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CONTENTS

STUDIES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

Gulzada SARGIZOVA

THE USE OF ANIMAL JAWS IN BRONZE AGE CENTRAL KAZAKHSTAN 5

Emre ERDAN, Nurdan AKBULUT, Nihan AYDOĞMUŞ

AN AEOLIC OR YÖRÜK GRAVESTONE, A CAPITAL, OR AN ANICONIC CULT OBJECT? PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON THE NEW TYPE OF VOLUTED STONE OBJECTS FROM AEOLIS. 12

Daniel MALAXA, Alexandru BERZOVAN

IDENTIFICATION OF ANIMAL RESOURCES FROM THE DOBROVÂȚ-LA LIVADĂ LATE IRON AGE SETTLEMENT (4TH-3RD CENTURIES BC) 24

Beatrice CIUȚĂ

ARCHAEOBOTANICAL INVESTIGATIONS ON SAMPLES RECOVERED FROM DACIAN SETTLEMENTS LOCATED IN TRANSYLVANIAN AREA 32

NUMISMATICS

Mihai DIMA, Ovidiu ȚENȚEA

THE COIN FINDS FROM THE MĂLĂIEȘTI ROMAN FORT AND BATHS 38

Cristian GĂZDAC, Radu ZĂGRANU

ROMAN COINS, NON-ROMAN OWNER. THE HOARD OF ROMAN IMPERIAL COINS FROM BISTRIȚA – POȘOT FOREST, ROMANIA 59

Jehan HILLEN

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE, EMPEROR? TARGETING AUDIENCES ON LATE ROMAN AND EARLY BYZANTINE COINS 74

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOPOGRAPHY

Florin-Gh. FODOREAN

MAPS OF ROMAN DACIA. IV. GRIGORE TOCILESCU AND „LA DACIE ROMAINE” IN 1900 91

REVIEWS

CSABA SZABÓ

REVIEW: MIHAI BĂRBULESCU, ISTORIA ARHEOLOGIEI ÎN ROMÂNIA, CIVILIZAȚIA ROMÂNEASCĂ NR. 33, EDITURA ACADEMIEI ROMÂNE, BUCUREȘTI, 2022, 490 PP. ISBN: 978-606-27-3660-6. 96

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Reviews

Review: Mihai Bărbulescu, *Istoria arheologiei în România, Civilizația românească* nr. 33, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2022, 490 pp. ISBN: 978-606-27-3660-6.

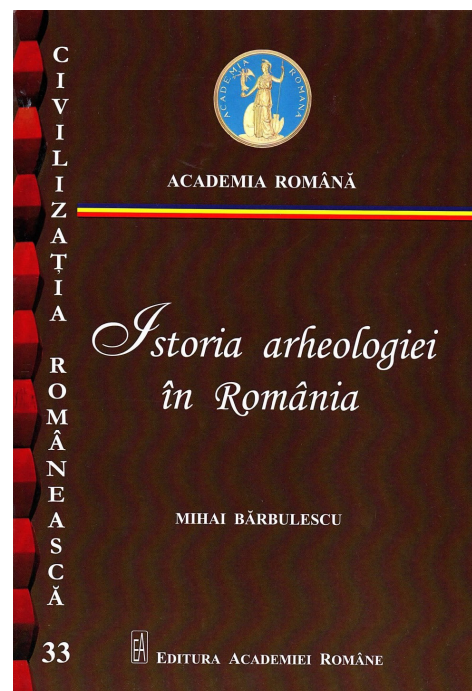
The book of Mihai Bărbulescu is a long-awaited synthesis on the history of archaeology in Romania. A monumental endeavour to summarise a long and difficult history of a discipline in an area of Europe which faced numerous political, cultural and scientific changes since the Renaissance time. History of archaeology, as a discipline aims to focus not only on the chronology and series of events relevant for the evolution of this discipline, but also to contextualise this field within a broader, continental and global history of humanities and metahistories on past materialities¹. Reflecting on the history of archaeological thought and metahistoric imagination of past materialities is a booming field not only in the Western, international scholarship, but since few years, in Romania too. Several important monographs and case studies were published in the last decades on the historiography of Prehistory in Romania², biographies of local archaeologists and classicists from the 19th and 20th centuries³, detailed histories of archaeological associations⁴ and sites⁵ and several theoretical approaches on protocronism, metahistories of antiquity and the reception of classical archaeology in the 20th century⁶.

The book of Mihai Bărbulescu is the first, attempt to present a comprehensive synthesis on the history of archaeology in Romania, although – as he rightly mentions in his short introduction – there were several, important case studies focusing on this topic since the 1960s by Zsigmond Jakó, Ioan Iosif Russu, Volker Wollmann, Radu Ardevan, Zoltán Vincze, András Bodor and many others.

In the introduction, the author enlists the rich bibliography of the previous, major works focusing on the history of archaeology and archaeological thought. The bibliographic list is not complete, some of the recent works I listed in my first footnotes – such as the paradigmatic works of Zoltán Vincze – are not mentioned. The international trends and methodological approaches on archaeological thought and critical theory of archaeology is almost completely missing from his introduction. The short, only three pages long introduction did not present one of the major issues of this attempt: the title of the book. The book title mentions “History of archaeology in Romania”, however the story begins from antiquity and continues in late Medieval, Renaissance, Modern and contemporary periods. Romania, as a modern state and a political and administrative entity exists only since the 19th century. The periodisation of the history

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1 On the notion and theoretical approach of history of archaeology see: TRIGGER 1986; MURRAY/EVANS 2008, 360-378; DIAZ-ANDREU/CHAMPION 2014; MEIER/TILLESSEN 2014; DELLEY *et alii* 2016; SZABÓ *et alii* 2017.

2 ANGHELINU 2014.

3 COCIȘ 2014; VINCZE 2014; SZABÓ 2016; BEREZKI *et alii* 2017; FRAUHAMMER *et alii* 2018; SZABÓ 2020; VINCZE 2022; LEZSÁK 2022.

4 VINCZE 2013; BODÓ 2021; URSU 2021.

5 PEȚAN 2018.

6 POPA 2016; NEMETI 2019; FLOREA 2020; EGRI/RUSTOIU 2020; HENȚ 2020; SÁNTA 2020; SZABÓ 2022; HANSCAM 2023; RUBEL 2023; NICULESCU 2023.

of archaeology in the contemporary territory of Romania is impossible without the presentation of the historical context: Transylvania, as part of the Hungarian Kingdom, later the Habsburg and Austro-Hungarian Empires and since 1918 part of Romania produced numerous different, often co-existing narratives and metahistories of archaeology. Inter-imperiality, glocalism and the major historiographic trends in Transylvania, Oltenia, Dobrudja and Moldova are not presented, although without these different cultural contexts it is hard (if not impossible) to contextualize the history of archaeologies (plural is intentional) in this macro-region. Periodisation is one of the recurring methodological techniques we found in works focusing on history of archaeologies: it reflects not only the major scientific and theoretical trends (antiquarianism, early archaeological thought, positivism, ethno-archaeology or nationalist archaeologies, processualism, post-processualism, new archaeology, etc.), but reflects also the political and historical changes of the region, which highly influenced the history of the discipline.

This methodological issue is not presented in the introduction; however, we will meet these questions and problems in the core-text of the book in each chapter individually, although in short discussion (such as on pages 292-293).

The first chapter presents the “unintentional” or scattered, accidentally discovered finds from Antiquity till modern times. An abundant chapter with several case studies, focusing especially on the most spectacular, large treasures discovered accidentally by lay people, without archaeological investigation or intentional search. Well-known stories of the Strei, Nagyszentmiklós (Sânnicolau Mare), Szilágysomlyó (Simleu Silvaniei) I-II, Apahida I-II, Pietrosa, Tomis treasures are presented here shortly. The chapter presents these case studies in chronological order, without a special focus on the historical context and the analysis of the treasures.

The next chapter presents in chronological order the intentional discoveries and treasure hunters from Medieval, Modern and contemporary periods. The author presents also the first legal attempts from the Hungarian Kingdom, Habsburg administration and the Romanian principates of Wallachia and Moldova which intended to regulate and protect the material heritage of the past. Again, the examples are presented in chronological order.

The following chapter presents shortly the history of “archaeology” (in fact: antiquarianism) in the 15th-18th centuries. It begins with the case study of Transylvania, part of the Hungarian Kingdom till the mid-16th century, quasi-independent Principate in the period of 1570-1690 and part of the Habsburg Empire after 1711. The author presents shortly the major epigraphic corpora, the first monographs and private, clerical and museal collections from Transylvania. This chapter is a short summary of the already well-known data from the paradigmatic works of Zsigmond Jakó, András Bodor, Ioan Iosif Russu and Volker Wollmann, with some relevant contribution of the author himself on the work of Zamosius, the collection of Ariosti and the early collections from Potaissa (Turda-Torda). Bărbulescu presents also the first description of Roman and early Medieval

ruins in Alba Iulia (Apulum), Ampelum (Zlatna-Zalatna), Sarmizegetusa, Băile Herculane (Herkulesbad), Micia, Drobeta, Potaissa (Turda-Torda) and some other cases by foreign travellers. The chapter is focusing on the major sites and mentions the major publications where lithographs, maps and descriptions of ancient sites were published in the 17th-18th centuries. Some of these case studies – such as the discovery of the Băile Herculane (Herkulesbad) Roman bath-complex, the historiography of Trajan’s bridge from Drobeta, the numismatic collection of Szathmáry Pap Mihály or the early discoveries from the 18th century in Alba Iulia – were already published in detailed studies.

The fourth chapter is focusing on the 19th century, named by the author as “age of romanticism and early archaeology”. His special interest is Transylvania, the case studies of Oltenia, Mutenia and Moldova are summarized shortly. The author presents in detail the case of the Kemény collection, the rediscovery of Sarmizegetusa Regia (although did not cite the monograph of Aurora Pețan on the research history of this)⁷ and several authors who contributed to the study of Roman and Dacian sites, Iron Age and Classical archaeology. He presents shortly some of the landmarks in the history of the discipline, such as the visit of Mommsen in Transylvania in 1857, the French archaeological mission in Dobrudja and Mutenia in 1865, the foundation of the first museum in Transylvania by Samuel von Brukenthal, the museums and associations from Iași and București in 1833 and 1834.

The fifth chapter presents the beginning of professional archaeology, as a discipline and the first museums focusing especially on archaeological heritage. Here again, the major organisational criteria is chronology: the author presents the museums of the contemporary territory of Romania in a chronological order, without focusing on the major historical and administrative changes in this region in the 19th century, which marked obviously the history of museology and academic life too (Habsburg Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire, Romanian Principates, Romanian Kingdom). While some of the major figures of this period, such as Béla Cserni, Henrik Finály, Béla Pósta, Gábor Téglás are well-researched⁸, others – such as the founder of the museum from Tîrgu Jiu, Alexandru Ștefulescu – are cited only in a short article of an online journal. The author mentions an impressive list of museum-founders, associations and institutions which marked the history of archaeological excavations and theoretical approaches in this region. This period produced already important, systematic excavations and historical works focusing on the history of Roman Dacia and Moesia Inferior too. The author here omits to contextualise the historiographic approaches of these early monographs, the first university courses and teaching methods in the late 19th century. Issues on Romanisation (p. 196-197), the early discussions on ethnogenesis, the early excavations on the so-called Migration Period, linguistics and archaeology are shortly or never mentioned. Issues on regionalisms, conflicts produced by institutional hierarchies, the first cases

⁷ PEȚAN 2018.

⁸ See especially VINCZE 2014.

of urban archaeology are presented very shortly, without a broader, continental contextualisation, indicated by the rich correspondence and academic network of these scholars⁹. The large quantity of primary sources preserved from this period in dozens of museum-archives and associations, the critical analysis of the works of these important pioneers of archaeology cannot be presented in a short chapter, but in detailed, monographic case studies or research projects focusing on the digitisation of this important heritage from the 19th century, the Belle Époque of archaeology.

The sixth chapter is focusing on the interwar period, marked by the dominant figure of Vasile Pârvan. The author also presents the important Schools of archaeology concentrated around the major universities, especially Cluj and Bucureşti. The delicate political situation in Transylvania in this period is shortly presented in the conflictual relationship between Márton Roska and Vasile Pârvan¹⁰. The chapter presents shortly the abundance of archaeologists, sites and major works published in the inter-war period, although none of these topics are presented in detail or framed into a broader context.

The next chapter is focusing on the second half of the 20th century, the Stalinist and national-communist periods. The activity of Roller, Ciumbrudean, Macrea, Berciu and especially Constantin Daicoviciu, are shortly mentioned. It is hard to understand, why such a dominant figures as Constantin and Hadrian Daicoviciu appear only occasionally and in few lines. The major ideological conflict which marked the archaeology of Transylvania during the Second World War between András Alföldi and Constantin Daicoviciu is not mentioned at all¹¹.

The last chapter presents again, an enormous number of excavations, archaeologists and institutions which played a crucial role in the history of archaeology in Romania after 1990. This chapter tried to summarize how Romanian archaeology escaped from the ideological cage of the national-communism, tried to recover the major historiographic and innovative tendencies in archaeological research. Notions such as landscape archaeology, non-destructive methods, GIS, the interdisciplinary use of IT and hard sciences in archaeology are presented. A special focus goes to the legal system and issues of protection of archaeological heritage in Romania. Problematic case studies with a significant social and even political impact, such as the case of Alburnus Maior/Roşia Montană, the golden bracelets from Sarmizegetusa Regia or the destruction of the Principia from Apulum (Alba Iulia) are shortly, or not even mentioned. The author highlights in the last chapter the current situation of Romanian archaeology, the major statistics and actors (number of archaeologists, sites, systematic excavations, the role of the National Commission of Archaeology). Notions, such as public archaeology¹², industrial archaeology, historical genetics, climatology, critical theory in archaeology, the international networks of archaeologists from Romania are shortly mentioned.

The book of Mihai Bărbulescu is a positivist kaleidoscope of the history of archaeology in the territory of contemporary Romania, which englobes parts of the inter-imperial and glocal histories of archaeologies from the Hungarian Kingdom, Habsburg Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire, Soviet Union and former Romanian Principalities, later Kingdom and Socialist state as well. The data (number of mentioned archaeologists, institutions, excavations, 1559 footnotes, hundreds of titles cited in several languages) is indeed, impressive, arguably the largest collection of this kind ever published in Romanian language in a single volume. It is, therefore, a work which will be a reference for all those who want to deal with this topic. It is an encyclopaedic, synthetic work in the style of the Romanian Academy, the publisher of the book. The abundance of data, however, cannot replace the painful lack of theoretical analysis in contemporary Romanian archaeology and the uncomfortable questions, which are rarely asked. The author argues that historians work with pen and paper, archaeologists with hoe and spade. This is an axiom, obviously. Archaeology today is, indeed, a technical science in close collaboration with earth sciences, geophysical measurements, aerial archaeology, oceanography, genetics and many other disciplines. It is predominantly a fieldwork science, focusing on the material heritage of the human past. Materiality however, does not mean only the descriptive method of objects: we can measure, describe, remake, paint, atomize objects and bones from the macro-, till the micro-level. This is not enough however: objects *do have* a life, a biography, they play a role in society and have a strong nature of agency¹³. The interpretation of the material past in metahistories (texts published by archaeologists) is an intellectual production. The analysis of these texts, the contextualisation of the major theoretical trends, political ideologies, dominant figures and their local and international networks constitutes together the history of archaeology. Analysing archaeological imaginations, as Petra Meier and Thomas Tillessen argued, is an intellectual challenge and as hard as it is, it cannot be reduced to the mere list of events and names. Histories of archaeology is history of ideas, ideologies, biographies and intellectual tendencies as well¹⁴.

The quantity of sources collected in the book of Mihai Bărbulescu shows, that history of archaeology in the current territory of Romania offers an enormous intellectual opportunity for historians and theoretical archaeologists as well: hundreds of biographies, institutional-histories, site-monographs are still waiting to be published which will be possible only as part of a multi-annual project with a glocal approach, while an intellectual endeavour focusing on the theoretical approaches and intellectual histories of archaeologies (especially Medieval and Roman) still need to be written¹⁵. The book of Mihai Bărbulescu can be a foundation for such future works.

⁹ SZABÓ *et alii* 2017.

¹⁰ For more details, see VINCZE 2022.

¹¹ VISY 2015.

¹² MOSHENSKA 2017.

¹³ PITTS / VERSLUYS 2021 on objectscape and the agency role of objects.

¹⁴ For a recent, good example see the studies in BABIC/MILOSAVLJEVIC 2023.

¹⁵ For Prehistory, see ANGHELINU 2014.

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