

Vincze Zoltán, *A kolozsvári régészeti iskola a Pósta Béla-korszakban (1899–1919)* [The archaeological school of Cluj during the Béla Pósta era (1899–1919)], Eme Kiadó, Kolozsvár 2014, 812 pages.\*

Zoltán Vincze's extensive monograph on the archaeological school of Cluj<sup>1</sup>, established and led by Béla Pósta during the first two decades of the last century, was published in 2014, and is a most timely and welcome book. The monumental volume, both in terms of length (812 pages) and informational value represents the culmination of a two decade-long documentary effort. It follows a long line of articles on the subject, published by the author in different media, ranging from academic and cultural journals to less formal popularizing forums<sup>2</sup>. During this time the author has emerged as a leading scholar in the history of Transylvanian archaeological research. Unsurprisingly the author has opted for a predominantly biographical dimension, whereby the most noteworthy aspects of the life and activity of Pósta, and to a certain degree his disciples within the respective timespan, are thoroughly discussed. The result is a comprehensive account of the scholarly and cultural movement headed by Pósta and its impact on the local and international scientific community as well as on Transylvanian society as a whole.

The work is centred on the history of two pivotal institutions of the time: the Transylvanian Museum Society's Collection of Coins and Antiquities, and the Numismatics and Archaeology Institute of the Franz Josef University, both based in Cluj and both headed by Pósta during these two decades. With over 30000 artefacts, in addition to some 15000–20000 coins in 1899, the Transylvanian Museum Society possessed by far the most consistent collection of antiquities in the region, becoming the foundation for the exhibitions of the National Museum of Transylvania. The Numismatics and Archaeology Institute, reuniting Pósta and his first generation students, István Kovács, Árpád Buday and Márton Roska, became the first archaeological research establishment in this part of the country. The bilingual Hungarian-French language journal of the Institute: *Dolgozatok - Travaux* (*Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából / Travaux de la section numismatique et archéologique du Musée de Transylvanie*)<sup>3</sup> published biannually between 1910 and 1919 became a much sought-after periodical throughout the museums and research institutes of Europe.

The book is structured in ten chapters in addition to a rich selection of transcribed documentary sources, comprising of 112 letters and other documents, index of names and places as well as abstracts in Romanian and English. The opening of the first

---

\* This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of National Education, CNCS-UEFISCDI, no. PN-II-ID-PCE-2012-4-0618.

<sup>1</sup> Official name of the city up to 1974, currently Cluj-Napoca.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Vincze 2002; Vincze 2003; Vincze 2004; Vincze 2009; Pósta 2013.

<sup>3</sup> For the issues of the journal see: <http://epa.oszk.hu/html/vgi/kardexlap.phtml?id=1580> (26.10.2015).

chapter deals with the antiquarian and archaeological activities prior to 1899, especially the foundation of the Transylvanian Museum Society (Erdélyi Múzeum-Egylet) in 1859, which can be viewed as the starting point of institutionalized archaeological research in the area. It is in this section that we also learn about the foregoing career of Pósta during his years at the University of Budapest and the Hungarian National Museum. The next chapters thoroughly scrutinize various aspects of Pósta's pursuits in Cluj, with emphasis on the ceaseless efforts aimed at the infrastructural development of the abovementioned institutions, the training of his students and their evolution from apprenticeship to partnership with their mentor. The next chapters are dedicated to the development of the antiquities collection, research activity of the Institute and Pósta's widespread efforts aimed at the creation of museums across the eastern half of the country as an inspector for the National Inspectorate for Museums and Libraries. The last section covers the personal and public life of Pósta, the effects of World War I on the functioning of the two institutions, ending with the dissolution of the first archaeological school from Cluj and an assessment of its legacy.

The core argument of the book centres on the pivotal role played by Pósta in establishing and managing the archaeological school from Cluj which throughout its two decade long history eventually developed into a genuine cultural and scientific movement. It is hence called for to outline briefly the organizational, pedagogical and scholarly activity of Pósta. Born in Kecskemét in 1862, he was introduced to archaeology by Károly Torma Transylvanian jurist, archaeologist and epigraphist at the University of Budapest. After a period spent as custodian of the collection of antiquities at the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, he was named head of the newly founded Department of Archaeology at the Franz Josef University of Cluj and director of the Transylvanian Museum Society's collection of antiquities. The archaeology department was created to boost the training of professional archaeologists across the country and thus alleviate the acute lack of specialised personnel in the growing number of local museums. Subsequent to the passing of his predecessor Henrik Finály in 1898, Pósta assumed his office as head of department and director of the antiquities' collection the following year. Right from the outset, his priorities were twofold: the formation of a team of specialists set out to undertake comprehensive archaeological investigations in Transylvania, as well as to acquire a proper venue for the storage and exhibition of the antiquities' collection. With regard to the training of young specialists, the results were both fast and pervasive, the excavations carried out by his students from 1900 onwards laid the foundation of professional archaeology in the region and prompted the reinterpretation of the early history of Transylvania, especially concerning the Migration and Early Medieval Period<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately the same cannot be said in the case of the antiquities' collection, which changed locations on numerous occasions during these two decades without settling down definitely. The onset of World War I all but paralysed the activity of the institutions headed by Pósta since with the exception of Árpád Buday, all of his students and young colleagues were drafted for military service, with two of them, Balázs Létay and János Gulyás being killed in action during the Battle of Galicia. Eventually, the passing of Béla Pósta in

<sup>4</sup> See Gáll 2010, 293–306.

the months following the conclusion of the armed hostilities, in April 1919, brought to an end the first archaeological school of Cluj.

Interest in the history of Transylvanian archaeology has never been particularly high among historians and archaeologists of this region, however during the last years it has witnessed a gradual intensification. A serious disincentive in this case is partly determined by the language barrier, the overwhelming majority of the sources being in Hungarian, as are the publications on the subject. Besides the author of the currently considered book, the work of István Bajusz<sup>5</sup> and Erwin Gáll<sup>6</sup> should be mentioned here. Notwithstanding the undoubtable merits of the studies hitherto written on the subject, they present an overwhelmingly cultural-historical perspective, without effectively integrating the connections between the archaeological discourse and its inherent ideological background. Studies written on the evolution of western archaeology have pointed out close ties between archaeological agendas and their scientific output on one hand and their political, economic and social context on the other<sup>7</sup>. Based on this theoretical framework, future investigations should explore the possible connections between the early phases of archaeological research in the region, the leading ideological movements in Europe at the time, and the local political projects and aspirations which were shaped in the political, economic and social context of Transylvania. The book contains some quite rich data in this regard which could be at some point elaborated into an analysis according to the abovementioned approach. Zoltán Vincze's book is undoubtedly a milestone in the history of Transylvanian archaeology, which anticipates a considerable upsurge in the research of this subject. Nevertheless the integration of ideological criteria in future studies has the potential of providing a better understanding or even a reinterpretation of certain cultural and scientific phenomena.

Dávid Petruț

Mureș County Museum, Târgu Mureș  
petrutdavid@gmail.com

### Bibliography

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Bajusz 2005 | I. Bajusz, Téglás István Jegyzetei. Régészeti Feljegyzések, 1-2, Kolozsvár 2005.  |
| Gáll 2010   | E. Gáll, Márton Roska (1880-1961) și cercetarea arheologică a secolelor X-XI, SCIVA, 61, 3-4, 2010, 281-306.  |
| Gáll 2012   | E. Gáll, Márton Roska and archaeology in Transylvania: from early 20 <sup>th</sup> to 21 <sup>st</sup> century. Some critical notes to the Hungarian-Armenian scholar's early medieval studies and recent evolution of archaeology in Transylvania, Acta Archaeologica Carpathica, 47, 2012, 127-165. |

<sup>5</sup> Bajusz 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Gáll 2010; Gáll 2012; Gáll 2013; Gáll 2014.

<sup>7</sup> See Trigger 1984, 356.

- Gáll 2013 E. Gáll, *Márton Roska (1880–1961) and the archaeological research of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries*, Acta Eurasiatica, 1, 2013, 74–104.
- Gáll 2014 E. Gáll, *Precursorii arheologiei profesionale din Transilvania. Gábor Téglás*, SCIVA, 65, 3–4, 2014, 219–293.
- Pósta 2013 B. Pósta, *Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárának története*, Sajtó alá rendezte Vincze Zoltán, Kolozsvár 2013.
- Trigger 1984 Br. Trigger, *Alternative archaeologies: nationalist, colonialist, imperialist*, Man, N. S., 19, 3, 1984, 355–370.
- Vincze 2002 Z. Vincze, *Pósta Béla-iratok az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárának levéltárában*, ErdMuz, LXIV, 2002, 1–2, 25–44.
- Vincze 2003 Z. Vincze, *A keleti Intézet Pósta Béla-i terve*. In: A. W. Kovács, G. Sipos, R. Wolf, A. S. Pál (eds.), *Emlékkönyv Kiss András születésének a nyolcvanadik évfordulójára*, Kolozsvár 2003, 640–657.
- Vincze 2004 Z. Vincze, *Pósta Béla és tanítványai*, Korunk, 7, 2004, 58–73.
- Vincze 2009 Z. Vincze, *Az Érem- és Régiségtár*. In: G. Sipos (ed.), *Az Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület gyűjteményei*, Kolozsvár 2009, 69–136.