

Nationalism and the Representation of Society in Romanian Archaeology

Gheorghe-Alexandru NICULESCU

Nationalism as a representation of society is supported by three assumptions: (1) all “men have ‘nationality’ as they have a nose and two eyes, and this is a central part of their being”; (2) “they wish to live with those of the same nationality, and above all resent being ruled by those of another one”; and (3) “it is rightly so” (Gellner 1964: 150). These postulates have become commonsensical and it is difficult to confront them without the tools offered by a critical social science. Nationalists may see a dispute on these postulates as pointless, because they hold them to be objective and fundamental. At the same time, they may regard such an endeavour as irresponsible towards one’s own nation because if one does not believe in it strongly enough it will go away, while other nations will prosper.

The Nationalist Representation of the Past

Nationalism produces a territorialized genealogy proving common descent, a particular representation of the past, of “our” past, confronted with “theirs”. It presents society as the evolved concretization of what was already there from the beginning because what society is by nature should transcend time. Thus it appears a basic continuity with the cultural intimacy of the present, allowing an extension of the nationalist representation of society to the past, a projection of “familiar social experience onto unknown and potentially threatening contexts” (Herzfeld 1997: 7) which tries to prevent the imagining of other ways of being us, making of the past an authoritarian illustration of the present.

The archaeological research is particularly useful for the construction of an exemplary past of a nation. It has the distinct advantage of mobilizing esoteric knowledge on facts as mysterious and ambiguous as the beginnings of the nation, which impose by their local materiality (Protase 2000: 105), by their authenticity (Zaharia 1995: 297), [\[1\]](#) to illustrate the true, scientific story of the origins, otherwise difficult or impossible to document. The Romanian case calls for some preliminary observations.

Archaeology in Romania: An Auxiliary Discipline

In Romania, archaeology is not only, as in most European countries, a historical discipline. It is an ancillary field, a collection of expert knowledge and techniques, which enable the historian to write his narrative using antiquities, especially needed when written sources are missing. The only teaching of archaeology is made in History departments where interdisciplinary research is

present less as a dialogue between paradigms, and more as an indiscriminate appetite of the historian to whatever might seem useful or appealing to him.

In these circumstances, the existence of two conflicting directions among Romanian archaeologists should be no surprise. One tends to see the discipline as a field of inquiry with a limited scope, dealing with a rather inexpressive kind of data, which have to be integrated in a historical reconstruction to make sense, sometimes by formulating hypotheses as conclusions. The other tries to develop a particular archaeological understanding, which, at its best, looks like a positivistic project, with stable and austere methodologies.

Most Romanian archaeologists are inclined to see their discipline as being a seamless combination of fieldwork, archaeological analysis, and “historical thinking”: an “archaeological thinking” appears to them limited, and the possibilities to develop it beyond the methodological principles to be used in the analysis obscure. The interpretation of the archaeological record is supposed to benefit from their competence as historians, including the readiness to employ all the range of evidence available about the past and their capacity to detach themselves from the present. Thus, archaeologists who show complete indifference towards current material culture or anthropological understandings of society are ready to use results coming from historical linguistics or from physical anthropology. [\[2\]](#)

There is a high correlation between mixed argumentation (the indiscriminate use of results from other disciplines) and nationalist reconstructions of the past. Those archaeologists who refrain from building their arguments on results from other disciplines and still believe in a positivistic methodology, with safe and innocent descriptions and catalogues, chronologies and typologies, try to keep away from more or less elaborate ideologized reconstructions of society. Nevertheless, they are likely to perpetuate the nationalist representation of society embedded in the concepts coming from the local tradition of the discipline. When such concepts are questioned for their nationalist content, the common answer is that they are harmless conventions, and that the effort to replace them is useless (Vulpe 1998: 10 on the use of “Geto-Dacian”).

In Romania, culture-history archaeology is the undisputed paradigm. Some techniques associated with processual assumptions have recently been adopted without changing the overall picture. A small curiosity is worth mentioning, the definition of culture used by the early processualists against the normative concept of culture-history archaeology: "culture is the extrasomatic means of adaptation for the human organism" (Binford 1962: 218), was chosen in influential archaeology textbooks written for the Bucharest Faculty of History in the '60s and '70s by Ion Nestor and Ligia

Bârză (e.g. Bârză 1977: 6 – “culture is a social adaptation to the physical environment”), with no consequence for the archaeological interpretation.

The Nationalist Image of Society in Romanian Archaeology

The nationalist representation of society outlined here, which I believe to be still very influential in Romanian archaeology, is constructed exclusively from writings of professional archaeologists, most of them published after 1989. The authors I have chosen concentrate on very important matters to the nation and, accordingly, for Romanian historiography: the “Geto-Dacians”, their Romanization, the fate of the Romanic population after the abandonment of the Roman province during the rest of the first millennium AD. The research on these topics is supposed to reveal “the fundamental ethno-cultural elements of the history of the Romanian people, without which its subsequent evolution during the Middle Ages and up to the present time could not be understood” (Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995: 13). Important differences exist between these authors, in the arguments they use, in their professional standards, even in the ways they conceive archaeology.

The basic principles of this representation operate as self-evident truths. The particular reconstructions that illustrate them, especially the products of the '70s and the '80s, times of what one may term “creative nationalism” [\[3\]](#) in Romanian archaeology, have been contested, many times with no other purpose than the finding of better ones. The competition for more adequate archaeological illustrations for the beginnings of the nation is still on and the political support for nationalist thinking is still strong. [\[4\]](#)

Ethnic identities and territories are the core of this representation: apparently if one knows the identity of a society, which appears to constantly reproduce social reality, the rest can be deduced because “spiritual structure” does not change. Not even strong political or military pressure can alter it beyond the surface (Bârză 1973: 91). Ethnic identity is seen as the manifestation of a stable, pre-cultural substance, the physical support (Constantinescu 1999: 151) of a coherent cultural content. Accordingly, ethnic continuity is seen as biological and demographic (Madgearu 1997: 7) while “ethnic mixture” is regarded as a “biological process”, e.g. facilitating cultural and linguistic Romanization (Bârză 1991: 34). Ethnic change in the population of a territory usually means that its inhabitants was either killed or left the place. An example of such thinking: the decreasing of the local population – as a consequence of the invasions of the Slavs and of the plague – together with the settling of Slavs are thought to make of the 6th century a period of great ethnic mutations in the region of the Lower Danube (Madgearu 1997: 167-168). To survive the loss of the “autochthonous” collective

identity on the Romanian national territory is not accepted for communities, only for individuals, and even that only in extraordinary circumstances.

Major questions about ancient societies are left unasked. Not a single remark on the gender differences, not even the necessary separation of the archaeological genders before a chronological seriation is attempted. The concern for social differentiation, when it goes beyond the trivial observation that those with more goods were better off than the others, is mostly an expression of the interest to detect political organization in the local population, presented in terms which are products of the brand of Marxism used in Romania in the '50s and the '60s and seen as a sign of progress, of the "capacity and continuous effort towards political organization of our people" (Olteanu 1997: 264), of the "superior stage" in the evolution of a people (Constantinescu 1999: 131), usually dated towards the end of the first millennium AD. Otherwise, the prevalent image of the local population is that of a rather undifferentiated (Protase 2000: 68) "folk" society of ethnic solidarity. [\[5\]](#)

As usual in nationalist representations of society, the "folk", the "popular", is situated above what one can attribute to individual action and it is used as an explanatory framework, particularly useful when no heroes are available. Therefore, we have not only strong "folk" local traditions, carried forward by an anonymous and cohesive mass of people. Even a major cultural transformation is seen as "popular", i.e. consequence of spontaneous and natural reactions of civilized people who know how to recognize cultural superiority when they see it: e.g. Christianity is accepted by the Daco-Romans for "ses traits de morale et d'humanisme" (Teodor 1995: 358). [\[6\]](#) The "popular" character of local Christianity is constantly opposed, as "natural" and early, to the "official" and late one of the neighbouring peoples, "the Bulgarians, Russians, Hungarians, and so on" (D. Gh. Teodor in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995: 291).

The territory assigned to the ancestors of the nation is identical with the national Romanian territory or bigger: it is inhabited uniformly by the "Geto-Dacians" until the Roman conquest, then by the Daco-Roman or the Romanic population. All these are pseudo-ethnic entities, endowed with the basic characteristics included in the representation of a nation: delimited territory, linguistic and cultural uniformity, quasi- national consciousness.

The "autochthonous" population appears to be a *sui generis* social formation (Strobel 1998: 75), its social and political organisation being an outcome of local traditions (D. Gh. Teodor in Constantinescu 1999: 5). It is called affectionately "our society" (Olteanu 1997: 10), supposed to be an ethnic group (Constantinescu 1999: 10), an assumption supported only by the alleged cultural uniformity. There is no discussion about the possibility of local identities, even if the emergence of local political authority before the end of the first millennium AD is generally accepted.

The “autochthonous society” had a remarkable feature, thought to explain its continuity: it was made of virtually identical village communities (“obști sătești” in Romanian), with an ancient and “precise” internal organization, “superior to that of the kinship communities of the migratory peoples” (Teodor 1997: 33), “different from that of other peoples” (D. Gh. Teodor in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995, 347), evolved from “archaic village communities” (Protase 2000: 68, 105), imagined as autonomous social formations, with little or no economic differentiation, combining private and common property. Although no archaeological interpretation has been devised to support its existence, many archaeologists admit this form of organization, imposed by the authority of the treatise of Romanian history published in 1960 (Protase 2000: 33 and Daicoviciu et al. 1960: 799-803).

“Autochthonous” Society

“Our ancestors”, the “autochthonus” population, are constantly opposed to the “migratory” or “allochthonous” populations, or, simply, to the “migrators”. We have here two kinds of people, one socially coherent, with all the attributes of human excellence, the other unstable, with no true essence and, therefore, no future. To this image the Romanian archaeological research has made an important contribution by setting as a paramount research goal the separation of the finds indicating the local population from those of the “migrators” in order to distinguish our past from theirs, to reveal the distinctive stages of social and economic development (Teodor 1997: 9), assuming that ethnic identity precedes and informs social reality.

Autochthony is seen as a state of normality: the local people have the privilege of progress, they would be in a continuous process of evolution without the foreigners who, by their invasions, have slowed it, evidently, always for a short time (D. Gh. Teodor in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995: 294; Zaharia 1995: 300; Constantinescu 1999: 134; Protase 2000: 103). Thus the best times for the Daco-Roman population seem to have been those between 450 and 550, when the local society, freed from any foreign influence, after assimilating all the isolated foreigners, enjoyed unimpeded evolution and a general well-being (Constantinescu 1999: 41-42).

The most important characteristic of the local society, indeed of any civilized one, is cultural uniformity, this again being inherited, not achieved: “[l]a population autochtone se caractérise par la grande unité de sa civilisation, grâce aux sources unitaires dont elle s’est formée partout dans son espace de développement” (Zaharia 1995: 298). People cherish the same values, follow the same rules and, accordingly, produce a homogenous material culture that allows archaeologists to recognize them and the spread of their culture over a territory. The uniformity seen in the archaeological record is extended to the “spiritual life” (e.g. Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995: 13), without any interpretative

procedures, following an understanding of culture as homogenous product of identity. The concept commonly employed to express this uniformity is, significantly, “unity”. Its function is not to allow some cultural diversity, but to convey the social and political deliberate solidarity to be expected from a nation-like entity.

This uniformity takes the form of a genetic space for the Romanian people when the archaeological record of the Latène, Roman and Post-Roman periods is repeatedly described as “unitary” for the whole territory of present-day Romania, even for the period of the Roman province (D. Gh. Teodor in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995: 272, 344), which extended only over a part of it. [7] This exaggerated and usually undocumented uniformity is also supported by the concentration of archaeological research on the national territory, disregarding the finds beyond its borders, which suggests that they belong to different culture areas.

For the 5th-7th centuries, a chain of site names, combined “afin de marquer le fait qu’elle embrasse le territoire du pays en son intégrité” (Zaharia 1995: 328), gives an identity to the local culture: the “cultural complex” *Ipotești – Ciurel – Cândești – Bratei – Biharea – Costișa – Botoșana* (Constantinescu 1999: 40). It illustrates the cultural “unity” of the local population, to be explained by common origin and common language (Zugravu 1997: 72-73). These site names are commonly employed to identify the “archaeological cultures” from the three main provinces of present-day Romania, Walachia (Ipotești-Ciurel-Cândești), Transylvania (Bratei-Biharea) and Moldavia (Costișa-Botoșana), but what the authors who use them have in mind is a single society, a cultural unity (Teodor 1997: 15) with “regional aspects”. When engaging in the research of only a part of the national territory, the authors take care to indicate, e.g., that “this region has always been a part of the territory where... the process of Romanian ethnogenesis took place” (Constantinescu 1999: 10), or that the civilization from that region (Moldavia) is “identical to that from the rest of the territory of Romanian ethnogenesis” (Teodor 1997: 35), or that the evolution of the local society, in its basic traits, “followed the general framework of development known by the whole history of our fatherland” (Constantinescu 1999: 151). Local differences, obviously a bad thing, are either “illusory” (Constantinescu 1999: 151) or to be explained by the “temporary domination of migrating peoples and populations” (Olteanu 1997: 10), which thus appear to have brought diversity to the local population as yet another attempt to hold it back from its progress.

No other explanation seems to be needed for this cultural uniformity, constantly detected for a span of time which exceeds 1000 years, and for many authors even more, than its being a property of the local population, a sign of its superiority, generated and maintained by the natural propensity for contacts with one’s own kind.

For the Daco-Romans, “[l]iés à l’Empire par leur être même” (Zaharia 1995: 334), this propensity explains not only internal cohesion but also their contacts, first with the Roman and then with the Byzantine Empire. Imports and imitations, seen as initiating the transformation of the local way of life towards Romanization, are the expression of a “specific trait”: the opening of the “autochthonous spirit”, since the Bronze Age, to southern influences (Bârzu 1991: 97-98), that is to civilization. Then, as manifestations of deep feelings of belonging to the civilization the imports are coming from, of mutual affection (Constantinescu 1999: 82), and thus Byzantine artefacts and their imitations, believed to be associated only with the “autochthonous” population, are understood as expressing its comprehensive links with the civilized Empire, “a fundamental necessity for its ethno-cultural being” (Constantinescu 1999: 24, 43; see also Protase 2000: 105), and even as evidence of the “exquisite taste...and spiritual-creative affinities of the Romanic populations north of the Danube with the Late Roman Empire” (Constantinescu 1999: 72).

Autochthony is also an economic state of mind: the local population is self-sufficient, industrious, skillful, creative, while the “migrators” are generally represented as incapable of producing their own food: they live with what they take from the “autochthonous” population, by plunder or as tribute (D. Gh. Teodor, in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995: 288-289, 342; Constantinescu 1999: 138). The ethnic attribution of archaeological features such as storage pits follows this reasoning: one author (Protase 2000, 28) believes they belong exclusively to the “autochthonous” population because obviously the “migrators” did not have any use for them. When the same author remarks that in the 6th century the storage pits are missing from what he thinks are “autochthonous” settlements, this should be explained in his opinion by the fact that the local population has simply chosen other ways of storing food. (Protase 2000, 37).

“Migratory” Societies

The notion of “migratory peoples”, as well as that of “migrators”, [8] suggests that migration is an essential part of their being. They are represented as crossing the present-day Romanian territory to disappear south of the Danube into the Empire, rushing towards the annihilation of their identity and leaving behind isolated individuals, ready to be assimilated by the local population. They cannot acquire “autochthony” without the complete loss of their identity and the radical change of their way of life.

The “migrators” seem easier to be imagined as societies made of individuals, rather than of communities. Archaeologists who try to interpret the “allochthonous” artifacts found in “autochthonous” settlements think of “infiltrated” single individuals or families, who have chosen to live with their superiors, at the margins of their settlements (Madgearu 1997: 116-117, about the Slavs

in the 6th century). Thus, individual choice appears associated with the lack of civilization and the conformity to ethnic tradition with cultural superiority.

The Interaction between the “Autochthonous” and the “Migratory Populations”

The relations between the local population and the “migrators” are almost always asymmetric. All of them were mediated through the communities of the former: no single individuals or families were ever subjected to the “migrators”, stresses one author, only the village communities (Protase 2000, 102-103).

The usual consequences of interaction are the “influences”. “Our people” assimilates them “organically”, “creatively”, “adapting not just adopting” (Constantinescu 1999: 23, 140), especially when they come from “great civilizations”. When the influences come from the culturally inferior “migrators”, they do not touch anything fundamental to the local population (e.g. Madgearu 1997: 97 against Bârzu 1980: 83 who argued for a change in the burial rite as a consequence of Slavic “influences”). If some “influences” of the “migrators” are nevertheless accepted, they can be described as “contaminating” the local culture (Olteanu 1997: 206 about the supposedly “autochthonous” cemeteries from the 4th-11th centuries). The ‘influences’ of the local population on the “migrators” are frequently presented as the only access to civilization they were likely to have, and, coming from a superior culture, believed to cause profound changes affecting their collective identity.

The assimilating receptivity of the local population has the interesting property of making the “migrators” invisible for the archaeologists. As Radu Harhoiu (forthcoming) noticed, the “autochthonous” population is thought to have the capacity of absorbing any material indicator of ethnic identity from the “migrators”. On the contrary, the artefacts supposed to indicate the “autochthonous” population always signify its physical presence: one finds out with satisfaction that “Dacian mugs” were discovered in Budapest and even as far as the Burgenland.

The final consequence of the interaction with the “migrators” is assimilation. The local population easily assimilates them: for instance, the *Gepidae*, who have created a kingdom in Transylvania, have either left or just “lost themselves among the people of the land” (Protase 2000: 103). Another author offers a more vivid description of the process, with the local village communities as protagonists:

[e]ntraînés dans cette organisation, les Slaves ont du tenir compte du statut juridique de la communauté. Une fois entré, n’importe de quelle manière, dans celle-ci, le nouvel élément était tenu de respecter son organisation intérieure, sans quoi il était liquidé ou bien soumis au processus d’assimilation graduelle, par l’imposition du nom, de la langue et du développement social-économique (Zaharia 1995: 330).

This capacity to assimilate stems from cultural superiority (D. Gh. Teodor, in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995: 344), demographic superiority, or from both because they are believed to be closely related. It can be presented like this:

[L]a confrontation constante des deux facteurs [the romanized population and the Slavs] a, chaque fois, prouvé que le fonds biologique, les éléments de culture et de civilisation de la population locale ne cessent pas de l'emporter, d'avoir de (sic!) dessus, parallèlement au dépérissement graduel des intrus" (Zaharia 1995: 298).

If one wonders why was the local population culturally superior, the answer can be that any sedentary people is superior to a "migratory" one, because they belong to different evolutionary stages (Olteanu 1997: 216; Teodor 1997: 9), or that a Romanic population is naturally superior to any of the "migratory peoples", because it was once a part of "l'État [capitalized in the original] le mieux organisé de l'antiquité" (Zaharia 1995: 329).

The local population monopolizes the contacts with the civilized Empire. Thus, with the same result of making the "migrators" invisible, Roman and Byzantine artefacts and, especially, local imitations thereof are attributed to the local population. In archaeological contexts that do not leave much choice, they can be associated with "migrators", but then they are supposed to have taken them from their local 'superiors', not from their distant ones (Constantinescu 1999: 72).

The "migrators" are usually credited with a "nominal domination" over the local population, exerted from a big distance, preferably from outside the Romanian national territory. When some actual settlement is accepted, it is thought to affect only very small areas (no central positions or regions identifiable as any kind of unity), in small numbers and for a limited time (Zaharia 1995: 298). "Migrators" are supposed to live in their own, separate settlements, in "ethnic enclaves" (Protase 2000: 104), located exclusively in the rural areas, "adequate to their tribal life" (Protase 2000, 8; see also 16), but even those scattered among the numerous settlements inhabited by the "autohtonous" majority (Protase 2000: 39, 63).

They are not to be found in the ruins of the former Roman cities or camps, inhabited exclusively by the local population. When in such places are found artefacts which can be linked to the presence of the "migrators", as in *Apulum*, Micia, or Comolău (Protase 2000: 19, 21-22), they are explained as "cultural borrowings" (Protase 2000: 9). Even when it is discovered something as spectacular as a princely grave, unmistakably belonging to a "migrator", as it happened in the Roman camp from *Potaissa*, it can be declared to have "no major ethno-cultural significance" (Protase 2000, 11; *contra* M. Bărbulescu in Bărbulescu et al. 1998: 119 who admits the presence of the barbarians in the former Roman cities and camps).

Some archaeologists believe that the superior “autochthonous” population did not live with the “migrators” in the same settlements or use the same cemeteries (Protase 2000: 35). For instance, the situation of Walachia in the 4th century, where the only finds, and those in great quantity, belong to the Černjachov culture, usually interpreted as a result of the Gothic migration, has made several archaeologists look for a distinct archaeological reality to be associated exclusively with the local population, and, trying hard enough, they have found it in the variability of the Černjachov settlements (Bârzu 1980: 57; Teodorescu et al. 1993). The most radical attempt to solve the problem declares “autochthonous” the majority of the finds belonging to the Černjachov culture, placing the Goths outside the present day Romanian territory and admitting as settlers only small groups of “*Taifali, Sciri* or even Visigoths, who, like the Sarmatians, have been accepted by the local population” (Constantinescu 1999: 64; cf. 136).

Ethnogenesis

The formation process of the Romanian people is usually conceptualized in current Romanian historiography and, accordingly, in the archaeological writings, as one of “melting together”, of knitting previous ethnic components (Madgearu 1997: 166-175, esp. 174) and of “unification” (Teodor, in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995, 352). It is imagined to be both biologic (by intermarriage) and cultural, as objective as the formation of languages and closely related to it. Once formed, the people is bound to evolve towards the fulfillment of its nature, to develop the full potentialities inscribed in its origins. The transformations of the definition of a people’s identity or of the ways it is expressed are not considered, although [e]ven an ethnic group that exhibits considerable continuity and stability over long periods of historical time will nevertheless change in fundamental ways (Kohl 1998: 232).

The result is an ethnic synthesis where the components involved are emphasised according to the current understanding of the nature of the nation. The generally accepted version employs two components [9], the “Geto-Dacian” one, the “ethnic basis”, “with ancient and strong roots in the Dacian land” (D. Gh. Teodor, in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995, 357), an artificial notion which secures an antique and “autochthonous” uniform basis for the Romanization process (Strobel 1998: 61), and the Romans, who have brought a high culture which does not end with the Empire: their civilization was preserved and developed by the Romanic peoples (H. Diacoviciu in Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1995: 218). The competition between the two components in the tradition of representing the beginnings of the nation has a long history. The latter has enjoyed a better fortune, although nationalist thinkers have often favored the “Geto-Dacian” component, frequently associated with

protochronistic ideas, in order to emphasize our specificity. This trend, still strong as one can see from many of the papers presented at the recent Second International Congress of Dacology – Bucharest 2001 [\[10\]](#) is though very poorly represented among professional archaeologists.

The Slavic component, strongly put forward in the '50s and the early '60s (Curta 1994) in the context of Soviet political domination, has been relegated since to a minor role, or even excluded from the ethnogenetic process using either the nationalist representation of the isolation in which the local, Romanic population, lived (Madgearu 1997: 174), or chronological arguments: the Romanian people was already formed at the time when the Slavs came (Constantinescu 1999: 24).

The formation of the Romanian people is the only one referred to as ethnogenesis. The emergence of the Daco-Romans does not enjoy this status. Nothing of the sort is considered for “migratory” peoples on the territory of present day Romania.

This representation of society preexists the interpretation of the finds. [\[11\]](#) Its archaeological support relies on a holistic notion of culture understood as ethnic culture, which recognizes ethnic significance to all artifacts. Thus, it is believed that an assemblage made of artifacts of different ethnic origins could be correctly assigned to one of them by assessing their proportion (Bâzru 1991: 211). Some artifacts (like the “Dacian mug”) or features have gained the status of ‘ethnic indicators’, of being more “ethnic” than others, (Protase 2000: 32). The same status was claimed for some others which has led to a variety of conflicting ways to imagine what the archaeological record of the Romanic population should look like (an analysis of this matter in R. Harhoiu forthcoming) and to an increased awareness of how difficult it is to bring the archaeological record into the main narrative of the nation among the archaeologists who promote nationalist representations of the past (e.g. Protase 2000: 102 referring to the second half of the 5th and to the 6th century in Transylvania).

Widespread enough, unfortunately, is the imposition of meaning on artifacts and features. An extreme example is that of the sign “X”, to be interpreted, according to one author, when found on whatever artefacts dating from the 2nd to the 5th centuries, as the cross of Saint Andrew (Constantinescu 1999: 106). More common is the interpretation of burials as Christian ones based solely on their orientation and the lack or scarcity of grave-goods (Teodor 1997: 15; *contra* Harhoiu forthcoming).

I do not intend to answer an obvious question: why do archaeologists promote such a representation of the past? Nationalism is still the dominant representation of society in Romania and a reaction against it, as well as a reflexive attitude that could help eliminate some of the nationalistic load from the reconstructions of society, do not come naturally from cultivating the traditional culture-historical paradigm. Archaeologists, defending themselves from the obvious and the dominant with

varying success, are not more influenced by nationalism than the rest of the society. It is taught in school, it is embraced, as “good nationalism”, by most of the politicians, unable or unwilling to imagine other reasons for solidarity, by the Orthodox church which claims to be recognized as the national church and supports extreme views on the antiquity of the Romanian people linked with its alleged early Christianization in the first century. [\[12\]](#)

The representation of society outlined here is more and more frequently contested in the last few years. Most of the critical reactions come from the positivistic tradition, which is still the major way in which Romanian archaeologists imagine their discipline as a science, and address what is seen as unprofessional interpretation and incompatibility with the archaeological record, rejecting the essential attributes of “our ancestors” as explanatory devices. [\[13\]](#)

A few examples. The archaeological representation of the Romanic population in Transylvania during the 6th-7th centuries has been recently shown to be inconsistent and the reliance on technological continuity in order to prove ethnic continuity unjustified (Harhoiu forthcoming); the use of “Geto-Dacian” to describe the Thracian population north of the Danube, generally defended by Romanian archaeologists after the conference given by Karl Strobel at the Bucharest Institute of Archaeology in 1997 (see Strobel 1998 and 1998a), has been under scrutiny, with the conclusion that we should not see behind it a culturally uniform population, having a common language or a common material culture (Vulpe 1998: 5). The uniformity of the Dacians living both inside and outside the Roman province, the idea that the “Free Dacians”, those outside the Roman province, were less “barbarian” and “closer to us”, and that their presence should be understood as comforting for the inhabitants and authorities of the Roman province have been contested (Opreanu 1998: 58-59), as well as the assertions on the “sensibility” and “receptivity” of the *Carpi* towards Roman civilization (Opreanu 1998: 89). The representation of other peoples in the first millennium A.D. has been characterized as xenophobia projected over our entire past, to be linked with the use of ethnic stereotypes for current political interests by nationalist propaganda (Babeş 1990: 21; 1996: 21).

Unfortunately, these reactions come only from few archaeologists and are seldom expressed, not yet conducing to a new archaeological image of the first millennium A.D., which could compete with the established one. This might explain, but only in part, why even some recent schoolbooks, written with good intentions, especially in the direction of limiting the impact of nationalist ideology, perpetuate the nationalist representations. In one of them (B. Teodorescu in Bozgan et al. 1999: 11), the pupils are invited to describe the artefacts, which define the Romanian space – of course, the author is thinking of antiquities, not of Heineken beer cans or other contemporary artefacts – and to look in the local museum or in historical syntheses for similar items.

Then they are invited to write about how the “autochthonous” and the ‘migrators’ lived. Both terms are used as valid concepts, with no comment, in all the schoolbooks I have seen. In the textbook on which most of the attacks from politicians and journalists of several nationalist persuasions concentrated in 1999, because of its bold attempt to eliminate nationalist representations from Romanian history, “migrator” is used, together with the time-honored metaphor of the ‘melting’ of the “migrators” in the mass of local people, and with that, significantly different, of the “melting together” of the Dacians and the Romans (Mitu et al. 1999: 9-11).

The nationalist representation of society should not have much of a future if the past would be recognized as a “foreign country” (Lowenthal 1985). For archaeologists this is not likely to happen without a transformation of the discipline from a collection of special knowledges on antiquities, waiting to be informed by a master narrative, to an independent study of past and present material culture and of its relations with social realities. Then, with all our limitations and biases, we could try to understand ancient societies for what they were being aware of what we have become.

References

- BABEȘ, M. 1990. “Daci sau romani? Etnogeneza românească între știință și plăsmuire”, *Alternative '90* 1(7): 20-21.
- BABEȘ, M. 1996. “Devictis dacis. Consecințele cuceririi traiane în lumina arheologiei”, (I), *Academica* 6(4): 21-22.
- BĂRBULESCU, M., D. DELETANT, K. HITCHINS, S. PAPACOSTEA, and P. TEODOR 1998. *Istoria României*. Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică.
- BÂRZU, L. 1973. *Continuitatea populației autohtone în Transilvania în secolele IV-V (Cimitirul 1 de la Bratei)*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei.
- BÂRZU, L. 1977. *Istoria universală veche. I. Societatea primitivă*. Bucharest: Universitatea din București.
- BÂRZU, L. 1980. *Continuity of the Romanian People's Material and Spiritual Production in the Territory of Former Dacia*. Transl. by Cristina Krikorian. Bucharest: Editura Academiei.
- BÂRZU, L. 1991. “Surse arheologice”. In Ligia Bârză and Stelian Brezeanu, *Originea și continuitatea românilor. Arheologie și tradiție istorică*, 83-230. Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică.
- BICHIR, Gh. 1984. *Geto-dacii din Muntenia în epoca romană*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei.
- BINFORD, L. R. 1962. “Archaeology as Anthropology”. *American Antiquity* 28: 217-225.

- BOZGAN, O., L. LAZĂR, M. STAMATESCU, and B. TEODORESCU 1999. *Istorie. Manual pentru clasa a 12-a*. Bucharest: All Educational.
- CONSTANTINESCU, E.-M. 1999. *Memoria pământului dintre Carpați și Dunăre*. Buzău and Bucharest: Editura "Fiat Lux".
- CURTA, FI. 1994. "The Changing Image of the Early Slavs in the Romanian Historiography and Archaeological Literature: A Critical Survey". *Südost-Forschungen* 53: 225-310.
- DAICOVICIU, C., E. PETROVICI, and Gh. STEFAN 1960. "Formarea limbii și a poporului român". In C. Daicoviciu et al (eds), *Istoria României*, vol. 1, 775-808. Bucharest: Editura Academiei.
- ELLIS, L. 1998. "Terra Deserta": Population, Politics, and the [De]colonization of Dacia". *World Archaeology* 30(2): 220-237.
- GELLNER, E. 1964. *Thought and Change*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- GILLET, O. 2001. *Religie și naționalism. Ideologia Bisericii Ortodoxe Române sub regimul comunist*. Transl. Mariana Petrișor. First published as *Religion et nationalisme. L'idéologie de l'Église orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste*. Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles (1997).
- HARHOIU, R. forthcoming. "Quellenlage und Forschungsstand der Frühgeschichte Siebenbürgens im 6.-7. Jahrhundert". *Dacia* n.s. 43-44 (1999-2000) [2001].
- HERZFELD, M. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. London: Routledge.
- IORGA, N. 1984 [1924]. "'Romania' dunăreană și barbarii în secolul al VI-lea". In idem, *Studii asupra evului mediu românesc*, 29-38. Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică. First published in French in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 3, 1 (1924): 35-50.
- KOHL, Ph. L. 1998. "Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Construction of Nations and the Reconstructions of Remote Past". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27: 223-246.
- LOWENTHAL, D. 1985. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MADGEARU, AI. 1997. *Continuitate și discontinuitate culturală la Dunărea de Jos în secolele VII-VIII*. Bucharest: Editura Universității București.
- MIHAILESCU-BĂRLIBA, L. 1997. Nationalism in Romanian Archaeology up to 1989. *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica* 3-4 (1996-1997): 161-164.
- MITU, S. (co-ordinator), L. COPOERU, O. PECICAN, L. ȚÎRĂU, and V. ȚÎRĂU 1999. *Istoria Românilor. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a*. Bucharest: Editura Sigma.
- OLTEANU, St. 1997. *Societatea carpato-danubiano-pontică în secolele IV-XI. Structuri demoeconomice și social-politice*. Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
- OPREANU, C. H. 1998. *Dacia romană și Barbaricum*. Timișoara: Editura Mirton.

PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, M. (ed.), H. DAICOVICIU, D. Gh. TEODOR, L. BÂRZU, and Fl. PREDA 1995. *Istoria României de la începuturi până în secolul al VIII-lea*. Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

PROTASE, D. 2000. *Autohtonii în Dacia. Vol. 2: Dacia postromană până la slavi*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Risoprint.

SAVESCU, N. 2001. Originea rasei umane: cei zece Adami și cele optsprezece Eve. Available at <http://www.iatp.md/dava/Dava2/Savescu_org/savescu_org.html>.

STROBEL, K. 1998. "Dacii. Despre complexitatea mărimilor etnice, politice și culturale ale istoriei spațiului Dunării de Jos" (I). *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie* 49, 1: 61-95.

STROBEL, K. 1998a. "Dacii. Despre complexitatea mărimilor etnice, politice și culturale ale istoriei spațiului Dunării de Jos" (II). *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie* 49, 2: 207-227.

TEODOR, D. Gh. 1995. "Quelques considérations sur la population daco-romaine et ancienne roumaine au nord du Bas-Danube aux IV^e-X^e siècles". *Dacia* n.s. 38-39: 357-363.

TEODOR, D. Gh. 1997. *Descoperiri arheologice și numismatice la est de Carpați în secolele V-XI*. Bucurest: Muzeul Național de Istorie a României.

TEODORESCU, V., D. LICHARDOPOL, M. PENEȘ, and V. SANDU 1993 [1983]. "Așezarea daco-romana din sec. IV-V de la Cireșanu, jud Prahova". *Materiale și cercetări arheologice. A XVII-a sesiune anuală de rapoarte Ploiești, 1983* (II): 389-416.

VERDERY, K. 1994. *Compromis și rezistență. Cultura română sub Ceaușescu*. Transl. by Mona Antohi and Sorin Antohi. Bucharest: Humanitas 1994. First published as *National Ideology under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1991).

VULPE, Al. 1998. "Geto-dacii?" *CICSA* 1998 (1-2): 2-11.

ZAHARIA, E. 1995. "La Station No. 2 de Bratei, dép. de Sibiu (VI^e-VIII^e siècles)". *Dacia* n.s. 38-39: 297-356.

ZUGRAVU, N. 1997. *Geneza creștinismului primitiv al românilor*. Bucharest: Vavila Edinf SRL.

[1] "Les sources archéologiques se distinguent par leur caractère entièrement authentique et permanent. Ce sont les plus authentiques témoignages sur la vie de chaque homme et de chaque peuple, sans égard aux conditions de leur développement socio-économique".

[2] For instance, Alexandru Madgearu (1997: 129) thinks that "an anthropological study of the first 125 skeletons found in the cemetery of Izvoru", showing that most of them have a "mediterranean or pontic nuance" character, supports his belief that these graves belonged to a Christian population, probably of Romanic origin.

[3] I do not think "creative nationalism" is what archaeology needs, as does Mihăilescu-Bârliba 1997: 164, associating it with "real patriotism" and deploring the effects of political pressure before 1989 on both. The difficulties of an open

discussion about nationalism in Romanian archaeology today are evident in this article, where protochronistic constructions and extreme positions are incriminated, but where only one archaeologist, a marginal one, precisely because of her protochronistic interpretations, is cited. This creates the impression that the discipline had to suffer mostly from the threat of politically supported amateurs.

[4] For the competition between groups offering different images of the nation in the '70s and the '80s, see Verdery 1994.

[5] The emphasis on identity and on the lack of social differentiation is present also in the concept of “folk *Romaniae*”, ethnic societies of the autochthonous population, grouping village communities, imagined by the historian Nicolae Iorga (1984) and very popular among the archaeologists (Teodor 1995: 362; Teodor 1997: 32; Olteanu 1997: 304; Madgearu 1997: 161-165).

[6] For Romanization as a “popular phenomenon” outside the Roman province, see Protase 2000: 82.

[7] Gh. Bichir (1984: 100) suggests that both the culture of the Dacians from the Roman province and that of the so-called “Free Dacians”, supposed to inhabit densely the rest of the future Romanian national territory, should be named “Dacian culture”.

[8] An American archaeologist, who has been in contact with Romanian colleagues for a long time, finds the concept “migratory peoples” appropriate (Ellis 1998: 230), and uses a remarkable notion, “transitory populations” (Ellis 1998: 220, 221), which pushes their inconsistency to an extreme which meets the local nationalist representation of ancient societies.

[9] A more comprehensive version, featured as “premises”, is very popular in high school textbooks. In one of them, the “premises of the ethnogenesis” are produced by “the Greek poleis, the warrior tribes of the Celts, of the Dacians, the Roman society, the migratory Slavs, all naturally incorporated in the great historical tradition of our people” (B. Teodorescu in Bozgan 1999: 13).

[10] Abstracts of some of the papers can be found at <<http://www.dacia.org>>. The views of the enthusiastic organizer are extreme: “When will our historians wake up and accept the origin of our Carpatho-Danubian people as being the one which gave birth to the modern European people (sic!), when will the fairy tale of the Romanization of the Dacian population end, when will they too accept the truth: the Carpatho-Danubian space is the hearth of Old Europe, and our people is the oldest European people”. (Săvescu 2001). On Romanian protochronism see Verdery 1994: 152-204.

[11] The awkward task of finding new interpretations supporting established facts about the beginnings of the nation following a nationalist representation of society is pursued usually without using the Romanian literature which tries to conceptualize it as social science. The references are almost exclusively made to historical writings, where it appears as the incontrovertible product of comprehensive investigations.

[12] On the Romanian Orthodox Church and nationalism see Gillet 2001, esp. 133-189. The support of the Romanian Orthodox Church for the view that the Dacians were Christianized by Saint Andrew is not commonly shared by historians and archaeologists – for a recent critique of this view see Zugravu 1997: 143-174 – whereas the views on “popular Christianisation” are not supported by the church.

[13] I do not include in these reactions the different attempts to update the nationalist representation of past by making it less aggressive, more flexible, and by abandoning some of the established interpretations. Thus Alexandru Madgearu distinguishes between “cultural”, “ethnic” and “inhabiting” continuity considering the indiscriminate discourse on “continuity” a propaganda cliché, (Madgearu 1997: 7); he also admits a partial cultural and ethnic discontinuity in the 7th-8th centuries on the future Romanian national territory, with micro-regions in which Romanic population was preserved, as core areas of Romanian expansion in the whole territory that was once Romanic (Madgearu 1997: 197). Likewise, Nelu Zugravu writes about the receptivity of the Germans to Roman culture (Zugravu 1997: 332) and estimates that the territory south and east of the Carpathians was ethnically, linguistically and culturally heterogenous in the fourth century (Zugravu 1997: 325).