescu 2007.

²² E.g. Andreescu 2004.

*de Roumanie (The Birth of a Great Exhibition: "A l'aube de l'Europe". Les grandes cultures néolithiques de Roumanie)*²³.

Both strategies find their analogies in the communist-era practice of strategically including quotes from the "classics" of Marxism-Leninism in one's own academic ("scientific", "objective" and "neutral") work. Such strategies, at their respective times, are manifestations of docility towards the political power. By means of its institutions, political power perceives the signals and rewards them, conferring the transmitters "eligible" status for certain positions, for leading certain teams/research projects, for acceding certain resources, etc. Those archaeologists may be regarded as "Trojan horses" of globalist ideology, as agents that fine-tune the discipline according to the official present-day political imperatives.

The rhetoric of "projects" and "operational programmes" funded by European money is more and more insistently inserted into archaeological discourse. Through such rhetoric, even book reviews and presentations begin to be transformed – from elements of a freely established dialogue within the field – into documents that justify the funds received from various legitimizing institutions: "The writing of this review was supported by European Social Fund in Romania under the responsibility of the managing authority of the Sectorial Operational Programm for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 grant POSTDRU/PPP/07/DMI1.5/S/78342"²⁴. While employing a style that brings to mind the "thanks" given to the Communist Party and "personally" to Nicolae Ceaușescu for the "provided conditions", this discourse practice symbolically consecrates the transformation of the archaeological field into a commodity, as every product of knowledge has its price.

The destruction of the academic/university environment as a space of critical thought is also furthered by archaeologists who make compromises for the sake of the "visibility" provided by the media and of the advantages derived therefrom, such as funding for continuing excavations. In exchange for media coverage, some archaeologists disseminate in printed media a politically correct discourse about the ancient past, promoting neoliberal values and legitimating the political construction of a European identity. For instance, in an interview about the Copper Age tell of Bordușani (Ialomița county), the author of the excavations stated that "the first Europeans were native to this area"²⁵. By contrast with the idea of archaeology being a "budget-draining sherd-picking scientific luxury", he claims to attempt to demonstrate that "archaeology can bring money as well", which were possible, according to him, if the micro-zone where the tell is located would be declared protected, and houses specific to the various communities that have been inhabiting Bordușani would be built for the visiting public²⁶. Such a discourse fits perfectly in the trend that adjusts the discipline after the neoliberal ideology theses:

"The public usefulness of an activity (be it scientific or cultural) can be measured by the very interest of the public. Financially, this is materialized in the agreement and readiness of as many people as possible to pay for cultural 'services': exhibitions, books, cultural tourism and their by-products, as well as by budget allocation."²⁷

From this perspective, the social relevance of archaeological research and of the heritage is not defined in terms of reflexive and critical practice, but in economic terms.

"One hundred years of solitude"²⁸

"Nestor is without question one of those who contributed crucially to the foundation of Romanian pre- and proto-historic archaeology. He brought to Romania the research methods of German archaeology, remarkable for their accuracy; they were then adopted by his pupils, the author of these lines included."²⁹

²³ Bucharest, October 2007–January 2008, advertising booklet.

²⁴ Vieru 2012, p. 159.

²⁵ Dragomir Popovici in Țurcanu 2006; for a criticism, see also Dragoman 2010.

²⁶ Dragomir Popovici in Țurcanu 2006.

²⁷ Angelescu 2005, p. 12.

²⁸ The critical-ironical comparison of Romanian archaeology to the novel of Gabriel García Márquez belongs to Florian Matei-Popescu (Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest), whom we thank for the right to use it here.

²⁹ Vulpe 2004-2005, p. 5.

“In order to capitalize the results, I recommend that we apply in real life the complex research method employed in the USSR, which has been ignored in our country up to this moment.”³⁰

“It is thus noteworthy that the site at Hăbășești (room III) succeeded for the first time in our country to unearth to full extent a primitive colony at the middle stage of barbarism, allowing for the integral plan of the colony to be documented. This was possible due to the methods applied in Soviet archaeology, to careful planning and to the material means made available for the site.”³¹

“Within this project [Romanian-British *Southern Romania Archaeological Project*], we used modern methodology and efficient equipment, some of the activities carried out there being absolute novelties in Romanian archaeology (site mapping in GPS, GIS, alluvial archaeology).”³²

“As of 1993, the research has become an international, Romanian-French program. / For the Romanian archaeology, this type of program was an all-times first.”³³

The above quotations clearly point out that the great changes in Romanian archaeology, regardless whether they occurred during the interwar period, during the communist era or after 1989, were methodological imports from centers of the great powers of the respective times – Germany, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France. The Romanian archaeological community finds out tardily, via some of its representatives, about various methodologies developed in foreign countries, then adopts and promotes them as great novelties. As suggested by the language used in the given quotations, the methods were perceived as exotic items, to be acclaimed for their novelty and for the high status given by their mainstream center origin. By equating the progress of the discipline and the methodology imports, the archaeologists themselves render a peripheral status to their field: archaeology is no longer regarded as a critical space of interpretation of material traces, but turns into a field of first-time application of certain methods, the “scientific” aura of which is conferred by the relationship with the technology imported from academic centers of the great powers. Thus, the methodological import to the Romanian archaeology becomes the scientific equivalent of cultivating the dependency of subordinate countries such as Romania on the technological superiority of the great globalist economic powers; the same also happened in South America, where the transnational North-American companies implemented new technologies that led to the monopolization of the Latin-American market, along with introducing new philosophies and research topics³⁴. Thus, collaborative archaeological projects between institutions in Romania and institutions in the centres of global powers (but not only), their objectives, practices and effects should be in the future subject of critical analysis and reflection, as was the case with the scientific partnerships with Africa³⁵.

“Redemption” by method: mythologies

The novelties of the archaeological discourse in post-revolution Romania³⁶ would be the interest for the history of the discipline, the adoption of new excavation methods (inspired by Harris’s stratigraphic principles), and experimental archaeology. Also, the “principle of inter-disciplinarity”³⁷ or of “pluri-disciplinarity”³⁸ is regarded as another gain of the “archaeology of the recent decades”.

The new excavation method (“chronostratigraphic”), employed initially within the Romanian-French research project of the Neo-Eneolithic tell of Hârșova³⁹ and subsequently spread at several sites, represents a major change in the style of archaeological practice, aimed mainly at the “cultural”

³⁰ Mihail Roller in *Consfătuirea* 1951, p. 15.

³¹ *Expoziție* 1950, p. 5.

³² Andreescu 2003, p. 350.

³³ Popovici 2006, p. 44.

³⁴ E.g. Lorenzo *et al.* 1976, p. 78ff.

³⁵ Droz and Mayor 2009.

³⁶ Curta 2007, p. 91.

³⁷ Cărciumaru 2006.

³⁸ Popovici *et al.* 2002; Popovici 2006.

³⁹ Randoin *et al.* 1998-2000; Popovici *et al.* 2002.

classification of the material and at obtaining stratigraphic information regarding the sequence of various “cultural stages”. Such a style was also reflected by the aesthetic of the excavation with long and narrow trenches. The settlements were regarded as a sum of “complexes” and a sequence of “layers”. Due to the attention paid to the smallest stratigraphic units and to their sequence (which is of consequence to the interpretation of the “biography” of various areas), to the preoccupation for calculating the formation of deposits and the precise contextualization of archaeological material, to the welcome changes in data recording, to the defining of sampling strategies, and to the questions related to the post-deposition and site-formation processes⁴⁰, this method becomes a necessary foundation for interpretations that are more directly connected to the social practices of the past.

In its object, the method involves a disjunction between the archaeological excavation and the interpretation, as the research is regarded as a sequence of stages where the completion of one stage is a condition for moving on to the next one, from “the understanding of the stratigraphic complexity, specific behaviors, the completion of sectorial cumulative stratigraphic diagrams” to data analysis and synthesis⁴¹. In short, the method attempts to answer the questions “why?” and “how?”: “Neither the type nor the sequence of these questions is haphazard”⁴².

However, in reference to archaeological data, the method poses a certain contradiction. On one hand, it would involve a “deliberate return” to empiricism and “positivism”, “removing subjectivity”, “utmost purification of the archaeological data of subjective interferences”⁴³. The research is allegedly founded on objectivity, as knowledge reflects archaeological data obtained by the method. Employing the method is sufficient for obtaining accurate archaeological data, a condition for subsequent interpretation by “using ethnographical analogies” or employing a “middle-range theory”⁴⁴. On the other hand, contrary to the claimed empiricism, it is asserted that this “*problem-solving oriented* research”⁴⁵ involves the existence of certain research objectives (which “are focused on the use of the space and on paleo-economy”)⁴⁶, of a “conceptual model”, of a theoretical perspective⁴⁷. The contradiction is not yet settled, as some texts give the impression that the main aim of the research would be the very application of the method⁴⁸. The delay in specifying the theoretical perspective⁴⁹ turns the method into a substitute of the interpretation.

Unfortunately, two decades after its adoption, the method has been presented “in action” only sporadically⁵⁰, the research results were published to a very small extent, partly due to the Ministry of Culture’s policy of exclusively financing the archaeological excavations, and not the processing and publishing of the information and materials⁵¹. Under these circumstances, the method has become known in archaeological folklore as “excavation on stratigraphic units”, a necessary and sufficient condition for a “good” excavation. The few published papers reveal, however, the theoretical perspective which guides the research method. For instance, some contexts are interpreted as “refuse areas” based on the food remnants discovered (animal bones or shells). As other categories of materials (such as human bones) were omitted, food leftovers determine the function of the contexts where they were found, which is a concept with a long-lived tradition in Romanian archaeology. According to this tradition of interpretation, the “stratigraphic units” defined in such contexts do not reflect practices of depositing/discarding of household waste, of various items and of human bones, significant “biographical” moments for those spaces, but directly human activities⁵². Moreover, being found in a refuse area, the human bones were

⁴⁰ Desse-Berset and Radu 1996; Popovici *et al.* 1998-2000; Haită and Radu 2003.

⁴¹ Popovici 2003, p. 8.

⁴² Popovici *et al.* 2002, p. 3.

⁴³ Anghelinu 2003, p. 272-273; 2003-2004, p. 49; for a criticism, see Dragoman 2006, p. 138-139; 2009a, p. 199-200.

⁴⁴ Anghelinu 2003, p. 327-329; 2003-2004, p. 44; 2006, p. 23; Popovici and Anghelinu 2006, p. 131-132.

⁴⁵ Anghelinu 2003, p. 273; 2003-2004, p. 50, italics in the original.

⁴⁶ Anghelinu 2003, p. 273; 2003-2004, p. 50.

⁴⁷ Popovici *et al.* 2002, p. 5-6; 2003, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *E.g.* Popovici 2006, p. 44.

⁴⁹ Popovici *et al.* 2002, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Popovici *et al.* 1998-2000; Bem 2001; Haită and Radu 2003.

⁵¹ For other reasons, Popovici 2003, p. 7.

⁵² The best example is the household area C 521 at Hârșova; Popovici *et al.* 1998-2000; a different style of interpretation for those contexts, Dragoman and Oanță-Marghitu 2007, p. 119-122.

assigned, by a roundabout logic, the function of that context, substantiating as such the practice of cannibalism⁵³. The results of the disciplines gathered under the flag of pluridisciplinarity are rarely relocated in the archaeological context⁵⁴; the faunal remains were not accompanied by the interpretation and publication of the objects with which they were associated⁵⁵. Thus de-contextualized, those remains are construed globally, becoming documents of some “occupations”, “subsistence strategies” or “resource management” strategies for “opportunistic economical behaviors”⁵⁶. In other words, the theoretical perspective that sets in motion the new excavating method is functionalism which also solves the above-mentioned contradiction: only functionalist questions can be answered by objective collection of data; the research objectives are implicit and need not be formulated explicitly, they are not preconceived ideas. The functionalist research philosophy promotes an economist (capitalist) view of the past. Whether about analyses of inhabited space⁵⁷, archaeo-zoological analyses⁵⁸ or ceramic analyses⁵⁹, the ultimate objective consists of the economical behaviours of various (E)Neolithic communities. The fact that each aspect of the life of those communities was imbued with symbolism⁶⁰ is not taken into account; nor is the fact that religion may have structured the entire social life⁶¹. The archaeological approach permeated by capitalist ideology overlooks the essential aspects of human life.

Scarcely elaborated on in scientific texts, this perspective is, by contrast, in plentiful supply in the so-called popularization texts⁶². During the communist era, at least in the official intention, an archaeologist was supposed to also be an ideologist, to issue a double discourse, both scientific and Marxist-Leninist or nationalist (depending on the party’s ideology at the moment). This discourse duality was also perpetuated after 1989, as the ideological texts were replaced by such popularization texts. Total stations and “with the invention of fire mankind took another step forward”⁶³; stratigraphic diagrams and “With the dexterity learnt through long experience, a fisherman could quickly catch a fish with his bare hands and toss it on to the bank. Sometimes, if a fish is small, the fisherman could hold it in his mouth and keep fishing from the water rather than repeatedly going to take the fish to the shore”⁶⁴; pluridisciplinary research and “all these data, even if incomplete, suggest the existence of a space where, as time passed, human beings lived and turned the resources available in abundance here to good account”⁶⁵. “We know that they were practicing agriculture because we have discovered querns and rubbers and sometimes cereals grains and even straw imprints in the clay walls of houses”. “They domesticated animals” (bones), “they were hunting” (bones, arrowheads), “they were fishing” (fish bones, fishing net weights), “they were weaving” (weights from the weaving loom, imprints of cloths), “they were smelting metals” (copper tools), “they were washing the golden sand” (golden adornments), “they were making tools” (“we found them along with waste from their manufacture”), “we know they were very good handymen because they were capable of making incredible buildings, single-story houses and houses standing on posts using only rudimentary tools”, “they were worshipping gods” (figurines), “they had great respect for their dead because we have found their cemeteries”⁶⁶. Commonplace information may be encountered not only in texts intended for a large audience, but also in academic papers. For instance, in a paper about the Gumelnița pottery found in a house at the Copper Age tell of Sultana, the following information is given in the section presenting the methods employed: “The calculation of diameters of both rims and bases was performed using a board on which concentric circles were drawn using a pair of

⁵³ Popovici *et al.* 1998-2000, p. 114.

⁵⁴ A different approach, *e.g.* Marciniak 2005.

⁵⁵ *E.g.* Bălășescu and Radu 2003.

⁵⁶ Bălășescu and Radu 2003; Popovici *et al.* 1998-2000, p. 112-113.

⁵⁷ *E.g.* Popovici *et al.* 1998-2000.

⁵⁸ *E.g.* Bălășescu *et al.* 2004.

⁵⁹ *E.g.* Ignat *et al.* 2012.

⁶⁰ *E.g.* Hodder 1990; Tilley 1996; Bradley 2005.

⁶¹ *E.g.* Insoll 2004.

⁶² A discussion at Dragoman 2010.

⁶³ Bem 2007, p. 13.

⁶⁴ Bem 2007, p. 23.

⁶⁵ Popovici and Vlad n.d., p. 3.

⁶⁶ Bem 2007, p. 33.

compasses [...]”⁶⁷. A working method that has been known and used for a long time by the Romanian archaeology (measuring diameters using concentric circles arranged at half-centimeter increments) is mentioned in order to cast a “scientific” light over the approach, as if it might add to the reader’s knowledge.

“[L]a mythologie petite-bourgeoise implique le refus de l’altérité, la négation du différent, le bonheur de l’identité et l’exaltation du semblable. En général, cette réduction équationnelle du monde prépare une phase expansionniste ou «l’identité» des phénomènes humains fonde bien vite une «nature» et, partant, une «universalité»”⁶⁸. The interpretation of materiality for the use of the public naturalizes and universalizes, in a language close to that of television, an image of the pragmatic human, exploiter or manager of resources, shaper of nature, reduced to techniques, activities, behaviours. Such a discourse is apparently dual. Producing with ease such popularizing texts, the frenzy of providing interpretations not encountered in scientific publications provide the actual outline of the theoretical perspective which sets the methods in out-of-gear motion: the people of the past were the same as we are. The tautological universe of the pluridisciplinary machinery that operates in symbiosis with the common-sense of the functionalist interpretation of archaeological contexts legitimates the neoliberal values.

As demonstrated by the post-revolution archaeological practice, the fetishized “new method”, turned into a purpose in itself, failed to change our perspective of the past. The objects are melted on into types, transformed into phases and cultures. There is an attempt to humanize the past by means of ethnographic analogies, the gap between present and past thus being filled with a perpetual rustic life, an eternal ethnographic present⁶⁹. A historical-cultural discourse where all that did not pertain to defining “cultures” and “chronologic classifications” belonged to common-sense and was implied is given additional functionalist interpretation with a scientific aura. A fairy tale the main character of which is the method, the means of scientific “redemption”.

On comfortable ideas: anti-nationalism, multiculturalism, feminism

A feature that characterized Romanian archaeology after 1990 was the emergence of critical statements targeting the nationalist discourse present explicitly or implicitly in archaeological literature, be it about the Neolithic period, the Roman period or the Middle Ages⁷⁰. The criticism targeting the manipulation of traces of the past into nationalist discourses, the biunique relationship between the affirmation of national identity in the 19th century and the birth of archaeology as a discipline, the connection between national ideology and cultural-historical archaeology were incorporated in a larger endeavour, related to the need to change the research philosophy and the ossified practices of Romanian archaeology. In these texts, “nationalism” is mentioned in association with the birth of Greater Romania after World War I and the consequences of unifying the Romanians into one single state, with the ideology of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime and/or with the post-1989 heritage thereof. Moreover, it was stated that from the interwar period until after 1989, even during the Stalinist era, the main interpretative perspective was a nationalist one, *i.e.* archaeological materials were invoked selectively for the purpose of eventually demonstrating the continuity and the multi-millennarian antiquity of the Romanian nation and people. In the context of Romania’s accession to the European Union and subsequent integration, the nationalist discourse was perpetuated and converted into a national-Europeanist discourse.

Although these critical remarks are justified, we find it problematic that nationalism is never nuanced, more precisely, it is cut off from the context of various periods when it emerged, and regarded exclusively from the point of view of the mark it has left along the years in archaeological discourses/writings. Therefore, nationalism is at the risk of appearing nowadays as “unchanging and monolithic”, to use an expression coined by Ulrike Sommer⁷¹. The same concept, regarded as implicit, covers undiscerningly discourses issued in radically different historical contexts, as those of affirming national identity in the 19th Century, when territories of the future Romanian state were component of

⁶⁷ See Ignat *et al.* 2012, p. 105.

⁶⁸ Barthes 1957, p. 81-82.

⁶⁹ Murray 1993, p. 179.

⁷⁰ Popa 1991; Anghelina 2003; Niculescu 2002; 2004-2005; Dragoman and Oanță-Marghitu 2006; Matei-Popescu 2007; Babeș 2008-2009; Dragoman 2009a; Gáll *et al.* 2010.

⁷¹ Sommer 2010, p. 175.

some Empires (the idea for which so many people died during the Independence War of 1877 and the two World Wars), the Christian-oriented social-political concept of the interwar Legionary Movement, or blending the Marxist-Leninist discourse with the national one during Ceaușescu's communist regime.

In a wider context, as Sommer stated, “the nationalism of the emergent nations of 19th-century Europe or of the nations that tried to free themselves from European colonialism is certainly different from that of the imperial and colonizing powers of Old Europe”⁷². After World War II, in the South American countries, adopting within the field of archaeology and anthropology an approach marked by the North-American capitalist view in its philosophy, criteria and research topics has led to the distortion and de-legitimation of the Latino-American indigenist and nationalist trends which, from a social-political point of view, were militating for the much-needed agricultural reforms and for wrenching the natural resources from under the monopoly of foreign consortiums, mainly of the United States⁷³. This example, far from de-legitimizing the criticism targeting a nationalistic manipulation of the past, reveals the need to put nationalisms in context, aiming at an ideologically un-truncated knowledge of the past. In the absence of contextualization, any historical or archaeological interpretation of nationalism may be instrumented by various ideologies in order to manipulate. The archaeological interpretation should aim not only at deconstructing the nationalist discourses materialized in writings, but particularly at the relationship between such discourses and the other ideologies and their relation to the social space. The simplistic *a priori* stigmatization of “nationalism” legitimates the neoliberal ideology, that promotes the development of a global community defined solely by the ecstasy of consumerism, and that can label other local forms of solidarity as “nationalism”. It is worth mentioning in this respect that the critical discourse of the intellectual elites on the link between ethnic groups and the places they settle tends to normalize the dislocations of communities by neoliberal policies, as shown by June Nash in an article about the struggle of the Mayas of Mexico and Guatemala to defend their traditional way of life⁷⁴.

Paradoxically, similar to the nationalist discourses, the anti-nationalist archaeological discourse in Romania currently tends to also understand “nationalism” in a genealogic way, indiscriminately building a long history of the term. Archaeology may contribute to the general discussion about the nationalist representations, not by the comfortable assertion that they have been abandoned in bulk in the social sciences (an argument used exclusively for the criticism of the cultural-historical approach), but by analyzing them with instruments specific to our own discipline. The archaeology of writings should blend with the interpretation of political rituals (processions, commemorations, national gatherings, working visits) and of the materiality of these nationalist approaches. Monuments and memorials, visual art, coins, plaques and medals, models of factories and production facilities, the effort made at various times for defining architectural styles regarded as “national”, suggest more clearly the diversity of those regimes of representing and producing space and time. During a long period of time, by means of materiality, one may define meanings and elements of continuity or discontinuity as related to the pre-modern periods, when, according to some opinions, the nation manifested itself in various forms⁷⁵.

In a criticism of nationalist interpretations, some archaeologists place themselves at the other extreme, by projecting multiculturalism into the past and assigning it positive values, as legitimated by the policy of the European Union. Thus, in a paper dedicated to the archaeologist Márton Roska (1880-1961), we find the following description of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where the Transylvanian researcher lived and worked:

“Perhaps no other state in world history has been more anathematized, after its disappearance, than the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Its multiple problems derived from the fact that, starting with the 19th Century, the cosmopolitan philosophical concepts of the Age of Enlightenment had been replaced by nationalistic Herderianism concepts, which strongly nurtured the nationalist feelings. In parallel and in contradiction to this trend, there were the multinational empires, especially the

⁷² Sommer 2010, p. 175.

⁷³ E.g. Lorenzo *et al.* 1976, p. 78-81.

⁷⁴ Nash 2001, p. 22.

⁷⁵ Within Romanian history, for different interpretations of the concept of nation, see Boia 2000 and Platon 2010; for a detailed discussion see Rizescu 2012, p. 173-278.

most liberal of them all, the Austro-Hungarian Empire (of the second half of the 19th Century), which, in its nature (economic organization, circulation of goods and people, multicultural and multiethnic nature) was in many ways similar to the European Union. The multicultural aspect of the Empire was best illustrated by its two capital cities (Vienna and Budapest), true emblems of an ethnical-cultural diversity specific to Central Europe, with nationalities of various origins and religions.”⁷⁶

In the introductory section of two pages and four lines, from which the above quotation is excerpted, the word “multicultural” occurs no less than five times (four times in the main text and once in the footnotes); the same term occurs once more in a section about Roska’s life and work. In another text, the same author described the Hungarian Kingdom of King Stephen I of around the year 1000 as “apostolic, multicultural and multiethnic”, as the king had a “strikingly ‘modern’ political-philosophical outlook”⁷⁷. This is not the place, nor is it opportune to debate multiculturalism, however attention should be drawn to the non-critical (ideological) use of the term in the mentioned text, a fact subsequently accepted even by the author (Erwin Gáll, pers. com., Bucharest, 2012). The author overlooked the fact that multiculturalism is a project which began in the second half of the 20th century⁷⁸, hence it cannot be projected into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Moreover, by contrast with the positive image built by the author around multiculturalism, including the “European” one, several analysts, left- or right-oriented, have shown that the multicultural policies of the European Union are uniforming. For instance, “today’s tolerant liberal multiculturalism” has been described by some intellectuals as “an experience of the Other deprived of its Otherness – the decaffeinated Other”⁷⁹. Such excision performed by the liberal multiculturalism “reveals the regression from the Christian love of one’s neighbour back to the pagan privileging of our tribe versus the barbarian Other”⁸⁰. Multiculturalism leads to a process of fragmentation into several closed identities (cultural, religious, gender, sexual, etc.), communities classified in accordance with a calculus unit into a world configured as a market:

“For each identification (the creation or cobbling together of identity) creates a figure that provides a material for its investment by the market. There is nothing more captive, so far as commercial investment is concerned, nothing more *amenable* to the invention of new figures of monetary homogeneity, than a community and its territory or territories.”⁸¹

Multiculturalism is an ideology that aims to “conceal the devastating nature of globalization by promoting a rhetoric of the difference. Following the logic of globalization, ‘multiculturalism’ suppresses the genuine differences (the Alterity), substituting them by homogenized differences, the so-called ‘cultural identities’”⁸². “The groups” promoted by multiculturalism represent, actually, the cultural equivalent of the “consumers communities”⁸³.

This logic of multiculturalism also encompasses feminism. In Romanian archaeology, this type of discourse is extremely poorly represented⁸⁴. Although several feminist criticisms are absolutely pertinent (see the pauperism and the stereotypy of the interpretations regarding men and women in prehistory; the male domination within the field; cases of discrimination and even harassment of female archaeologists by their male superiors, etc.), we consider that those aimed at the “patriarchal society” in Romania have chosen the wrong target:

“When women die of exhaustion in the offices of multinational companies or survive ‘on antidepressants’, when they abandon their children in the country for a piece of bread earned in a

⁷⁶ Gáll 2010, p. 281-282.

⁷⁷ Gáll 2011, p. 75.

⁷⁸ E.g. Tamás 2011.

⁷⁹ Žižek 2010.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Badiou 2003, p. 10; italics in the original.

⁸² Hurduzeu 2009, p. 82-83.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁸⁴ E.g. Palincaș 2010.

neo-slavery system (albeit well-paid) in the ‘Community countries’ – can we serenely assert that it is the ‘Romanian patriarchy’ that is to blame?”⁸⁵

The association of the “patriarchal society” with the domination over women and their immobilization in a subordinate status is a simplistic one. For instance, the interwar Legionary Movement, follower of traditional values, commonly associated with the “patriarchal society”, promoted at the same time a discourse which combined feminist and family themes – an unusual fact at that time⁸⁶. Moreover, the Movement had a strong organization of women, many of whom were imprisoned and killed in concentration camps and prisons for their political activity, both before and after the communist regime was established⁸⁷. As regards the concept of “patriarchal society” as a negative constant across time, its criticism discolors into uniformity the domination forms of modernity. In the archaeological approach, the feminist discourse, cut off from the criticism of neoliberal ideology, becomes a mere amorphous element in a checklist of theoretical imports from the West, emancipating in tone but conformist in reality. Pinned to this perspective, the feminist discourse represents, together with the totalizing criticisms targeting “nationalism” (sometimes along with projecting multiculturalism into the past), an institutionalized criticism in the field of political sciences and sociology from Romania: it is politically correct to be critical about these topics, it agrees with the globalist ideology. These are what Ovidiu Hurduzeu calls “comfortable ideas”:

“By ‘comfortable ideas’ we understand the tamed ideas that do not oppose the current ideological dogmas. They are ideas that moderate, misrepresent, falsify or discredit the truths regarding the material reality and real life situations. Intellectual comfort doesn’t suppress the critical conscience, but reforms it in terms of malleability and adaptability to the present times. The individual, reformed into the patterns of intellectual and material comfort, lacks the POTENTIAL TO REFUSE and TO REACT of a living human being.”⁸⁸

Similar to post-communist anticommunism, these comfortable ideas confer “ideological respectability”, to use Victor Rizeanu’s formulation⁸⁹, and are tardily promoted in the public space in Romania, at a moment when they are elements of the official discourse, subsequent to the historical context where they would have commanded all their critical features.

On preventive archaeology

A new element in the Romanian archaeological landscape is the Western import of the preventive archaeology concept. After being confused for a while with the older approach of rescue archaeology (which already had a tradition since the communist period), the new concept was regulated by law shortly after 2000 and was included in the larger framework of international legislation protecting the heritage from the perspective of “durable development”, of “integrated preservation” and of “participative society”⁹⁰. The legal criterion was the only one addressed in order to categorize archaeological research into several types: systematic (equivalent to the “fundamental”, “academic” research), preventive and rescue excavation⁹¹.

Preventive archaeological research means “the sum of works involved by archaeological research, performed before or during the implementation of an investment project susceptible to irremediably damage the archaeological heritage”⁹². Such definition of the concept was a consequence of the launch of

⁸⁵ Hurduzeu and Platon 2008, p. 19, note 7.

⁸⁶ Mann 2004, p. 272-273; see also Barbu 2005, p. 124-125.

⁸⁷ *E.g. Lacrima* 2009.

⁸⁸ Hurduzeu and Platon 2008, p. 156, footnote 2; emphasis in the original.

⁸⁹ Rizeanu 2012.

⁹⁰ Angelescu 2004.

⁹¹ Angelescu 2004, p. 49.

⁹² Angelescu 2004, p. 50; see also Damian and Borş 2007-2008, p. 492-493.

a number of large-scale researches that accompanied various investment projects, private (Roșia Montană) or governmental (the Transylvania Highway). Preventive research, which benefits from a financial and human mobilization unprecedented in Romania, should be the locus of dialogue between various archaeological traditions, or of experimenting various excavation methods. In general, preventive archaeology should be an opportunity to formulate new questions regarding the theoretical perspective of Romanian archaeology. It should be a meeting point not only for archaeologists and archaeo-zoologists, paleobotanists or sedimentologists, but also for sociologists and anthropologists who may study the impact of the research over local communities, or the relation between the archaeologists' community and that of the site workers. However, the praiseworthy results of such preventive researches, particularly in the light of the interest in a more expeditious publishing of results⁹³, mirror the factual condition of archaeology in Romania: an allegedly atheoretical discipline, yet, *de facto*, strongly embedded in the cultural-historical tradition, descriptive, non-interpretative (mainly targeted towards establishing formal typologies and analogies, instruments for the cultural, ethnic and chronological classification of the material), with no interest for the traces of the recent and contemporary past. Even the approaches within easy reach, that might bring the items to the center of discourse, such as technological research of ceramics, source identification for various raw materials, C14 dating, etc. are underrepresented. In publishing the results of urban archaeology research (for instance, conducted until recently in the Historical Center of Bucharest), medieval documents are mechanically juxtaposed to dry excavation reports⁹⁴.

Lately, along with the political oligarchy's increased interest for extensive investments in infrastructure (such as the highway sections in Transylvania and Dobruja), cultural managers have found themselves in a position to obediently follow political orders to research hastily, sometimes incompletely, the identified sites. By signing various agreements with unrealistic deadlines (to use an understatement), managers place archaeology in a state of exception. To quote the title of an article, "the archaeologists work hard to 'outpace' the concrete mixers": for instance, in no more than two weeks, until the concrete was to be cast, the research of a 9th century AD settlement had to be completed, together with the research of a cemetery of the same period, which comprised hundreds of graves discovered on the axis of the highway in Dobruja⁹⁵. There is an attempt to naturalize the inadmissible premise that it is correct to leave behind unresearched surfaces of sites encountered on the route of highways. The managerial techniques introduced in the archaeological field in Romania, mainly at the discourse level ("distribution of all the heritage elements in the area", "establishing the importance and significance of the sites", "the prioritization of knowledge", "identification and planning of impact-lessening measures", "research team management", "management of archaeological heritage resources", "planning, organization, management of preventive research", etc.)⁹⁶ cosmeticize in a new wooden language a preventive archaeology reduced actually only to excavation.

In the above-mentioned legal framework it is not taken into account the fact that preventive archaeology consists of all those approaches apt "to reduce to the maximum possible the number of archaeological excavations"⁹⁷. The National Archaeological Repertory, the only coherent preventive archaeology action, fails to compensate the lack of dialogue between The National Archaeological Commission, on one hand, and the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Transports, on the other hand, as regards governmental infrastructure projects. For two decades, public money has been granted year after year to "systematic" research sites the results of which remained, in many cases, unpublished. Instead, the endeavors for micro-zonal researches lacked; the exceptions were due to personal initiatives⁹⁸ or to international projects⁹⁹. No fostering and no financial support were provided to fieldwalking, soundings and preventive archaeological excavations performed timely on the projected highway routes¹⁰⁰.

⁹³ One example would be the publications in the series *Alburnus Maior*: Damian 2003; 2008; Simion *et al.* 2010.

⁹⁴ E.g. Mănușu-Adameșteanu *et al.* 2008.

⁹⁵ <http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/povestea-scheletelor-din-secolul-ix-descoperite-langa-autostrada-soarelui.html> (accessed: 11 July 2012).

⁹⁶ Damian and Borș 2007-2008.

⁹⁷ Marinescu-Bîlcu *et al.* 1996-1998, p. 93-94.

⁹⁸ E.g. Bem *et al.* 2001.

⁹⁹ E.g. Bailey *et al.* 1999; 2000; 2001.

¹⁰⁰ A different approach, to give a more recent example from Switzerland, Schopfer Lunginbühl *et al.* 2011.

Preventive archaeology, in the true sense of the word, would have meant that the feverish archaeological effort made currently on highways in progress would have actually been made in sites located in the areas of future extensive projects (as, for instance, the projected highway in Moldavia, eastern Romania). This reduction of preventive archaeology to excavation, resulted today in a mechanized maximum-speed research of a large number of sites in a very short time, is accounted for by bad cultural management – to put it in consecrated terms. Unfortunately, we are currently left with “rescue excavation as the primary form, and most often the only one available for archaeology”¹⁰¹.

On the rescue of the rescue archaeology: an essay

Of course, rescue archaeology is some kind of second-rate systematic archaeology. In our country, the mechanization of what we call preventive or rescue archaeology (fortunately, here they are synonyms) shall never attain the high-spheres harmony in which a systematic site can float for decades after decades. In these times of great transmutations, of constructive momentum, rescue archaeology must look intensely into the future, towards an expanse where the archaeologist, watching from the corner of his eye the contexts he is currently digging, sees at the horizon a whole network of highways rising from the weeds of the hills and fields, blue ribbons wrapped around the country as if around a present. The communist ideology materialized here, as well as in metallurgic and chemical production facilities, factories and mills, aviculture and zootechnical complexes, apartment buildings, setups for working visits, ribbon-cuttings and other political rituals; these were words of a discourse which turned the materiality into monuments of communism’s aspiration to eternity. Fortunately, the wisdom of the post-revolution political class has not destroyed these good rituals along with the socialist economy. The highways are anticommunist evidence of the spectacular capitalist metamorphosis of the country, symbols of progress and of our connection to European values. The cutting of inaugural ribbons for highway segments by the firm hand of the prime-minister is an archetypal gesture of renewal of space and time, of restoration of national cohesion. The duty of the archaeologist is to participate silently but efficiently in the fulfillment of all these rituals conducted mainly in times of elections. It is an honor to meet society’s new requirements of fast and comfortable transport. The hard work of today secures the archaeologist the civic gratitude of drivers that are concerned about the condition of their own vehicles, which are, due to their significance as power and social differentiation symbols, yet another evidence of severing the ties to the oh-so-harmful egalitarian communist mentality. Archaeology becomes, at long last, relevant for the contemporary society.

For this reasons, preventive excavation must take place *only* in tandem with building highways, a sign of the clever spirit of Romanian archaeology adapting Western models. The surface research of future highway routes, the soundings and beginning of the actual preventive excavations some three or four years before the general deployment of the civil engineering companies would be a pointless waste of the money that is so badly needed for the real excavations, the systematic ones. Fortunately, between the undisturbed integral research of the traces of the past and the concern of the state and cultural managers for the integrity of the profit of civil engineering companies, the choice is crystal-clear. The archaeological work is swiftly performed like in an American action movie in the shadow of excavator buckets, in the dust raised by the trucks running the technological roads, in the music of pick-hammers modeling the pillars of future bridges over waters. It is like releasing a shark in the pool in order to improve the swimmer’s performance. We are the privileged witnesses of an interdisciplinary research under the aegis of harmonious co-operation between archaeology and the Ministry of Transportation. The archaeological site is a kind of building site with a total station, trowels and spatulas, mason’s brushes and paint brushes. The archaeologist has the benefit of the keen expert’s eye, able to quickly identify those sites that may be finished even in the evaluation stage. The excavator is the main instrument for building the future as well as for researching the past. Non-complaining, silent, tractable, obedient like a director towards the Minister, the excavator is forever upon your heels.

The excavator is the archaeologist’s dog.

It digs quickly, one-gashed, generous trenches, real 40 x 4 m-avenues, windows through which we can contemplate the past in its cross-section. The excavator is the archaeologist’s arm restoring the earth its

¹⁰¹ Marinescu-Bîlcu *et al.* 1996-1998, p. 94.

geological look; the pits are best exhibited against the yellow natural deposits of clay, thus the “stratigraphic units” report sheets, such as “pit cut” or “pit fill”, are assuredly accurate. We are moved by the tenderness of the bucket fondling with repeated caresses the walls of some burned Neolithic building, in ruins.

Clearly, from timelessness, one can hear the years ascending.

Throughout this inner struggle, among so many pits, hearths, ovens, houses, the archaeologist’s attention should not be distracted by the manipulating life-stories of the workmen participating in excavation. They are people brought over from recruitment companies all over the country and accommodated in metal barracks, “generously” paid for their 10-12-hours workdays. They are jailbirds who, for a cigarette, become champions at finishing complexes. The rare visits of the media pursue the spectacular dimension of the site “what special discovery have you made?” What spectacular stories can one hear from those dismissed a few years before retirement from factories that were privatized or sold as scrap iron? What sensational news is there in the nostalgic remembrance of holidays spent at the seaside in their youth? Not to mention the sadness of the former technician, currently barrow-carrier, who sings reminiscent elegies about the Egyptian and Iraqi building sites where he worked during communism. Rightfully, if the media, the sociologists, anthropologists are not interested, why should the archaeologist of all people record the history of these human traces of communism, monuments of an outdated mentality? We should not forget that a large portion of the Romanians in search of lost time are yet of the opinion that the communist project was viable. Those people should be disciplined, trained in order to learn how to see logically, abstractly, the neoliberal blessings.

Like people, the rescue excavations are in the habit of dying.

The deadline is announced by increasingly frequent visits: governmental officials, representatives of civil engineering companies or interfaces between Transports and Culture. The bulldozers, the excavators, the buldo-excavators, the trucks are waiting in a militarily harsh line for the archaeologists to clear the area. The owners of the recruitment companies sort the workers who have worked on the defunct archaeological site; most of those are sent home while the few happy chosen ones are relocated to various working units along the highway routes, and the briefly frozen building-site scenes are set into motion once more. Meanwhile, the archaeologists load the institute’s car with tools and materials, with items and fragments of the past, with fieldnotes, notebooks and package ticket-books, context notebooks, context sheets, excavation unit sheets, small finds sheets. They are happy, not necessarily for the money they earned, but for the feeling of fulfilled duty of having researched the sites on the highway route. Other colleagues were not that lucky. Anyway the expert archaeologist had previously explained that the research of 30%, 50%, 80% of the area affected by the highway building provides representative samples of the site. In this case, the archaeological deposits and contexts of various ages and periods, left on the spot, would be covered by the roadbeds and the asphalt of the highway. That is, technically put, “they are preserved”.

The history will not bleed.

We suspect, here, the presence of a symbolic materialization act of a tradition according to which any new work should be erected in the wake of a sacrifice. The past is the symbolic offering of the rescue archaeology in Romania. At the same time, it is for sure an ethical effort of the manager to provide working places for the archaeologists of the centuries and millennia to come. There is no joy like finding stratigraphic layers of ruins from the Neolithic until the 3rd millennium AD, evidence of the continuity in an endlessly transforming globalized world. The archaeologists leave the site joyfully and are in turn sorted by the manager. Most of them will end up on other rescue excavations. Others, more privileged, will head towards their systematic excavations where they have been spending summers ever since their University years, perfectly integrated in the local community. The money received from the ministry is, as usual, sparse, yet sufficient for hiring a couple of kids from the village and opening new trenches. Fortunately, this year the funds are supplemented with money received by the institute for the rescue excavations. This is just another noble mission of the rescue excavations, to ensure the persistence of the systematic excavation, this island of patriarchal peace in the middle of the river’s stormed waters.

The buildings of the archaeological camp, the erection of which is justly encouraged by the ministry upon granting the funds, are tangible guarantees of this peace of national importance. The systematic site is a rescue excavation deprived of excavators and deadlines. Both furnish the deposits of institutes and museums with archaeological materials, some of them being declared heritage items. The slow pace of their publication is an assumed intellectual act, as the controversies issued during the excavation are ironed out throughout the years, and the thoughts about what one had excavated would be

sedimented into oblivion. The ceramics discovered in the 1980s of the last century, rediscovered now with a pleasant surprise in the store rooms of the museum, seems so recent. The shoeboxes of the 1980s, which accommodated the sherds, come to enrich the heritage of the History Department of the museum. For now, the preventive archaeological research reports, previously submitted to the National Archaeology Committee and to other committees, transformed into books by suggestively colored covers, suffice for widening the diversified publishing scope of our archaeological book market. The large font and the two rows spacing renders the reading more comfortable and the richness of the information quickly assimilated. For publishing the results of the systematic excavations, we are content with the space of *Chronicle of Archaeological Excavations*, the ogre of the forests.

The texts must be baroquely embellished with as many numbers as possible, as well as logos of archaeological trenches, contexts and “stratigraphic units”, diameters of pits and hearths, thickness of various crusts.

These will endure.

Around the winter holidays, the archaeologists return home, tired of the effort of digging up sherds from frozen earth. However, one can discreetly observe them proudly regarding the metal lockers, show-cases, boxes and crates, desks and ergonomic chairs with which we were sensibly provided.

The yield of their work.

The rescue archaeology is a cornucopia.

Only juxtaposition renders clearly the deep meaning of the symbiotic relationship between the two styles of practicing archaeology in our country. Systematic researches signify to us the preservation and perpetuation of our traditional background, our pastoral repose of thought. By contrast, Marinetti’s futurist manifesto has found an unexpected resonance, one century later, in the rescue archaeology in Romania: the cult of the machine, the assisted destruction of the past, the flooding of libraries. Rescue excavations are wellsprings of affluence scattered over archaeology, useful only for the perpetuation of tradition, because, naturally, they are only second-rate systematic excavations.

On attitudes towards the contemporary material culture

With some exceptions¹⁰², no research agenda includes the recent/contemporary past archaeology that might provide new perspectives for interpretation, both of contexts of the past and of new meanings of contemporaneity. Archaeology is still defined as a historical discipline aimed at the research of “early cultures and populations”¹⁰³, and not the material culture in general. The relation with the contemporaries is defined in pedagogical terms and narrowed down to a teacher-student type of relation: one of the archaeologist’s duties would be to provide correct information to the large public and to criticize scientifically ungrounded theories; thus archaeology is considered able to contribute to a better concord between nations¹⁰⁴. In its relationship with the traces of the past, Romanian archaeology takes a “scientific”, “objective” point of view, where materiality is separated from the people that have produced it, and the items are important in their quality as indicators and “guiding fossils”. This view from the outside also explains the archaeologists’ lack of interest towards contemporary material culture.

For instance, in 2000, the Roşia Montană Gold Corporation SA, part of the Gabriel Resources Ltd. trust, initiated an extensive mining project. In order to implement the project, the company launched a campaign to persuade people to sell their properties and to abandon the village. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture and Cults created the “*Alburnus Maior*” *National Research Programme*, with the purpose of investigating from an ethnographical and especially archaeological point of view the area envisaged by the mining project. From the very beginning, the archaeological community divided into adepts and adversaries of the project, and at the time of writing this text, the topic is still under controversy. Relevant for the present discussion is the fact that the opponents invoked as main argument the special scientific importance of the heritage and cultural landscape of Roşia Montană (mainly that of the Roman period, but also that of the modern age), which would be destroyed should the Government of Romania approve the start of project¹⁰⁵, but ignored the condition of the inhabitants of Roşia Montană.

¹⁰² Dragoman and Oanță-Marghitu 2006, p. 71.

¹⁰³ Babeş 2008-2009, p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, the collection of articles issued in the extra of the 22 magazine, issue 875, 15-21 December 2006; Babeş 2008-2009, p. 13, note 18.

Similar to entomologists that are only interested in their butterflies, archaeologists manifested an exclusive interest for researching and protecting the material culture of the past, but overlooked the critical study of the process of town abandonment by a part of its population¹⁰⁶. The documentation of the relinquished, degraded houses, of the sadness of deserted lanes, of abandoned objects – images of another face of modernity, of destruction, of ruin, of uprooting, cloaked under triumphalist discourses about welfare – might have constituted an argument for the opponents of the mining project. Although there is merit in their position, their approach favors the heritage and beauty of landscape, a Karamazovian love for Mankind and indifference towards real life people.

The new activists: a world in words

dissemination ineffable rainbow
 statue a Roman's blood on the stairway of the museum
 of relationship with Switzerland
 crown pearl little paris
 vernissage interwar tradition not 1907
 world in perpetual management change
 anticommunist capitalist on government money
 under management agreement notify all employees
 should prioritize hierarchize poverty democracy
 operating less money-paying work harder
 organization self-funding regulation
 department manager I have not read
 large public research 15%
 fill-up department manager
 I do not read I will not read post-processualism
 optimization young team competencies
 quantity elements institution working hours
 homage implementation the minister's agenda
 subtle evaluation dialectics
 norms global agreement job description
 gesture of but-of-course goodwill
 museological activity 15%
 Dacians' treasures we're jack-of-all-trades
 feminine charm available employment promotion
 body of researchers experts to some degree
 ATV-archaeology act of cohesion and esteem
 conduct code standards and procedures
 flexibly correct conditions participating to good practices
 you can be an author co-author
 inventories monthly activity reports
 speak about anything
 European-level plagiarism coincidence of texts
 such grey or black aspects
 meetings on hourly basis is not opportune
 under the aegis have all authority
 substantiation note heritage records 60%
 our tutelary forum the meeting minutes
 commemoration delivery-receipt
 solidarity of the team from division to division
 after all scientific gathering of the soul
 contacts quantifiable standardized by heritage
 due to an unfortunate mistake we are this way archaeologists
 food additive

¹⁰⁶ Dragoman 2009b, p. 350-352.

The subversive look of archaeology

Inside a sanctuary researched in 1929 at Ayia Irini and dated to the Geometric period, terracotta votive figurines were arranged in a semicircle, facing a stone altar¹⁰⁷. Also arranged in a semicircle, in a statuary group reproduced on the cover of an issue of *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor* (*Journal of museums and monuments*) (no. 9 of 1978), busts of voivodes and lords (prominent figures of the national history) look towards the bust of Ceaușescu. In various pictures, Ceaușescu is illustrated among working people, pioneers, Fatherland Falcons (the preschoolers' communist organization) as the Dacian king surrounded by his people on the mosaic decorating an apartment building in Orăștie city. On Europe Day, 9 May 2006, at 10:00 a.m., on the Island of Roses in the Herăstrău Park in Bucharest, 12 bronze busts were unveiled (probably a subtle reference to the Holy Apostles) arranged in a circle, representing the founding fathers of the European Union. They are almost two meters tall and face an elevation of blue granite and marble scattered with yellow stars, in which a tall mast is planted. At its end, the European Union flag is aflutter. Shortly after the inauguration, the place became a performance space for political rituals, when the participants at the 11th Francophone Summit followed a route including the Monument of the European Union Founders, the statue of Charles de Gaulle, and the French Village¹⁰⁸.

In case of the above-mentioned (post-)communist monuments and works, the metaphor of the center introduces us to the regime of representations, of discourses, regarding the society as a project conceived and implemented by heroes, geniuses, technicians, experts. "Society" does not mean the people building or contesting it day by day, or the battles from the past for gaining certain rights, or the thought and critical approach; it is a project already carried out by providential personalities, who deserve to be in history school books, to be cast in bronze, to be celebrated. It only takes for this project to be "implemented". Also relevant is the gradual shift of the accession and integration discourse from European "values" towards "norms". And for some archaeologists, the "progress" of the discipline is accomplished by means of norms: "We wish to also draw the attention of those who believe, as we do, that archaeology should progress, that European models and practices are based on a set of regulations addressing the specific problems we ourselves encounter"¹⁰⁹. A bizarre correspondence is established between archaeology and ideology: "... the reassessment of the ideological sector in which the Romanian archaeology is active should lead to the restructuring of the theoretical contents of Romanian archaeology"¹¹⁰. The rhetoric of implementing "norms" is, however, accompanied by "good practices" such as plagiarism, conflict of interests in granting excavation funds, simultaneous participation to several post-doctorate programmes as both assistant manager and "post-PhD-candidate", "publishing" books useful for promotions or for fulfilling the objectives of some projects, which only exist as ISBN, etc. Romania participates to the "construction of Europe" by means of a double discourse which blends a *Realpolitik* limited to application of norms with a celebration of the European Union, at least in works of art, following the well-known recipes of the personality cult, aestheticizing politics and politicizing the aesthetic. In turn, archaeologists develop gradually, through writings, exhibitions, projects, a discourse where the founding past is looking towards a yellow-starred blue flag. The Monument of the European Union Founders is yet another stage in the biography of the park, from interwar period, when it was established as a National Park, throughout the Stalinist period when, between 1951-1962, a statue of the "great ruler" loomed over the park entrance, on the very spot over which the statue of Charles de Gaulle is towering at the date we write these lines. During this long time, the Herăstrău Park becomes the materiality of the Romanian elite's obedient manner of relating to ideologies.

The comparison with the sanctuary at Ayia Irini (and with other contexts of the past) reveals more clearly the aspiration of those secular projects (communism, Neoliberalism, European Union), founded by Reason, scientifically designed and implemented, to develop by means of monuments, images and words, a "metaphysical supplement", sacred, a "religiosity" sans divine. Those are elements needed for crafting a new space which projects into eternity the time of establishing the utopia, brought into a perpetual present

¹⁰⁷ Slej 2005, p. 20-21.

¹⁰⁸ *Evenimentul Zilei* of 11th of September 2006.

¹⁰⁹ Angelescu 2004, p. 7-8.

¹¹⁰ Popovici and Anghelinu 2006, p. 131.

of the consumerist ecstasy (which has replaced the communist heroism of production), an idealization of reality fashioned as a consensus of adhesion. Thus built, the space presumes to “reflect” and aims to “build”, by means of insinuating into everyday life, a new society, a new individual. The architects of those secular projects subtly arrogate attributes of divinity.

In this balance between the past and the present, the outlook of archaeology, “educated” to construe various styles and aesthetics of deposition, meanings of contexts and objects, becomes subversive if placed in the folds between reality and representation. By means of some kind of against-the-grain “middle-range theory”, in which the contexts of the past assist in interpreting the present, archaeology may reveal otherwise unperceived aspects of contemporaneity, may deconstruct these great stories, ideologies and policies that affect negatively the life of most people of nowadays Romania. An archaeology of the communist repression (not limited to exhumations), excavations in the waste dumps from before and after 1989, ethno-archaeological researches regarding the process of migration of labor force towards Western countries, or regarding the metamorphosis of the rural environment, models of communist factories presented to Ceaușescu as gifts, juxtaposed to the history of the post-1989 destruction and to the stories of the former workers – those are only few of the topics that might counteract globalist ideology and render alternative interpretations, as opposed to the official ones. Such interpretations might contribute to a critical understanding of the world we live in.

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