

ARCHAEOLOGY, NATIONALISM AND “THE HISTORY OF THE ROMANIANS” (2001)¹

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The recent publication of a “History of the Romanians” (*Istoria Românilor*), which starts with the Paleolithic, offers a good opportunity for examining how archaeological data and interpretations are used in a narrative about the origins of a nation, in changing political and ideological circumstances.²

The “History of the Romanians” presents itself as the apex of Romanian historical and archaeological research, in a long tradition of national histories which started before the birth of the Romanian national state and continued with the works of A. D. Xenopol, N. Iorga and C. C. Giurescu. This tradition continued after World War II with the work published in 1960-1964 under the aegis of a Romanian Academy “reformed” by the Communist leadership of the country, and stopped with volume IV, mostly because of the rapidly changing views on Romania’s recent past. A new version was planned in the second half of the 1970s and stopped in 1980³ when the authors of the first volume refused to comply with the view of the national past favored by an influent part of the Communist leadership. One of the editors of the 3rd volume sees the “History of the Romanians” as “the editing of a continuously renewed old project”⁴, words in which, following Z. Bauman’s thoughts⁵ (1992: 684-686), an imperative of nationalism can be recognized: the outcome of research on the origins of the nation has to be what we already knew.

If we compare the first three volumes of the “History of the Romanians” with the relevant literature from the 1980s, the continuity is unmistakable. There is almost no change in the depiction of the origins of the nation and this shows

...the absence of a long-term regeneration effort, of debates and recuperation projects, of a systematic effort to detect and mend the lacunae of Romanian historiography.⁶

Many of the texts intended for the project aborted in 1980 were recycled for the “History of the Romanians”. At a meeting for the setting up of the redactional collectives in 1994, Ștefan Pascu declared that the third volume was “already written”⁷ and in 1995 Răzvan Theodorescu summoned the authors of

¹ A version of this paper was presented as a lecture at the Institute of Archaeology “Vasile Pârvan” in May 2003. I am grateful to my colleagues for their comments and support.

² I will follow the narrative of the national past, presented in the first two volumes and in an important part of the third, all supposedly built mainly on archaeological data, up to the 14th century, when the principalities of Walachia and Moldavia came into being.

³ M. Babeș, *Mitteilungen des Humboldt-Clubs Rumänien* 6, 2002, p. 9; O. Iliescu, *Revista* 22 13, 39 (655), 2002, p. 6–7.

⁴ R. Theodorescu, in Șt. Pascu and R. Theodorescu (eds.), *Istoria Românilor III. Genezele românești*, Bucharest, 2001 (hereafter *IR3*), p. x.

⁵ Z. Bauman, *Sociological Review* 40, 4, 1992, p. 685–686.

⁶ Ș. Papacostea, *Revista* 22 13, 10 (626), 2002. This stagnation astonishes G. Schramm, who is interested in the problem of Romanic continuity: “Im übrigen kenne ich in einem zeitlich und räumlich weitgesteckten Kreis von historischen Themen, mit denen ich mich ein Forscherleben lang vertraut gemacht habe, keinen anderen Bereich, wo mit ähnlicher Monotonie in immer neuen Publikationen stets dasselbe behauptet wird, ohne daß neue Argumente entdeckt oder Detailkorrekturen vorgenommen würden” (*Ein Damm bricht. Die römische Donaугrenze und die Invasionen des 5.-7. Jahrhunderts im Lichte von Namen und Wörtern*, München, 1997, p. 283).

⁷ P. Alexandrescu, *Revista* 22 13, 18 (634), 2002, p. 12.

the same volume and established as a principle that the old texts should be revised by the authors and, eventually, “updated”⁸.

This continuity allows the recognition of attributes shared by the historiography from the last two decades of Ceaușescu’s dictatorship, a regime which was particularly interested in legitimating itself by the use of the national past and which mobilized for that purpose the whole range of ideological and academic, teaching and research institutions of the state. It corresponds to the continuity of the political and economic power in Romania after 1989, held, as in other Eastern and Central European countries, by the former nomenklatura, lower level Party officials, secret police and personnel attached to the administration of Party assets, as well as managers of the socialist economy and entrepreneurs of the informal one. This continuity was in many ways concealed during the “transition period,” marked by the building of democratic institutions and of a market economy, apparently a clean break with the Communist past. In these circumstances nationalist ideology proved to be most appropriate for facilitating the turning of the old politically and economically dominant groups into the new ones. It had the peculiar property of being both a sign of continuity with the last two decades of the Communist regime, and of renewal, of bringing alive an idealized pre-World War II Romania, hence its appeal for the revived “historical parties”,⁹ and it has allowed those who have made careers by “defending national interests” to justify the positions held during the Communist dictatorship and to keep them after 1989, by defending the fiction of the incompatibility between communism and nationalism.

After lingering a few years in an atmosphere of relative indifference and skepticism about the purpose of a new grand book on national history, the project, initiated in 1993, became suddenly a priority in 1999 when the institutes were pressured to produce the necessary texts, the Academy going as far as to condition long overdue salary raises with their “delivery.” This change of pace might be related to the introduction in the same year of alternative high-school history textbooks by the Democratic Convention government, a coalition of pro-market and pro-European parties, which has won the elections in 1996 and lost them in 2000. The opposition, especially the nationalist Greater Romania Party, but also the leading force in Romanian politics between 2000 and 2004, the Social Democratic Party, both linked with the former Communist elite, reacted unfavorably¹⁰ and sometimes angrily. Fearing that some historians were becoming irresponsible towards our nation, some public figures requested from the Romanian Academy, “the highest forum of science and culture,” a comprehensive and “true” synthesis of national history. The Romanian Academy accepted the legitimacy of alternative textbooks, but repeatedly criticized one of them and the curriculum because, instead of starting from “the necessities of *national education* (original emphasis), they mechanically implemented external models”¹¹. One introductory text to the “History of the Romanians” mentions “the denigration of historical personalities” (in the alternative textbooks), thus situating the work in position of temperate patriotism, and “the exaggerations of the ‘demythologization’”¹², an allusion to the work of Lucian Boia, a professor in the History Department of Bucharest University, who, in several books¹³, has successfully attempted to prove the mythical nature of much of the academic knowledge about the Romanian past, especially of that on the origins of the nation.

⁸ O. Iliescu, *Revista* 22 13, 39 (655), 2002, p. 6.

⁹ On nationalism in Romania immediately after 1989 see K. Verdery, *Slavic Review* 52, 1993, 2, p. 179–204, reprinted in eadem, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next*, Princeton, 1996, p. 83–103.

¹⁰ For a chronological presentation the alternative textbooks debate, see O. Pecican, *Observator cultural* 99, 2002, p. 7–12.

¹¹ D. Berindei, *Academica* 9, 12 (108), 1999, p. 1 and 14.

¹² D. Berindei, in M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița and A. Vulpe(eds). *Istoria românilor, I. Moștenirea timpurilor îndepărtate*, Bucharest, 2001 (hereafter *IR1*), p. xix.

¹³ See especially *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, Bucharest, 1997. Second edition, Bucharest, 2000. English edition, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Budapest, 2001.

The authors of the "History of the Romanians" define their view on national history also against the version of the purely Dacian origins of the Romanian nation, particularly influential in the 1980s, when it was supported by some of Communist Party leaders, and promoted by people from its Institute of History. "Thracomania," as it is usually called in the Romanian academic environment, traces the origins of the Romanian nation – and eventually of all European civilization -- to the Dacians, and presents the Romans as conquerors and foreigners. It has a long history, starting in the 19th century¹⁴ and in recent years it is noisily advocated by an organization, *Dacia Revival International Society*, led by a US based physician, Napoleon Săvescu, who claims, using misinterpretations of ancient DNA, that the Dacians are the matrix of all European peoples.¹⁵ In the few attempts after 1989 to examine nationalism in Romanian archaeology, such "excesses," seen as some of the worst consequences of the Communist Party's control over historical and archaeological research during the 1980s, were the main, if not the only target¹⁶, reinforcing a widespread distinction between "good" and "bad" nationalism. The "History of the Romanians" rejects Thracomania. The historians who have resisted giving a bad treatment to the Romans are praised for their patriotism¹⁷.

The "History of the Romanians" is justified by its importance for the nation, its proportions and quality. In his introduction, the president of the Romanian Academy exhibits an irritated defensiveness: "Why ...a ten volume Handbook about a history with already too many myths and too many statues, and far too many heroes which prevent us from entering Europe!? ... [t]he Romanians deserve an integral history, neither mythicized, nor minimized; written, as Braudel demanded, with *exigent passion*"¹⁸.

The head of the Historical Sciences and Archaeology Section of the Romanian Academy, Dan Berindei, argues in his introduction that in the contemporary process of reducing the distances between the peoples we have to "preserve our distinguishing traits... in order to enter the big round dance of the European nations... with our spiritual dowry." The Romanians need their national history; without it, they would be "gravely affected by the complicated and complex processes facing them"¹⁹. The "History of the Romanians" addresses "a necessity of our society," it accomplishes "the mission history has to bind of the citizens of Romania together, and it is "beneficial...for the complex process of transition we are living, for the normalization and stability we hope to see established"²⁰.

The "History of the Romanians" is presented as an "ample synthesis, ...the result of the information from the sources and of the works of interpretation offered by our modern and contemporary historiography after an evolution of 200 years," written by the "best specialists"²¹ and as a fruit of recently gained freedom, which makes possible this "synthesis of the achievements of national historiography, ...without any political conditioning, ...in the spirit of historical truth"²². The emphasis on "specialists" can be understood as a reaction against Thracomania, but also as an assertion of the authority of those authorized by the state to write about the origins of the nation. "Specialists" in Romanian archaeology deserve a closer look. Employed by the state in appropriate positions they are empowered to speak about their field²³, but, in the absence of an institutionalized qualitative evaluation

¹⁴ K. Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*. Berkeley, 1991, p. 36–40; L. Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, Bucharest, 1997, p. 101–107.

¹⁵ Statements, articles, papers presented at the "International Congresses of Dacology" are available at <http://www.dacia.org>.

¹⁶ As it happens with L. Mihăilescu-Bârliba, *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica* 3–4, 1997, p. 161–164.

¹⁷ D. Berindei, in *IR1*, p. xix.

¹⁸ E. Simion, in *IR1*, p. xiii–xiv.

¹⁹ D. Berindei, in *IR1*, p. xvii.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. xix.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. xviii.

²² *Ibidem*, p. xix.

²³ I am inspired here by E. Said's thought: "...giving up to specialization is, I have always felt, laziness, so you end up doing what others tell you, because that is your specialty after all." (*Representations of the Intellectual*. London, 1994, p. 77)

of their work, their level of professionalism is almost entirely dependent on personal initiative and dedication, and is variably related to social recognition. This situation explains the differences in quality between the volumes and the chapters of the “History of the Romanians”.

The responsibility of coordinating tens of historians and archaeologists was assumed for each volume by two coordinators and an editorial secretary. Together with the editors of the whole series they have attempted “to solve difficult situations...in order to ensure an unitary, relatively similar and organized character to the volumes”²⁴. Dan Berindei finds that the main impediments the project had to overcome included insufficient funding and “the weakening of the links between the Academy and the research institutes, chapter authors being recruited only of their free will”²⁵.

To accommodate differences of opinion, the coordinators of the first volume²⁶ found the following solution: “the different interpretations” are introduced with expressions such as “the author of these lines believes....” While this might be a progress compared to the authoritative writing disguised as collective authorship of the 1980s, this solution would have us believe that whenever this expression is missing we are not reading an interpretation but “historical truth.”

In the published reactions to the “History of the Romanians”²⁷ the most discussed problem is that of the use made, especially in volumes 3 and 4, of the texts prepared for the version aborted in 1980 and of previously published literature. An official answer of the Romanian Academy to the accusations of Ș. Papacostea²⁸ presents how volume 4 was made: the editors have used parts of the chapters written for the version abandoned in 1980 and articles written by their authors afterwards, “without being able to specify the paternity of each fragment,” their names being mentioned in the foreword to the volume and the bibliographies to each chapter. This blatant infringement on authorship rights appears to the authors of this answer somewhat natural and the use of the name of another author for a text written by Ș. Papacostea, who refused to take part in the project, just a “regrettable negligence.”

Several authors to the second and the third volumes have discovered in their texts interventions they did not approve, or sometimes did not recognize the text published under their name as theirs. Especially in the third volume there are chapters attributed to several authors which appear to the reader as having been written only by one of them, Șt. Olteanu. A shocking decision was to associate R. Popa, who died in 1993, as coauthor with Șt. Pascu and Șt. Olteanu although, in one of the few direct attacks against the local ideologized tradition of writing history, Popa had chosen their works as targets²⁹. Therefore we can be only more or less certain that the texts of the “History of the Romanians” were indeed written by the named authors. Nevertheless this is often obviously the case and my references always indicate the authors as published.

The choice of “History of Romanians” as a title for the whole series, not particularly popular among the archaeologists from my institute, is justified in one of the introductory texts by the fact that pre-World War II similar works had this title, which allows the historians to take into account “the history of the entire nation, both within the state and outside the borders”³⁰.

Since the authors do not mention the Romanians until towards the end of the second volume, what justifies the use of the title “The History of the Romanians” for the first, what can a history of the Romanian national territory before the Romanians³¹ mean? The million years covered by the first part of

²⁴ D. Berindei, in *IRI*, p. xviii.

²⁵ Idem, loc. cit.

²⁶ M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița and A. Vulpe, in *IRI*, p. xxii.

²⁷ E.g. Ș. Papacostea, *op. cit.*, O. Iliescu, *op. cit.*, P. Alexandrescu, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Biroul de presă al Academiei Române. Comitetul de redacție al volumului IV la Tratatului de Istoria Românilor, *Revista* 22 13, 14(630), p. 10.

²⁹ R. Popa, *SCIVA* 42, 1991, 3-4, p. 153-188.

³⁰ D. Berindei, in *IRI*, p. xviii.

³¹ The confrontation with this problem has led to solutions such as the title used by Jean Guilaine (*La France d'avant la France. Du néolithique à l'âge du fer*, Paris, 1980) or the subtitle chosen by Herwig Wolfram (*Die Geburt Mitteleuropas. Geschichte Österreichs vor seiner Entstehung: 378-907*. Vienna, 1987).

the first volume are thought to be of paramount importance for the history of Romania, as "the foundation of the whole building of the subsequent evolution," as "the inheritance of the past, without which the subsequent evolution of the history of the Romanian people, from the Middle Ages to the present, would not be understood"³². There is no elaboration on what was inherited and on how this has shaped the Romanian nation, but the construction and the content of the first volumes of the "History of the Romanians" show that indeed the nation was born before its birth.

The national territory

We learn from an introductory text that in the first chapter we will find the "geographic characterization of the territory and population of Romania, valid for all the volumes"³³. The territory of Romania is presented a natural unity, its "geomorphologic, hydrographic, pedologic particularities" explaining both "the unitary aspect of this part of Europe ...[and] the interference of influences exerted from the outside." It has a personality of its own, "traits of unity seldom encountered," a product of "the diversity of component parts," of their "complementary relations"³⁴. It is a national territory and the geographer explains what this means: "[t]he territory of a nation represents the basis for a whole system of relations of mutual determination affecting all human activities"; it is "the stage on which, step by step, the history of a people takes place," and, as it can be hostile, the inhabitants have to cope with it, "not only with other human groups, a confrontation inherent in the fabric of history..."³⁵.

The relationship between the territory and "the people of the land" is one of "complex brotherhood" which allows "infinite possibilities of defense, of finding shelter, of regrouping in less accessible lands, in order to face migrations and invasions..." Hence, for "an ancient people, anchored in the same lands, like the Romanian people, the national territory is an integral part of its very existence," and this is "the deep meaning of life, with an ancient stock of rural traditions, of the European peoples, with autochthonous roots which descend, through ancestors, to ancient times"³⁶.

Thus the geographical introduction starts the volume with a clear cut, essential, distinction between the autochthonous population, to whom "[t]he territory is not...an external element, foreign to the being of the people inhabiting it," and "the human groups recently arrived from other lands"³⁷. This distinction organizes the entire national prehistory and the geographer introduces some of the *topoi* which will be at work in the "History of the Romanians". For example, the plains are presented as exposed to invasions and war expeditions, "however, the shepherds... and the farmers consistently returned immediately after the danger was over, because the newcomers themselves needed food..."³⁸. The national territory appears to the geographer as a defensive matrix for the Romanians, with "an intra-Carpathic enclosure, ...well defended to the East and the South by the mountains..." and with plains "more endangered by the invasions," with stronger and weaker spots, easier or harder to defend³⁹.

The national territory will be the geographical framework from now on, regardless of the relevance current national borders might have had in the past. The authors name it "the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic space," or employ the shorter form "the Carpatho-Danubian space" which, we are told, "logically implies ...Pontic"⁴⁰.

³² M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița and A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. xxi

³³ *Idem*, loc. cit.

³⁴ V. Tufescu, in *IR1*, p. 5.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 3-4.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița and A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. xxi.

The frame of the national boundaries is supported by the use of the maps throughout the volumes, almost⁴¹ all of them outlining the territory of present-day Romania. In many periods “Romanian” archaeological phenomena have areas which extend outside the Romanian national territory; they are “nationalized” by the use of local names, and since this is also the practice in the neighboring countries, we are confronted with a plethora of name-strings which refer to the same archaeological phenomena and coalesce the national ambitions which have developed about their area.

Archaeology

Archaeology is defined as:

a discipline with its own methods, which... had the task of completing the data from the written sources, and, when these are missing, is the only source of information about extinct prehistoric populations...⁴².

The dominant attitude about how sources of different natures should be used by the historian or the archaeologist stems from the idea that the “[written] sources interweave... harmoniously with the archaeological ones, thus contributing to a better approach to the historical phenomenon...”⁴³. Therefore mixed argumentation, the use of knowledge produced in various disciplines, represented as “historical evidence,” without a proper consideration of its paradigmatic context⁴⁴, appears as a must: “the confrontation of [the written sources] with other source categories, whenever this is possible, is somewhat mandatory in the determination as correctly as possible of the facts”⁴⁵. A few of the authors, it should be noted, are aware of the dangers. A. Vulpe warns about the mixing of the methods of archaeology and history, because they have different “probability coefficients” and because “there is nothing to justify the interpretation of the historical data as a premise for ordering the archaeological material”⁴⁶. M. Babeș⁴⁷ voices a similar opinion. When writing about the identification of the *Bastarnae* with the Poienesti-Lukaševka culture, he mentions the independent analyses of the written sources and of the archaeological record leading to this interpretation.

Archaeology as a provider of historical information when better sources are missing is an outcome of a long local tradition: in Romania all the archaeological teaching at university level is done in History departments. Archaeology is not taught as an autonomous discipline and, although after 1989 the number of archaeology courses has increased in many old and new Romanian universities, this has brought no visible change in the status of the discipline: archaeology is an auxiliary to history. With a historian’s goals, the archaeologist is supposed to combine digging and analytical techniques with “historical thinking” in writings where the specificity of the approach is limited to description, typology and chronology, the interest for the social realities being usually limited to the detection of ancient identities, thought to explain everything else of importance.

Whereas in other paradigms the archaeological knowledge about society is built on theories linking material culture with social realities, in the paradigm at work in Romania archaeologists are supposed to use the ancient authors to understand the ancient societies, whenever this is possible. The social sciences

⁴¹ There are few exceptions. In volume 1: A. Vulpe, p. 242, fig. 34 – four maps illustrating theories about the origin and the spread of the Indo-Europeans; A. Avram: p. 536, fig. 96 – a map of the Greek colonies from the Black Sea region; in volume 2: A. Suceveanu and A. Rădulescu: p. 293, Fig. 26 – a map of the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire in the 2nd-3rd centuries.

⁴² M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița, in *IR1*, p. 43.

⁴³ D. Protase, in D. Protase and A. Suceveanu (eds.), *Istoria Românilor. II. Daco-romani, romanici, alogeni*, Bucharest, 2001 (hereafter *IR2*), p. 5.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of this subject see R. Wenskus, in H. Jankuhn and R. Wenskus (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und Archäologie*, Sigmaringen, 1979, p. 637–657.

⁴⁵ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 399.

⁴⁷ In *IR1*, p. 525.

are usually ignored, the few remnants of the kind of Marxism imposed in Romania by the Soviet occupation being of little consequence. The role of the social sciences is played by the common knowledge about society, structured by nationalist representations.

There are few statements about society in the "History of the Romanians"; one of them – published twice, in identical form, which makes clear that its author is Șt. Olteanu – declares the separation of humanity in groups

intrinsic to the human being, as old as humanity itself, stemming from the security feeling issued from the grouping of people, both for productive activities, and for the common defense against the natural elements or against enemies of all kind who might endanger their lives⁴⁸.

The importance of archaeology for the reconstruction of the past varies. It is particularly important for the crucial period after the abandonment of the Roman province of Dacia in AD 271 because it produces "direct evidence"⁴⁹ and offers "indisputable documents" about the continuity about the "Daco-Romans"⁵⁰, whereas the written sources stubbornly mention only "migrators" on the future national territory. We learn from the same author, however, that the historian encounters great difficulties in reconstructing the way of life and the social-economic structures of the indigenous population after the withdrawal of the Romans because he has "to rely on data, frequently vague and incomplete, which archaeology and numismatics can offer"⁵¹.

Nevertheless, when needed, archaeological data can be more reliable than written sources. For instance, we are told that the written sources on the 5th-7th centuries contain "errors" -- by which confusions between our ancestors and the "migratory peoples" are usually meant – that the archaeological research is supposed to be able to "correct"⁵². The archaeological sources, as "direct sources," by "their materiality"⁵³, do not deceive as the written sources do: Șt. Pascu states that the information offered by the archaeological excavations have a value of main historical source, because most of the written sources about the 7th-14th centuries do not come from the Romanian environment, which diminishes their value, especially when they contain "faulty or tendentious interpretations." The archaeological sources complete in many cases the written information, "correcting it veridically"⁵⁴. They are most relevant because of their authenticity⁵⁵ and offer "a credible, concrete image of the material and spiritual culture values, ... of these territories"⁵⁶.

Archaeological cultures

The main task of archaeological research appears to be the separation of "our ancestors" from other people, usually following the assumption – embedded in the use of the "archaeological culture" concept – that we are able to recognize them in the archaeological record because peoples "have" distinctive cultures. Attempts to define the notion of "archaeological culture" are to be found only in the first volume and most of them, if not all, belong to A. Vulpe:

⁴⁸ Șt. Olteanu, M. Rusu and R. Popa, in *IR3*, p. 94 and Șt. Pascu, Șt. Olteanu, D. Gh. Teodor and O. Iliescu, in *IR3*, p. 149.

⁴⁹ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 259.

⁵⁰ Idem, in *IR2*, p. 555.

⁵¹ Idem in *IR2*, p. 581.

⁵² D. Gh. Teodor, in *IR2*, 641, 725, 729–730.

⁵³ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 605.

⁵⁴ In *IR3*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ E. Zaharia, D. Gh. Teodor and R. Theodorescu, in *IR3*, p. 288.

⁵⁶ M. Rusu, Șt. Olteanu, R. Popa and Z. Székely, in *IR3*, p. 44. The distinction between "material culture" and "spiritual life" (e.g. M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița, in *IR1* 44), frequent in Romanian archaeology, expresses one of its ambiguities: although it deals with material remains, there is no reflection on their specific nature; they are just "concrete testimonies" of "material life" and of "spiritual life".

The concept of *archaeological culture* (original emphasis) is understood, in the traditional sense, as representing merely a combination of characteristic traits from the material obtained in archaeological excavations, which constitutes itself in a *rule* (original emphasis), delimited in space and time from other similarly made combinations. The *rule* (original emphasis) must include more (as many as possible) categories of finds – not just one. Thus conceived, the culture is an image of the organization of the archaeological material, behind which real situations, historical, social or of other nature must not necessarily hide... the majority of the [Bronze and Iron Age] ‘cultures’ are made of groups of pottery shapes and decoration, the style of the latter being the defining element. It is evident, therefore, that such groupings of the archaeological information do not necessarily imply ethnic groups; a grouping of pottery forms with a particular decoration might indicate a group of related tribes, as well as ethnically different populations”.⁵⁷

This position, a radical one in the Romanian context, does not significantly modify the account of the national origins: A. Vulpe describes the Iron Age Basarabi culture as “a complex synthesis of material culture which *certainly* (my emphasis) also mirrors cultural-historical processes”⁵⁸. He is not questioning culture history as a useful paradigm for archaeologists – the paradigm at work in Romania has no name, because it is archaeology *tout court* – as a remark about a conception being “unsatisfactory from a culture-historical point of view” shows⁵⁹. His repeated warnings against the ethnicization of the archaeological cultures do not lead to a decisive reformulation of Romania’s ethnic past. The nature of ethnic phenomena is not questioned, only what archaeologists, with their limited means, can do to recognize them in the archaeological record. Central to their representation is still the belief that people speaking the same language are an ethnic group, an assumption essential for the construction of the national past⁶⁰, for the ethnogenesis of the Romanians, which is treated as similar and intimately related to the formation of the Romanian language,⁶¹ despite the fact that two linguists clearly state that the formation process of the Romance languages “should not be confounded with the formation process of the Romanic *peoples* (original emphasis), which is one of ethnic nature”⁶².

In most of his warnings A. Vulpe allows the interpretation of archaeological cultures to indicate ancient peoples, but does not offer any hint on how such an interpretation could be supported. Following the traditional understanding of archaeological cultures, he tries to give them more consistency by adding to pottery styles metallurgy, funerary customs and other cultural traits. Most importantly, he assumes the existence of human groups, difficult to imagine as something else than ethnic groups, associated with the archaeological cultures. These groups are made of the “bearers” of archaeological cultures to whom behaviors are assigned: e.g. “the economy of bearers of the Coțofeni culture”⁶³ or “the metallurgical activity of the bearers of the Tei culture”⁶⁴.

⁵⁷ In *IR1*, p. 211–212. A. Vulpe remarks that both ethnic migration and continuity have been used to build national pasts (in *IR1*, p. 214). He presents his views from 1979 -- the formation process of the Thracian peoples beginning with the Bronze Age and, accordingly, the use of the terms “pre-Thracian” for the Neolithic, “Old Thracian” for the Bronze Age, “Old Geto-Dacian” for the Early Iron Age – as hypothetical and presents an alternate view as legitimate: the Thracian populations could have developed from an initial diversity to their “apparent unity” in the historical period. (in *IR1*, p. 212–213).

⁵⁸ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 327.

⁵⁹ Idem, in *IR1*, p. 215.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., R. Theodorescu, in *IR3*, p. x on the value of including in the Romanian national history all the people speaking the same language.

⁶¹ The Romanians, as other Neo-Latin peoples, are “a product of an ethnic and cultural synthesis between the defeated autochthons (as ethnic basic *substratum*), and the Roman conquerors (as *stratum*), a synthesis which has led to the assimilation of the natives and the creation of Roman provincial, Latin-speaking populations...” (D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 167; see also Șt. Pascu and R. Theodorescu, in *IR3*, p. 24).

⁶² M. Sala and G. Mihăilă, in *IR3*, p. 111.

⁶³ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 231.

⁶⁴ Idem, in *IR1*, p. 269.

Despite A. Vulpe's concerns about the interpretation of archaeological cultures, most contributors to the "History of the Romanians" understand them as "cultural-historical phenomena"⁶⁵, and almost everywhere in the three volumes there is little doubt about their ethnic significance. Starting with the Neolithic, the archaeologists make of the archaeological cultures the main actors of the historical narrative. Thus "the Starčevo-Criș communities" are enclosed with shallow ditches, "maybe to defend themselves against the first Vinčan tribes"⁶⁶; "[t]he departure point of the Dudești communities lies in north-vest Anatolia"; "the communities of the LBK culture... have always tried to infiltrate themselves towards the south;" "the last Dudești communities...were influenced...by their Vinčan neighbors"⁶⁷; "the advance of the LBK communities was stopped by the Vinčan communities and those of the Lumea Nouă complex"⁶⁸, cultural groups can have an "organic, continuous evolution"⁶⁹, their "bearers" occupy territories⁷⁰.

There are situations when the reconstruction of the national past is not well served by the archaeological culture concept. The Sîntana de Mureș-Černjakhov culture of the Late Roman Age cannot be interpreted as belonging to the local ancestors of the Romanians because it occupies not only a large part of the Romanian national territory, but also a large part of the Ukraine. In the "History of the Romanians" this culture – sometimes termed "cultural complex" to suggest its peculiarity⁷¹, but also "culture"⁷² – represents several ethnic groups, identifiable in its "variants." Sîntana de Mureș is the Romanian local variant, with its eastern border on the Dnestr, which for most Romanian historians and archaeologists is also the eastern border of the Romanian national territory (i.e. including the current Republic of Moldova).

Although a surprising unity is recognized to the Sîntana de Mureș-Černjakhov culture, explained by the existence of very similar political and economic conditions, created by the Gothic migration, the hand-made pottery is supposed, without any argumentation, to always indicate a particular ethnic group, which allows the interpretation of "the strong Dacian traditions in pottery" as the "continuous presence of the Dacian population in the territories west of the Dnestr during the Gothic migration"⁷³, only partially affected by the "continuous swinging of human communities and the Roman influence over the whole area"⁷⁴. Thus two of the most impressive monuments of the Sîntana de Mureș-Černjakhov culture in Romania, the cemeteries from Tîrgșor and Valea Seacă, are declared to have a Dacian majority because of an alleged overwhelming weight of hand-made pottery of local tradition. The cemetery of similar size from Mihălășeni is declared Gothic⁷⁵.

The archaeological recognition of ancient identities can do even without the concept of archaeological culture. E.g., one bucket-shaped iron pendant found in Cristian, another one in Merești – artefacts especially frequent in Przeworsk cemeteries and also to be found in Černjakhov cemeteries -- indicate for D. Protase the presence of the *Carpi* in south-eastern Transylvania in the second half of the 3rd century AD or at the beginning of the 4th⁷⁶.

The ethnic meaning of the traditional concept is present in a sequence of cultures understood as stages in the evolution of the autochthonous population towards becoming Romanian: the Daco-Roman stage (the Bratei-Ipotești-Costișa culture, 4th-6th centuries), the Romanic stage (the Ipotești-Cândești-Botoșana-Hansca-Filiaș culture, 6th-7th centuries) and the ancient Romanian stage (the Dridu culture, 8th-

⁶⁵ E.g., A. László, in *IR1*, p. 297.

⁶⁶ N. Ursulescu, in *IR1*, p. 134.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

⁶⁹ A. László, in *IR1*, p. 313.

⁷⁰ A. László, in *IR1*, p. 320-321.

⁷¹ I. Ioniță, in *IR2*, p. 617.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 625.

⁷³ *Idem*, loc. cit.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 628-630.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 630-631.

⁷⁶ In *IR2*, p. 573.

11th centuries)⁷⁷. One of the alleged authors of this scheme presents a different view when he is indicated as the only author: archaeological cultures (Costișa-Botoșana-Hansca, Ipotești-Cândești-Ciurel, Bratei-Țaga-Biharea) appear as “regional aspects” of the “autochthonous civilization” of the 5th-7th centuries. He argues that they are “contemporary and identical in origin and evolution” and cover “the whole territory once inhabited by the Geto-Dacians”⁷⁸.

Such cultural distinctions can be ignored altogether: in the third volume the archaeological finds of the 7th-14th centuries are presented as “the material culture of the population identified...on the whole territory of ancient Dacia.” Everything demonstrates “its Romanic character, its Latin origin,” including agricultural implements and household annexes⁷⁹.

We, the “Autochthons”

The main plot of the first volume is the compact inhabitation of the national territory by an uninterrupted genealogy of archaeological cultures, since the beginnings of the Neolithic, which suggests or is interpreted as a succession of inheritances, from one culture to another, until an unspecified ethnic content, after traveling through the ages, reaches and determines us, the Romanian nation. Just one example will illustrate how an element of this genealogy is built:

For the origin of the Verbicioara culture a contribution of the groups with striated pottery of Gornea-Orlești type is supposed, defined exclusively on criteria of typological selection of the pottery, groups which should have also contributed to the genesis of the cultural aspect Cornești-Crvenka from the Banat and Serbia, all with roots in the Early Bronze Age⁸⁰.

The effort spent on the construction of these genealogies leads to nothing more than what we already knew from the geographical introduction: the continuous existence of a local population.

The geographical unity of the future national territory becomes a cultural one with the Iron Age Basarabi culture, “a stage in the natural evolution of the local Hallstatt...”⁸¹, showing analogies in pottery decoration with long disappeared Bronze Age cultures, a situation explained by the survival of “a patrimony of [decorative] motives... preserved on perishable materials...” In contrast to the Bronze Age cultures, which were well individualized on restricted territories, the Basarabi culture has a large area, it is “a syncretic and unitary image,” which mirrors “to a great extent” a cultural unity of the communities from the respective area, explained, “very probably”, as a religious one, not necessarily linked to a certain ethnic identity⁸². Then the author mentions only as a hypothesis his interpretation from 1979, which defined the “content of the Basarabi culture” as belonging to a community of tribes of different origins (Illyrians, Pannonians, Thracians, and maybe unknown others) among which

it is plausible to distinguish the Northern Thracian communities – named by convention Geto-Dacian – as a dominant element. Only thus can be justified the later contribution of the Basarabi culture to the genesis of the Geto-Dacian civilization. The fact that the area of the Basarabi culture coincides to a great extent with that of the five centuries later “classical” Geto-Dacian civilization makes plausible the hypothesis which sees in this cultural community a manifestation of a unity of [religious] belief, characteristic especially for the Northern Thracian tribes⁸³.

⁷⁷ E. Zaharia, D. Gh. Teodor and R. Theodorescu, in *IR3*, p. 288)

⁷⁸ D.Gh. Teodor, in *IR2*, p. 652 and 654

⁷⁹ M. Rusu, Șt. Olteanu, R. Popa and Z. Székely, in *IR3*, p. 45

⁸⁰ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 267.

⁸¹ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 327.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 327–329.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 331.

This "spiritual unification" is imagined as an "accelerated diffusion" from one community to another, a consequence of ever more sustained contacts among their members, a much more intense circulation in the entire Carpatho-Danubian area, a phenomenon supposed to explain, in great part, the cultural syncretism and which could favor the emergence of a single language for the mutual understanding of all these communities. This process should have begun much earlier, at the end of the Bronze Age. After this reconstruction, effectively outlining the ethnogenesis of the "Geto-Dacians," the author cautions us again: "[b]eing aware of the risks implied by such historicizing hypotheses, we would like to state, ... that a hypothesis, however plausible it might seem, is only a hypothesis"⁸⁴. While the Basarabi culture is allowed, however cautiously, to take an ethnic content, this is not happening with the Scythian culture, not even as a hypothesis. A discussion about who the people of the Ciunbrud culture in Transylvania were is followed by this statement: by:

"Scythian culture" we mean a conventional term, which generically designates all the cultural-archaeological manifestations from the Northern Pontic area of the Late Hallstatt (7th-4th centuries BC). In no circumstance should any ethnic character be assigned to this concept⁸⁵

The same happens with another "intrusion" in the "Geto-Dacian" area, the "Illyrian cultural area," which is declared a convention, not to "be confused with the spread area of the populations speaking proper Illyrian"⁸⁶.

Once the presence of cultural uniformity on the future national territory of Romania is established, with the Basarabi culture, a strong and pervasive dichotomy is instated, between the local population, continuously evolving to become Romanian, and the foreign peoples.⁸⁷ The purpose of all the endeavours will be from now on to reconstruct "the thread of the history of the autochthonous population"⁸⁸, which will continue, uninterrupted, up to 1918, when the all the territories inhabited by Romanians were united in a single state.

The "autochthonous" population is frequently presented as civilized, unlike its barbarian neighbors. In this perspective, the Dacian kingdom from the first century AD, "a strong client kingdom," was "a trusted ally of Rome against the continuous threats from the Germanic and Sarmatian tribes, always looking for loot and strife"⁸⁹. The high level of civilization enables the local population to act as a cultural mediator, especially between the Roman Empire and the barbarians, one of the frequent hypostases of peripheral claims to civilization in Eastern and Central Europe.

The "Geto-Dacians"

The first form of stable, ethnic articulation of the "autochthons" are the "Geto-Dacians". They are supposed to be behind the "cultural unity" of the Basarabi culture and from now on one can speak about a single "autochthonous society," with a "traditional culture"⁹⁰. Professor Vulpe is one of the few Romanian archaeologists to make a clear distinction between the *Getae* and the *Daci*, against a long tradition of considering them one and the same, expressed in the concept of "Geto-Dacian"⁹¹, thus creating the fiction of a uniform population inhabiting the Romanian national territory. Nevertheless, he needs – for unspecified reasons – "a generic term to designate all the Carpatho-Danubian peoples," and

⁸⁴ Idem, loc. cit.

⁸⁵ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 463.

⁸⁶ Idem, in *IR1*, p. 414.

⁸⁷ A remarkable exception: for A. Suceveanu (in *IR2*, p. 307–309) in Dobrogea not only the *Getae* were autochthonous, but also the *Scythae*, the *Bastarnae* and the Sarmatians.

⁸⁸ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 463.

⁸⁹ C. C. Petolescu, in *IR1*, p. 675.

⁹⁰ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 468.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 417–418.

writes about the difficulties of finding one. He admits that “the names of the *Getae*, of the *Daci*, and of other peoples had, each of them, their own history, and have certainly had their own significance which has evolved in time”.⁹²

Although the first mention of the *Getae* is from the 5th century BC and the first one about the *Daci* from the 1st century BC, although Strabo (7. 3. 13) describes them as two peoples, inhabiting different territories, A. Vulpe supports the use of “Geto-Dacians,” understood as a modern and conventional concept, “designating all the Northern Thracian tribes which have inhabited the Carpatho-Danubian space,” which does not imply “an absolute ethnic, linguistic or historical unity”.⁹³ Another convention, with a similar function, is to name Dacia the territory inhabited by the “Geto-Dacians.” A. Vulpe carefully points out that “nothing allows us to understand a more ancient use of this term for the whole area inhabited by the *Getae* and the Dacians, although he thinks that this “is plausible for the time of Burebista” (1st century BC).⁹⁴ However, he believes that “the Romanian historiographical tradition” entitles us to use Dacia as an alternative to the Carpatho-Danubian space, “in order to designate all the territories inhabited by the *Getae*, the Dacians and other North Thracian peoples” (IR1 - A. Vulpe: 423).⁹⁵

A. Vulpe seems to believe there is more to the “Geto-Dacians” than mere convention; he sees them related in a way typical of modern thinking, not of antiquity,⁹⁶ and his further arguments tend to establish this concept as an accurate description of an ancient reality. He claims that “the ancient sources are unanimous in asserting that the *Getae* and the *Daci* were of the same people, the differences being regional,” but quotes only Strabo (7. 3. 13) for the assertion that the *Getae* and the *Daci* spoke the same language.⁹⁷ Here the representation of ancient peoples as nations leads A. Vulpe to understand that Strabo considered the two to be one people because they were speaking the same language, although the ancient geographer clearly states that they were two distinct peoples; “the differences being regional” introduces what is naturally missing in Strabo: the idea that if the language was the same every other difference was unessential, confirming the widespread belief among Romanian historians and archaeologists that language is, beyond anything else, what makes a people.⁹⁸

Thus the “Geto-Dacians” -- rightly characterized by Karl Strobel as a *sui generis* social form⁹⁹ -- end by being recognized as a people [*neam*], permanently inhabiting the Carpatho-Danubian territory, something confirmed “to a great extent” by the archaeological research, whereas the “foreign populations” settled in Dacia are imagined as “temporarily constituting enclaves which were in the end absorbed”.¹⁰⁰ The “Geto-Dacians” have a “civilization”,¹⁰¹ a “religion”,¹⁰² and they are singled out by a remarkable uniformity, which allows even autochthonous ethnic diversity.¹⁰³ During the 1st century

⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 417.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 418–419.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 421.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 425. The diversity suggested by the tribal names known to the ancient authors is downplayed in these “other” and when A. Vulpe mentions other ethnonyms than the *Getae* or the Dacians, placed by the ancient sources on the territory of present day Romania, he supposes that they were “related” to the *Getae*, if not Getic tribes. (in IR1, p. 424). A. Suceveanu gives the same treatment to such names (IR2, p. 307–309).

⁹⁶ For how the relatedness between peoples was seen in antiquity see e.g. Gh. A. Niculescu, StCl 23, 1985, 37–43.

⁹⁷ A. Vulpe, in IR1, p. 419. The same author stresses the importance of the language differences among the Thracians (in IR1, p. 404).

⁹⁸ See e.g. D. Protase, in IR2, p. 159 – “Despite the importance which must be recognized to the changes in material culture and the consequences they might have had at the ethnic and linguistic level, the language, followed by customs, religious beliefs, way of living and thinking..., characterized, first of all, a certain ethnic community in antiquity.”

⁹⁹ SCIVA 49, 1998, 1, p. 75.

¹⁰⁰ A. Vulpe, in IR1, p. 421.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 429.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 439, 444.

¹⁰³ A. Vulpe, in IR1, p. 648.

BC and the 1st century AD the *Getae* and the Dacians made a "veritable ethno-cultural unity"¹⁰⁴. M. Babeş distinguishes for the 2nd century BC - 1st century AD a central area, in which the main components have local antecedents, and a peripheral one. This central area "must be defined" as "the permanent living hearth of the Getic and Dacian tribes," and, "significantly,"

this territory coincides to a great extent with the formation area of the Romanian people. This ascertained fact is of paramount importance, suggesting the role of biological, cultural and ethnic substratum which the Geto-Dacian element has played in the formation of the Romanian people¹⁰⁵.

Once the equivalence of the *Getae* with the Dacians and the link with the Carpatho-Danubian territory are firmly established, anything on this territory happens to the indigenous population. For example, the finding of Greek coins from Istros on the "indigenous territory" indicates the *Getae* have entered in "closer commercial relations with the Greek world"¹⁰⁶; not one or several communities, eventually of *Getae*, with one Greek colony. This inaugurates an interpretative device of great further use: in every action, every inhabitant of the future national territory of Romania represents his people, just as sportsmen, for example, represent the contemporary Romanian nation (no women are mentioned in the volumes of the "History of Romanians" analyzed here).

The reign of Burebista (c. 80 - 44 BC), the first important "Geto-Dacian" ruler – Strabo's clear statement (7. 3. 11) that he was a *Geta* receives no attention – to extend his domination over a vast territory, assumed to be that of present-day Romania or even greater, is interpreted as a period of political unification of an already culturally homogenous population. His actions are seen as the consequence of high political aspirations. He did not destroy the fortifications of his rivals because they were "vital for Dacia"¹⁰⁷. He attacked the Greek colonies not for vulgar hopes of gaining wealth, like previous local dynasts: beyond "financial necessities," he acted for a superior good, that of Dacia¹⁰⁸, he had a "superior political plan," that of "strengthening the eastern flank of his recent political construction"¹⁰⁹. And finally, the Greek colonies were not simply plundered, but were "integrated in his kingdom"¹¹⁰.

The interpretation of the archaeological data which make the "Geto-Dacian" culture leads to a conclusion "of deep historical significance": it is "unitary" in its entire area, a unity "most pregnantly" illustrated by the uniform aspect of hand- and wheel-made pottery¹¹¹. This unity, which is not illustrated by a map showing the spread of pottery forms, is ascribed to "a defining structure," which was not affected by "particularities" issued from the contact with other populations¹¹².

Economic activities on the future national territory are described as the economic life of Dacia (in terms reminiscent of Ceauşescu's time propaganda): "the rapid increase of all the branches of the economy..., the continuous intensification of the commercial relations with the Hellenistic countries, then especially with the Roman world," This development is traced to the progress of iron metallurgy which sustained and "favored the evolution of the agriculture and of the other crafts"¹¹³ and the intensification of internal commercial exchanges¹¹⁴. We find a similar description for the end of the first millennium AD: the economy of the "Carpatho-Danubian society" has mutually conditioning economic branches, defining "the structures of human communities," and "exports"¹¹⁵.

¹⁰⁴ M. Babeş, in *IR1*, p. 501.

¹⁰⁵ M. Babeş, in *IR1*, p. 760.

¹⁰⁶ A. Vulpe, in *IR1*, p. 645.

¹⁰⁷ I. Glodariu, in *IR1*, p. 640.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 649.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 646.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 647.

¹¹¹ M. Babeş, in *IR1*, p. 759.

¹¹² I. Glodariu, in *IR1*, p. 762.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 762.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 774.

¹¹⁵ M. Rusu, Şt. Olteanu, R. Popa and Z. Székely, in *IR3*, p. 50, 54.

According to this narrative, the “Geto-Dacians” lived in village communities¹¹⁶, where land was common property, at the same time primary elements and small replicas of a nation-like entity, spaces of ethnic uniformity and social equilibrium, imagined as perennial and basic forms of organization of the local population throughout its existence, until the Middle Ages. Yet, there is no convincing archaeological argumentation supporting their existence, inferred from social realities studied in some parts of Romania at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as from Late Medieval documents¹¹⁷. The village communities barely survive during the time of the Roman province¹¹⁸, but after the end of the Roman rule they become again ubiquitous¹¹⁹.

Survival and Romanization of the “Geto-Dacians”

The survival of the “Geto-Dacians” after the final defeat of king Decebalus (AD 106) and the organization of the Roman province of Dacia is a key element in the narrative of Romanian national origins. It extends the Romanians back into prehistory, and as such, it must be well defended against its enemies. These are depicted in dark colours, their theory that the “autochthonous” population was exterminated – an “aberrant thesis”-- was put forward, “for chauvinistic political reasons,” by foreign historians and rejected by “the entire Romanian historiography and by a series of foreign scholars, eminent experts in the history of the Roman Empire”¹²⁰. Of course, D. Protase does not deny that Romanian historians from Transylvania had the same opinion at the end of the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th, but he thinks that unlike those foreign historians, they were supporting the extermination of the Dacians “in good faith, although naively...in order to demonstrate the pure Roman origin of the Romanian people”¹²¹.

This survival is supported by “archaeological culture” reasoning: “[t]he Geto-Dacian culture from the province of Dacia has close relationships, evidently of a genetic nature, with that of the second Iron Age from the same area, from which it derives...”¹²². The interpretation of the survival should allow two contradictory processes: the maintaining of the collective identity of the “autochthons” by living in isolation – in settlements clearly differentiated from those of the Roman colonists, settlements characteristic for all Free Dacians¹²³ – and their Romanization. The solution is a peculiar one: the two processes are presented as non contradictory and the outcome, the “Daco-Romans,” are as autochthonous as the “Geto-Dacians.”

Romanization is described as a “linguistic and ethnic mutation, of spiritual *habitus*, of ways of thinking and of living”¹²⁴. It is a “beneficial synthesis, the basis of the evolution towards Romanianness”¹²⁵. The social aspect of the process is generally played down, and even when the phenomenon is examined in a chapter about social structure, it is deemed to be “decidedly determined by the cultural factor”¹²⁶. Romanization is presented as a civilizational upgrade of a particularly homogenous and receptive, that is an already highly civilized, population¹²⁷, the “power and prestige of Rome” being “efficient psychological factors in the assimilation of the

¹¹⁶ I. Glodariu, in *IR1*, p. 777.

¹¹⁷ H. H. Stahl, *Les anciennes communautés villageoises roumaines: asservissement et pénétration capitaliste*, Bucharest and Paris, 1969.

¹¹⁸ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 171.

¹¹⁹ Idem, in *IR2*, p. 581.

¹²⁰ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 137–138.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 138.

¹²² M. Babeş, in *IR1*, p. 799.

¹²³ Idem, loc. cit.

¹²⁴ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 165.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 168.

¹²⁶ A. Suceveanu, in *IR2*, p. 350–351.

¹²⁷ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 160.

autochthons to (sic!) Romanization¹²⁸. The "History of the Romanians" also hosts a different opinion: the local population was not at all prepared for the new values – e.g. writing was scarcely used until the conquest -- and Romanization was a "spiritual" shock to the Dacians, "because nothing specific to the autochthons (e.g. the Zalmoxian religion or the sacred architecture) survives"¹²⁹. D. Protase has to recognize the absence of any trace of the local cults but refuses to accept that

the indigenous population lacked the previous religious sentiment, that it has suddenly given up the ancestral religion... because the religion of the autochthons, as a conservative element of ideology, was nowhere destroyed through the Roman religion¹³⁰.

Then he imagines that "the indigenous population assimilated those customs and religious cults that better corresponded to its traditional beliefs. In this sense we can even speak about a Daco-Roman religious synthesis, to be explained only by a quick Romanization.... Later...when the autochthonous population was able to express freely its religious sentiments, it used the forms, names and representations of the Greco-Roman divinities."¹³¹

Thus any form of Roman religion becomes evidence for the continuity of the "Geto-Dacians" in the Roman province. Similarly, the preponderance of the local population in the Roman province is "demonstrated," together with its Romanization, by the overwhelming majority of Roman finds¹³².

A distinction between culture and ethnicity is noticeable in the presentations of the Romanization process: *romanitas* appears to be mostly cultural, whereas ethnicity is Dacian, as "Daco-Roman" seems to indicate. Ethnicity is understood as a demographic and biological objective reality, the economic basis of the province¹³³. No arguments to support this economic role, which would be more conducive to the ethnic dichotomization than to Romanization.

The progress of the Romanization process is not described archaeologically or otherwise. It is simply asserted that

in the 3rd century the ethnic differences between the newcomers and the autochthons, the old hostility between the Dacians and the new masters disappeared, being replaced by a general cooperation¹³⁴,

but this is not its end – as one might expect –

because Romanization did not stop on the territory of the former province after the withdrawal of the army and of the administration...under the reign of emperor Aurelian, but continued and accomplished itself as a natural process within the Daco-Roman population until the 5th century. ...the Romanized elements from the cities... continued to bring [to the rural areas] higher forms of civilization: Latin, the Roman way of living, Christian belief¹³⁵.

One of the most difficult parts of the construction of the national past is the Romanization of the Free Dacians, supposed to end just in time for the Slavs to find on the future national territory of Romania, "a compact mass of Romanic population, Latin-speaking and Christian"¹³⁶.

The "Free Dacians" – the shift from "Geto-Dacians" to "Dacians" suggests an increasing ethnic uniformity – are the Dacians who inhabited territories outside the Roman province. The concept, another "convention," recognized as a modern historiographical creation¹³⁷, helps establish the idea that "Dacia,"

¹²⁸ Idem, in *IR2*, p. 166.

¹²⁹ M. Bărbulescu, in *IR2*, p. 225; see also p. 249–251.

¹³⁰ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 164–165.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 165.

¹³² *Ibidem*, p. 164.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 163–164.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 167.

¹³⁵ Idem, loc. cit.

¹³⁶ Idem, loc. cit.

¹³⁷ I. Ioniță, in *IR2*, p. 401.

as the future Romanian national territory, continued to be inhabited by a homogenous population. To that effect the persistence of “traditional relations” between the Dacians from the province and the Free Dacians is emphasized, explained by family ties and commercial exchanges with Roman products¹³⁸.

For the Free Dacians of Muntenia, the process of Romanization is described as “authentic” and developing “intensely and alertly” following the Daco-Roman wars. While the Romans act by their “nominal domination,” with an occasional presence of persons for production activities and commerce, and for the “collection and acquisition of the products necessary for the military units on the *limes*,” the Dacians “were attracted by the force of the Roman civilization to which they remained faithful until the end”¹³⁹. Romanization appears here less as a social process to be explained than as a destiny to be fulfilled. Later, the same author takes a more rational approach: the Free Dacians from Muntenia “were compelled to come closer to the Roman civilization and to assimilate it to a greater extent, which also meant the gradual renunciation to many specific Dacian elements”¹⁴⁰. The Romanization of the Free Dacians is usually extended beyond the end of the 3rd century and the agents are the vicinity of the Empire and the Christianization process¹⁴¹.

The foreign peoples

Whereas the autochthonous population is presented as compactly inhabiting the future national territory, the foreigners are almost always presented as intruders, as “infiltrating themselves,”¹⁴² usually taking advantage of the incapacity of the local population – for instance of “the weakening of the power of the Geto-Dacians”¹⁴³. The slow, surreptitious movements of small groups of people on the national territory packed with “autochthonous” population might be conceived as an opposite of *Landnahme*¹⁴⁴, a central concept for narratives of the origins of other nations, which makes not of the local population, imagined as shapeless and retarded, but of the people on the move, the true heroes of civilization.

The presence of foreign peoples on the national territory – always a historical accident, sometimes violent, always short-lived, opposed to the principles of historical evolution embodied in our ancestors – has only one significance: they slowed, or even, for a short time, stopped, the evolution of the “autochthonous society.” Conversely, in the absence of the “migrators” the local communities enjoyed a steady progress. Thus towards the end of the first millennium, the Romanian society, “freed...from the specter of destruction by the nomad peoples, steps on the path towards a sensible progress...”¹⁴⁵. More specifically the foreign peoples hamper the natural evolution of the local society towards state formation: for example the “Celtic military and political domination in central and western Dacia has certainly prevented an earlier unification of the *Getae* and the Dacians”¹⁴⁶.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 404.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 421–422.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 430.

¹⁴¹ D. Gh. Teodor, in *IR2*, p. 652.

¹⁴² After one relatively neutral use (N. Ursulescu, in *IR1*, p. 143), the rest characterizes only the “foreigners” (our ancestors never infiltrate themselves). For instance in the first volume: A. Vulpe, p. 228 – “infiltrations of populations foreign to the autochthonous cultural environment”; p. 451 -- “some foreign populations might have infiltrated themselves in the Carpatho-Danubian space and be the cause of these perturbations”; p. 495 -- “migrations or infiltrations in this space in the first half of the first millennium BC”. Such uses are more frequent in the second volume (at least 15 occurrences) and decrease in the third where the local population is imagined so compact that perhaps infiltration seems no longer possible.

¹⁴³ C. C. Petolescu, in *IR1*, p. 671.

¹⁴⁴ On this concept see Michael Müller-Wille and Reinhard Schneider (eds.). *Ausgewählte Probleme europäischer Landnahmen des Früh- und Hochmittelalters. Methodische Grundlagediskussion im Grenzbereich zwischen Archäologie und Geschichte*. Part I. Sigmaringen, 1993.

¹⁴⁵ Șt. Pascu, Șt. Olteanu, D. Gh. Teodor, O. Iliescu in *IR3*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁶ - M. Babeș, in *IR1*, p. 503.

The foreign peoples do not mix with the local population on our national territory. When this is happening, in Crișana for instance, the foreigners are so few that they can exert no durable influence¹⁴⁷. Especially when imagined as "migrators," i.e. peoples always on the move, unable to create anything durable, lacking the healthy cohesion of the "autochthonous population," and therefore short-lived, they "have always been dominant ethnic enclaves...which lived mostly on what produced and realized peacefully the autochthonous village community of farmers, herdsman and craftsmen with old traditions"¹⁴⁸ The foreign peoples are rarely imagined as common people, "we" were the common people. The idea that they must have lived in "enclaves"¹⁴⁹ is stronger than the archaeological evidence: even when the archaeological finds assigned to the local population are thought inseparable from those of other populations, as it happens with those from the second half of the 5th century and the 6th in Transylvania, when "the living together of the migrators with the local population determined the unitary aspects of the material culture...", the Gepids are still imagined as "ethnic enclaves"¹⁵⁰. A different view deserves to be mentioned: V. Spinei admits the sedentarization of Turkic nomads on the future national territory and a symbiosis with the local population¹⁵¹.

One of the maps¹⁵², representing finds of the 1st-3rd centuries AD, offers support to this kind of thinking: it presents a Roman center of Romania, with a homogenous Free Dacian periphery from which diversity – e.g. the differences between the Militari-Chilia from Muntenia and the Carpien culture of Moldavia – is eliminated. Most intriguingly, only two Sarmatian find spots are figured – Stejaru and Viespești – out of the 79 known in Muntenia¹⁵³; they are completely absent from the eastern part of the Walachian Plain, where nothing else dating from the 2nd and first half of the 3rd century AD than Sarmatian burials was found; instead, Sarmatian finds like Ulmeni, and Lișcoteanca are presented as Dacian. Another map, illustrating the finds from the 4th-6th centuries, uses a similar procedure¹⁵⁴: the presence of the "migrators" is minimized simply by eliminating sites or assigning them to the "autochthons." For instance, the Goths have no settlements and only 10 cemeteries (4 in Transylvania, 5 in Muntenia and only 1 in Moldavia). We have no indication on why these, mostly Černjakhov cemeteries, were selected as Gothic; anyway most Černjakhov find spots (1915, among which 158 settlements and 206 cemeteries, burial groups and isolated burials¹⁵⁵) are ignored in this map.

The foreign peoples are a problem the authors of the "History of the Romanians" have to solve rather than an object of academic inquiry. This might explain why Muntenia receives a more elaborate treatment than Moldavia, although the Carpien finds are much more substantial than those of the Militari-Chilia culture¹⁵⁶. To solve the problem the Sarmatian presence in Muntenia and Moldavia raises for the national narrative, a helpful characteristic is assigned to the Free Dacians: they controlled more territory than the higher ground they actually inhabited¹⁵⁷. Described as an outcome of "infiltration," a process

¹⁴⁷ I. Ioniță, in: *IR2*, p. 405.

¹⁴⁸ D. Protase, *IR2*, p. 603.

¹⁴⁹ E.g. *IR1*, 2001 – A. Vulpe: 413 (the Illyrians in south-western Romania); *IR1*, 2001- A. Vulpe: 421 (Celts, *Bastarnae*, other foreign peoples among the "Geto-Dacians"); *IR1*, 2001- M. Babeș: 503 (the Scythians in Dobrogea); *IR1*, 2001- A. Avram: 551 (the Scythians near Callatis); *IR2-A*. Rădulescu: 370–371 (the Scythians in Dobrogea); *IR2-I*. Ioniță: 405 and 436 (the Lipica culture); *IR2-S*. Dumitrașcu: 447 (Germanic enclaves in Crișana); *IR2-A*. Rădulescu: 473 (the Goths in the south-eastern Carpathians).

¹⁵⁰ L. Bârzu, in *IR2*, p. 716–717.

¹⁵¹ In *IR3*, p. 266.

¹⁵² D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 37, fig. 1.

¹⁵³ Gh. A. Niculescu, in Claus von Carnap-Bornheim (ed.), *Kontakt - Kooperation - Konflikt. Germanen und Sarmaten zwischen dem 1. und dem 4. Jahrhundert nach Christus*, Neumünster, 2003, p. 177–205.

¹⁵⁴ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 557, fig. 70.

¹⁵⁵ Florin Petrescu, *Repertoriul monumentelor de tip Černeahov-Sântana de Mureș de pe teritoriul României*. Bucharest, 2002, p. 19 (based only on literature, without a new determination of the finds). For more Černjakhov finds than in the map of D. Protase, but still grossly underrepresenting them, see I. Ioniță, in *IR2*, p. 618, fig. 89 (in a chapter on the "local population").

¹⁵⁶ I. Ioniță, in *IR2*, p. 407–422 and 423–431.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 430.

which could not be “controlled by the Dacians,” the presence of the Sarmatians is of little consequence: the “Sarmatian influences” are “almost non-significant,” something explained “by the nomadic character of this population”¹⁵⁸. The adoption of Sarmatian dress customs by the Free Dacians is rejected, the Sarmatian origin of the custom of placing metal mirrors in women burials “cannot be fully accepted” because the burial customs of the Dacians during two centuries before conquest of Dacia are almost unknown, and the Dacian Lipica group had them in the first century AD; also the glass, coral or chalcedony beads were not taken from the Sarmatians but through direct exchanges with the Roman Empire¹⁵⁹. While D. Protase tends to ignore the Sarmatian population of Muntenia, I. Ioniță seems determined to explain it away: he starts by asserting that at the beginning of the 2nd century AD “the population inhabiting and mastering the territory between the Danube, the Olt and the Southern Carpathians was Dacian in its entirety.” After settling this, he sets out to explain the “rarefaction of the population” in the Eastern part of Muntenia¹⁶⁰, without facing the real problem: in this region there are no cemeteries and no settlements that could be assigned to the Free Dacians using the traditional culture history approach. He suggests lack of autonomy of the Sarmatians on the future national territory, by examining the possibility that the Free Dacians accepted the Sarmatians, and, finding no proof, that of the Romans encouraging them to settle in Muntenia, in order to weaken the Free Dacians¹⁶¹. I. Ioniță illustrates more accurately than D. Protase the occupation of eastern Muntenia by the Sarmatians, figuring 20 Sarmatian find spots on his map¹⁶², and interprets it as a depopulation caused by the politics of the Roman Empire of creating a “safety space”¹⁶³. The beginning of the Sarmatian presence in Muntenia is dated late, after the middle of the second century BC. The Sarmatians “did not have much space to move,” being surrounded by the Roman *limes* and the Dacian area (the Militari-Chilia “cultural aspect”); the Dacian population, “of course,” opposed their progression to the North. Nevertheless, I. Ioniță writes about “an infiltration” in that direction, in the plain of Ploiești, where allegedly it was confronted with a dense Dacian inhabitation which “has stopped from the beginning the enthusiasm of the Sarmatians.” Nevertheless the “infiltration” takes place, peacefully, – here the biggest Sarmatian cemetery from Muntenia (Tîrgșor – 35 burials) was found – and “the newcomers are tolerated for reasons which can only be guessed”¹⁶⁴, an interpretation serving the idea that the future national territory of Romania outside the Roman province was “effectively mastered and inhabited mostly” by the Free Dacians¹⁶⁵.

Not always the relations between the Dacians and other barbarian peoples are presented as consequences of natural enmity. S. Dumitrașcu interprets the Zemplin cemetery (Slovakia; 1st century BC – 2nd century AD) as an illustration of the cohabitation of the Dacians and the Vandals “in conditions of freedom...that is without dominating each other”¹⁶⁶. The interpretation changes when the presence of a Germanic population on the future Romanian national territory (in Crișana) is discussed: “these enclaved Germans will not change the local ethnic structure”¹⁶⁷. Similarly, after struggling to demonstrate the lack of Sarmatian influence over the Dacians in Moldavia, I. Ioniță accepts the cohabitation of the Sarmatians and the Dacians in the same settlements outside the Romanian national territory, in Hungary¹⁶⁸. However, there are authors who admit cohabitation on the national territory¹⁶⁹.

¹⁵⁸ Idem, loc. cit.

¹⁵⁹ Idem, in *IR2*, p. 454, 671.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 413.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 455.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 415, fig. 43.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 416.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 417–419.

¹⁶⁵ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 43.

¹⁶⁶ S. Dumitrașcu, in *IR2*, p. 445.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 447.

¹⁶⁸ I. Ioniță, in *IR2*, p. 454.

¹⁶⁹ I. Barnea, P. Diaconu, in *IR3*, p. 393, about the cohabitation with “barbarians” at Dinogetia-Garvăn in the second half of the 12th century AD and at the beginning of the 13th.

The relations with the foreign peoples are usually of unbalanced mutual influence. For example, the "Daco-Romans" were taking from the Goths the pottery with burnished decoration, the combs and some brooch types, i.e. what archaeologists use as ethnic indicators, thus making the Goths invisible¹⁷⁰, while the Goths were taking from the "Daco-Romans" some pottery forms, brooch types, the use of the bricks for the graves, and the "occasional" use the coins¹⁷¹, that is cultural traits spread as a consequence of the Roman influence in many territories of the Barbaricum at that time.

The "migrators" either lost their "ethno-cultural identity," being assimilated because of their demographic and cultural inferiority¹⁷², or left. One of the more elaborated presentation of this conception is the following:

The vastly superior number of the Romanics in all the relief forms of the regions east and south of the Carpathians, the solid internal structure of the village communities, the higher social and economic development stage, as well as the superiority of the autochthonous material and spiritual culture compared to that of the various migrators, to which was added the direct or indirect support of the Empire, offered through multiple and permanent economic, cultural and spiritual links, and the sustained military activity against the foreigners..., were some of the principal causes which laid the ground and then oriented the direction in which, starting with the 7th century, took place gradually, everywhere north of the Lower Danube, the process of assimilating the newcomers in the mass of the autochthonous population¹⁷³.

The local population after the withdrawal of the Romans from Dacia

One other delicate moment for the national narrative is that of the end of the Roman province in AD 271. The continuity of the provincial population, the "Daco-Romans," is authoritatively presented as the just thesis, and its rejection, implying a late immigration of the Romanians, is labeled "a crafty theory"¹⁷⁴, and explained by the "regrettable circumstance that the whole discussion (because of political and nationalistic passions) has often slipped on a non-scientific, tendentious course..."¹⁷⁵. The withdrawal of the Romans from the province is conceived in such a way that the poor, i.e. "the autochthons," the majority, the "demographic and economic basis," do not leave; the only ones to emigrate are those who once came to Dacia, "the city-dwellers, great landowners of the Roman provincial past..."¹⁷⁶. The poor wanted to "be masters again of lands they once owned and to fully benefit from material goods, of which they had been previously frustrated to a great extent"¹⁷⁷.

This interpretation produces a non-interrupted autochthony by connecting the survival of the "Geto-Dacians" with the continuity of the "Daco-Romans." The local population, "the ethnic basis of the historical processes," appears to be the same as the one before the conquest, only more civilized. Apparently, the historical role of the Romans was to quickly civilize the local population and then to withdraw: "[t]he Roman graft on the Dacian stock proved resistant and viable"¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁰ On the capacity of the "autochthons" to "absorb" cultural indicators, see R. Harhoiu, *Dacia N.S.* 43–45, 1999–2001, p. 138.

¹⁷¹ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 601–602.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 602–603 (about the Gepids).

¹⁷³ D. Gh. Teodor, in *IR2*, p. 662.

¹⁷⁴ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 259.

¹⁷⁵ *Idem*, loc. cit.

¹⁷⁶ *Idem*, in *IR2*, p. 561.

¹⁷⁷ *Idem*, in *IR2*, p. 267.

¹⁷⁸ *Idem*, loc. cit.

One way to emphasize the Dacianness of the “Daco-Roman” population is the interpretation of the presence in the former Roman province of groups of *Carpi* and “other Free Dacians” as “strengthening the Dacian component of the Romanized population”¹⁷⁹, their presence being supposed to partially compensate the demographic losses following the withdrawal of the Romans¹⁸⁰. The arrival of the Free Dacians was peaceful¹⁸¹, unlike that of the “migrators,” and, most importantly, it happened after the abandonment of the province. D. Protase deplors that

in the last decades some authors have claimed – ...even tendentiously, with evident Roeslerian substratum – that the Free Dacians-*Carpi* from Moldavia were colonized by the Romans and that they founded settlements of their own in the province since the reigns of Marcus Aurelius or Commodus or towards the middle of the 3rd century.

He argues that through this idea about the early colonization of Free Dacians in the Roman province, *nolens volens*

the documentary fund about the massive existence of the Dacians in Roman Dacia was reduced and they were robbed of a great part of their cultural dowry¹⁸².

Without using the chronological arguments one might expect here, the author puts forward the damage to the national interests the interpretation he fights is doing.

However, a problem persists for D. Protase: did the “Daco-*Carpi*” immigrated in the province settle exclusively in new places, or also by “*joining* (original emphasis) the existing Daco-Roman communities”?¹⁸³. This is to him a legitimate question because the *Carpi* are not “migrators” who live in ethnic enclaves: these are ethnic brothers and here the peculiarity of the Romanization concept employed is again at work. The Romanized Dacians, i.e. the “Daco-Romans,” are still Dacians and even if the Free Dacians had attacked the province for loot, as I. Ioniță admits¹⁸⁴, all autochthons are related in the great autochthonous society, no matter how Romanized they are.

The whole archaeological construction of the continuity of the local population is based on attributing everything belonging to the Roman tradition – artefacts, coins, Christianity, etc. – to the “Daco-Romans”¹⁸⁵. The former Roman cities belong exclusively to them, while the “migrators” settled “in open spaces, adequate to their tribal life”¹⁸⁶. Two Gepidic burials found in a former Roman camp, strikingly foreign to the local tradition, are declared to be of “no major ethno-cultural significance for the general situation in Potaissa”¹⁸⁷. This reasoning allows the archaeologists to assign all the finds in the former cities of the province to the “Daco-Romans,” and to imagine their life as completely separated from the “migrators,” not “significantly influenced” by the civilization of the Goths and the Gepids¹⁸⁸.

In the Roman province the producers were mostly autochthons: the production of iron tools, for example, “must in general be considered the product of the local craftsmen”¹⁸⁹; the “Dacian village, mostly autochthonous demographically,” together with the *villae rusticae*, were supplying with corn the cities, the crafts and mining centers”¹⁹⁰.

¹⁷⁹ I. Ioniță, in *IR2*, p. 453.

¹⁸⁰ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 578.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 571.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 572.

¹⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 573.

¹⁸⁴ In *IR2*, p. 451.

¹⁸⁵ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 555–556.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 556.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 558.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 560.

¹⁸⁹ *Idem*, in *IR2*, p. 181–182.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

After the Romans abandoned the province, its population is supposed to have preserved Roman traditions and permanent links with the Roman-Byzantine world, assumed to exert a considerable influence over culture and religion, over the economy and the techniques of the "Daco-Romans," an influence "which created, in some respects, a certain superiority towards the foreign elements and towards the neighboring populations which have not lived in the Roman Empire"¹⁹¹.

Important traits of civilization are extended from territories still part of the Empire (*Scythia Minor* [Dobruja]) and several cities on the northern bank of the Danube) up to the end of the 6th century, where they were indeed present, to the whole Romanian territory. For example, the problem of writing during the 4th-11th centuries is presented in such a way that one is led to believe that "some" of the Romanians and their immediate ancestors used writing continuously; the argumentation mingles data from the Late Roman and Byzantine cities with data from the Early Middle Ages¹⁹². The same procedure is applied to the ecclesiastical organization: by mentioning some real bishoprics in Dobruja and some highly dubious ones in Muntenia, the "History of the Romanians" extends the ecclesiastical organization to the "rest of the country" without any shred of evidence¹⁹³.

The links with the Empire after the withdrawal of the Romans from Dacia are considered essential for the survival of the Romanity north of the Danube¹⁹⁴. They were economic and political, "ethno-cultural" and linguistic¹⁹⁵. Surprisingly, the presence of the Late Roman and then Byzantine fortifications is as beneficial to the Romanity north of the Danube as their absence. One author concludes that after the Danubian *limes* was destroyed by the Slavs and the Avars towards the end of the 6th century, "thus cutting the links between the Byzantine world and the autochthonous population north of the Danube, ...the demise of the Romano-Byzantine border...created new facilities for the economic and ethno-cultural relations between the Romanity south of the Danube and that from old Dacia..." The links with the Empire are believed to be so intense that the whole territory north of the Danube might be considered "a Roman-Byzantine cultural province"¹⁹⁶.

The economic preeminence of the local population is extended outside the former Roman province and so for I. Ioniță the quality of the manufactured items in the Černjakhov settlements, the great number of the workshops and the fact that their population practiced mainly agriculture, justify their presence in a chapter dedicated to the local population¹⁹⁷, although he is also one of the few authors of the "History of the Romanians" to recognize to the Goths, i.e. to "migrators", the capacity to practice agriculture¹⁹⁸. Metallurgy continues to be considered an exclusively "autochthonous" occupation, explained by the "perpetuation in the same ethnic community of the appropriate technical knowledge"¹⁹⁹. During the 6th-7th centuries the "autochthons" were the main producers of food, implements and weapons for the "newcomers"²⁰⁰ and during the 4th-7th centuries, agriculture is ascribed exclusively to "the autochthonous population," because it was incompatible with the nomad character of the "Barbarians"²⁰¹. Such views are not shared by all the authors of the "History of the Romanians". Some recognize that the Bulgarians and the Alans did practice agriculture, perhaps even the Magyars²⁰². Accordingly, one of them rejects the idea that the foreign peoples relied exclusively on the production of the local population²⁰³.

¹⁹¹ Idem, p. 584.

¹⁹² Șt. Olteanu, M. Rusu and R. Popa, in *IR3*, p. 79–81

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 92–93.

¹⁹⁴ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 604–605, and Gh. Popilian, in *IR2*, p. 607.

¹⁹⁵ Gh. Popilian, in *IR2*, p. 614.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 616.

¹⁹⁷ I. Ioniță, in *IR2*, p. 619–620.

¹⁹⁸ Idem, in *IR2*, p. 689.

¹⁹⁹ Șt. Pascu, Șt. Olteanu, D.Gh. Teodor and O. Iliescu, in *IR2*, p. 179–180.

²⁰⁰ D. Gh. Teodor, in *IR2*, p. 559, 562.

²⁰¹ Șt. Olteanu and M. Rusu, in *IR3*, p. 102–103.

²⁰² V. Spinei, P. Diaconu, I. Ferenczi, in *IR3*, p. 251

²⁰³ V. Spinei, in *IR3*, p. 269.

In addition to their economic role, the social organization of the “Daco-Romans” is an expression of their identity and of their superiority. According to “archaeological results,” i.e. “the distribution of family plots, that of the houses, that of the deceased in the cemeteries,” they were organized in nuclear families, while the “migrators” were organized in “large patriarchal families,” corresponding to the “gentile community”²⁰⁴. The method to arrive at such conclusions seems to be a crude form of pattern recognition. For example, in the first settlement from Davideni, out of 8 dwellings, four make a “nest,” i.e. they are grouped, while the rest are isolated; in the second settlement, out of the 15 dwellings, 3 make a “nest,” the rest being dispersed and “lonely.” The “nests” are interpreted as the house of the “nuclear family and those of the children,” while the isolated houses belong to the foreigners accepted by the village community²⁰⁵.

These village communities are supposed to form groups, “confederations” for common defense and economic interests, based on “ethno-linguistic community and similar stage of socio-economic development, culture and [Christian] spiritual life...,” named by D. Gh. Teodor, after N. Iorga²⁰⁶, “popular *Romaniae*”, “strong, stable demographic and linguistic cores of Romanic culture”²⁰⁷.

A gradually increasing social differentiation is accepted, with a clear preference for feudal lords raised from the village communities, to whom the obligations of the peasants were more of “a familial character... under the control of the collectivity and constantly limited by the power of the traditions”²⁰⁸. To these considerate local lords the foreign merchants are contrasted, who were “a negative aspect” because they “disadvantaged Romanian society by making great profits”²⁰⁹.

“Although sufficient and explicit documents are not available” – there is no interpretation of the archaeological material to that effect – “in principle and analogically,” we have to admit that the local village communities, producing the majority of the material goods necessary to the everyday life were “collectively subjected” to the new masters (Goths, Huns, Gepids), not individually or by families²¹⁰. This subjection was possible only because the Romanic population, “in its evolution towards becoming Romanian, was not able to rise to superior forms of socio-political organization”²¹¹.

Political organization is considered “of paramount importance in the history of the Romanian people, associating itself, through its probative capacities, to the fundamental problem of our historical permanence.” Again the positions contrary to ours are deplored – in this case those which place the beginnings of the political organization of the Romanians in the 14th century – and assigned to “foreign historians, adversaries, for political reasons, to the affirmation of our historical continuity.” These people are supposed to ignore “the capacity and the continuous effort of political organization [of the “autochthonous society”], starting from inferior forms, like those represented by the territorial rural community, to the mature ones, embodied by the state...”²¹².

The method of identifying political organization and its complexity in the 4th-9th centuries is the same as that described above: “groupings” of “urban settlements” (sic!) are detected; e.g. for the 3rd-5th centuries 25 such groupings were found on the territory of ancient Dacia and in time their number decreases as the number of settlements included increases²¹³. The whole process is imagined as a continuous evolution towards state formation, a capacity inherent in the local population, viewed as its political maturation²¹⁴, a result of the union of “pre-state formations”²¹⁵.

²⁰⁴ Șt. Olteanu, E. Zaharia, R. Popa, in *IR3*: 64–65; see also D. Gh. Teodor, in *IR2*, p. 641–642

²⁰⁵ Șt. Olteanu, E. Zaharia, R. Popa, in *IR3*, p. 65–66)

²⁰⁶ In *Studii asupra evului mediu românesc*, Bucharest, 1984. First published in French in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 3, 1924, 1, p. 35–50.

²⁰⁷ D. Gh. Teodor, in *IR2*, p. 642.

²⁰⁸ Șt. Pascu, Șt. Olteanu, M. Rusu, M. D. Matei, R. Popa, O. Iliescu, in *IR3*, p. 349

²⁰⁹ Șt. Olteanu, O. Iliescu, in *IR3*, p. 543

²¹⁰ D. Protase, in *IR2* 603)

²¹¹ Idem, loc. cit.

²¹² Șt. Olteanu, M. Rusu and R. Popa, in *IR3*, p. 93–94.

²¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 94–95.

²¹⁴ N. Constantinescu, Șt. Olteanu, M. D. Matei and Șt. Ștefănescu, in *IR3*, p. 563

Christianity

Christianity is described as a culture historical phenomenon of universal importance and, "not less important, a solid testimony of the massive continuity of the Latin-speaking indigenous population in post-Roman Dacia"²¹⁶, but the cultural phenomenon seems for most of the authors of the "History of the Romanians" interesting mainly for its quality of ethnic marker. Its beginnings are so important for the origins of the nation, that during the last 2 decades of the Communist regime the research, i.e. mostly the continuous finding of new evidence, even if sometimes highly questionable, was constantly encouraged. After 1989, the Christianization of the ancestors of the Romanians by apostle Andrew became a dogma for the Orthodox Church, and some historians and archaeologists have accepted it. Not M. Bărbulescu, who emphasizes the rarity of paleo-Christian finds datable to the time of the Roman province, a situation similar to that of other provinces at that time, and considers the "apostolic origin of the Christianity north of the Danube" a mere hypothesis²¹⁷. The recent emphasis on early Christianization, beginning in the second half of the first century AD²¹⁸ is echoed in a chapter about Dobruja, where, following "Church traditions," against "the reservations of some researchers," it is suggested that Andrew has founded the bishopric of Tomis, an idea apparently supported by the assertion that the local population of Dobruja was "in superior evolutionary stage"²¹⁹.

Christianity is supposed to be general on the future national territory by the end of the 5th century.²²⁰ D. Protase thinks "we have logically and necessarily" to suppose the existence of cult buildings on the "whole Daco-Roman territory," from the withdrawal of Aurelian to the end of the 6th century, although he admits that the only ones we know about are that from Sucidava, a Roman city on the northern bank of the Danube, at that time a part of the Byzantine Empire, and two other (highly) questionable constructions in Slăveni and Porolissum. The more than 100 paleo-Christian objects, worship places (I do not know what he is speaking about, and there is no indication about that in the text), and cult buildings, "even though they have an unequal scientific weight and their Christian significance remains uncertain in some cases, indicate the high number of those who embraced the new creed" and "decidedly argue for the widespread existence of cult buildings, even though they have not been detected... by the archaeological excavations." We are warned that many were wooden constructions, therefore, D. Protase believes, archaeologically undetectable²²¹.

The exclusive access to Christianity of the "autochthons" is explained by the fact that its spontaneous spread²²² was not possible in the "tribal world, incapable of massively receiving the new religion...[a]mong the 'barbarian' peoples...organized in tribes and with their ancestral beliefs, Christianity could not establish itself...." D. Protase plays the archaeological evidence against the evidence of the translation of the Bible by Ulfilas and of the Gothic martyrs, to claim that the Goths from

²¹⁵ Șt. Ștefănescu, in *IR3*, p. 589.

²¹⁶ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 587.

²¹⁷ M. Bărbulescu, in *IR2*, p. 257.

²¹⁸ A. Rădulescu, in *IR2*, p. 370-371.

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 530, 532.

²²⁰ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 596. A map of paleo-Christian objects and monuments in post-Roman Dacia (AD 275 - 6th century) seems to prove that there are no such finds outside the former province (*Ibidem*, p. 588, fig. 80), although a few Christian object were found outside the former province in 4th century contexts. Another map, with the "Christian symbols" from the 5th-7th centuries, registers more finds outside the former province: 31 vs. 22 (Șt. Olteanu, M. Rusu and R. Popa, in *IR3*, p. 92).

²²¹ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 591-592.

²²² The absence of any evidence about the organization of the Church on the future Romanian national territory outside the Empire and the pressure of the nationalist representation of society make D. Protase and many others defend the thesis of a "popular" Christianity, with no hierarchy (in *IR2*, p. 599), which echoes the "popular" basis of the Romanian ethnogenesis.

the territories north of the Danube were not Christians,²²³ and declares that any paleo-Christian find of the 4th and 5th centuries indicates exclusively the “autochthonous population”.²²⁴

Ethnogenesis

The process of ethnogenesis after the withdrawal of the Romans is described as a gradual qualitative change of the local population. It became more uniform²²⁵ in all its cultural manifestations, more Romanized, more Christian. Settlements and dwellings, the burial rite and rituals, the specific artefacts, the same weight of the Christian elements and of the artefacts imported from the Empire, are taken as undisputable evidence of the “unity (original emphasis) of material culture and spiritual life,” a consequence of “the same socio-economic development”, of the existence of “the same ethno-linguistic elements”.²²⁶

The emergence of the Romanians is placed in the 7th century without any kind of argumentation. In the second volume of the “History of the Romanians” the local population after the abandonment of the Roman province of Dacia is named “Daco-Romans” or, less frequently, Romanics. The third volume, which begins with the 7th century, designates the local population exclusively as “Romanians”. At the end of their ethnogenesis the Romanians are the only population of Romanic origin in Eastern Europe, with ancient social and economic regulations, with Christian mental structures preserved from the Roman and Roman-Byzantine time²²⁷.

Ethnogenesis²²⁸ is conceived as a synthesis of – carefully identified – demographic and cultural components, a process of natural evolution²²⁹. As such it does not differ from the birth of an archaeological culture or, e.g., that of the “Daco-Romans”: “a symbiosis and later an ethnic and cultural synthesis between the winners and the vanquished...”²³⁰. Why is ethnogenesis different from these other “syntheses” remains unexplained but its importance appears with clarity. All that we know about events prior to it constitutes its “premises” and everything that follows is made of its consequences.²³¹ As usual in nationalist ideologies,

²²³ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 594–595. I. Ioniță expresses a different opinion: he believes that the Christianization of the Goths is visible for the archaeologist (in *IR2*, p. 691).

²²⁴ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 595–596. The exclusive use of the Christian objects by the “autochthons” is supposed to last only until the end of the fifth century, when the first Christian objects belonging to a Germanic population are dated.

²²⁵ Significantly, the concept most frequently used to designate the sameness of all the “autochthons” is not the descriptive “uniformity”, but “unity”. Although it allows some cultural diversity, if it turns into complementarity, usually its main function is to convey the social and political deliberate solidarity to be expected from the members of a nation-like entity.

²²⁶ D.Gh. Teodor, in *IR2*, p. 654.

²²⁷ Șt. Pascu and R. Theodorescu, in *IR3*, p. 110.

²²⁸ With one exception: A. Vulpe, when writing about the origins of the Thracians (in *IR1*, p. 286), ethnogenesis - “one of the key problems of the history of each people” (I. Ferenczi and Th. Năgler, in *IR3*, p. 412) – is used only for the Romanians. One could legitimately enquire about a Getic ethnogenesis, a Dacian one, a “Geto-Dacian” one, or a “Daco-Roman” one.

²²⁹ D. Protase, in *IR2*, p. 604.

²³⁰ Idem, in *IR2*, p. 143.

²³¹ In guidelines to teachers and textbook authors for the 12th grade, backed by the authority of the Ministry of National Education, this is all one finds out about ethnogenesis: “the premises and consequences of the synthesis”. (M. Cerkez et alii, *Curriculum național. Programe școlare pentru clasa a IX-a. Volumul al III-lea*. Bucharest, 1999, p. 32. In spite of the subtitle, this publication includes indications for the 12th grade. There is nothing else to indicate the nature of the process itself. How far in time the “premises” can go is shown by one textbook (N. Dumitrescu et alii, *Istoria Românilor. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a*, Bucharest, p. 6) where, in a lesson dedicated to them, the chronology begins with the orogeny of the Carpathians, “ca. 65,000,000 years BC” (sic!).

the origins explain the present.²³² The profound structural changes, which make us much closer to the Hungarians or the Bulgarians than to the Dacians or the Romans, in the entity whose continuity is assumed, the ethnomorphosis²³³, are ignored or downplayed to predictable, "normal" evolution.

Conclusions

The authors of the first three volumes of the "History of the Romanians" have various attitudes towards its main narrative, the ethnogenesis of the Romanians and its "premises." Some ignore the narrative altogether, and this is possible especially when writing about matters peripheral to it or by making them peripheral²³⁴ (therefore their names are seldom mentioned here), a few – A. Vulpe when discussing the "archaeological culture" concept or M. Babeş when discussing the elements of Dacian discontinuity in the Roman province²³⁵ – confront from scientific positions some of its key issues, without questioning the core of the construction, while others are supporting it following an ideological tradition. This encouraging variety of attitudes does not affect the construction of an ancient past for the Romanians in the "History of the Romanians". Its structure and main elements are the same as before – I assume the editorial collectives for the first three volumes took care of that – and they were better defended elsewhere.

It is not my purpose to assess the overall quality of the work or the merits of each author. There are very important qualitative and editorial differences between the chapters and the volumes. However, most archaeology used in it for the building of the national narrative is simply bad archaeology and there is no need to compare it with other paradigms and other conceptions of society to pass such a judgement. It is enough to examine it against the criteria of traditional, culture historical archaeology, the dominant paradigm in Romania. With the remarkable exception of the efforts made by A. Vulpe to "clean" the archaeological culture concept of its ethnic and therefore political implications, the archaeological interpretations made in the "History of the Romanians" with the purpose of reconstructing the national ancestry are following G. Kossinna's concepts of culture, archaeology and ethnicity, but are used with less rigour. The poor understanding of the archaeological record, its sloppy documentation, the frequent contradictions, the double standards employed for our ancestors and the foreign peoples, the reduction of the past to "premises" of the present, and of archaeology to the role of providing with "concrete evidence" already existing representations of the national past, are all likely to make any archaeologist unhappy.

The low quality of the interpretation stems mostly from the subordination of archaeological knowledge to political goals: many interpretations are not meant to lead to a better understanding of the past, nor are they made for colleagues to read and critique. Rather, they are for politicians to appreciate and reward, based on their interests and their common knowledge. Such constructions are not evaluated against validity criteria made by the archaeologist, but are matched to the perceived imperatives of the political present, with "the national interest" to which normative, ritualized discourses about the nation, disguised in professional knowledge about the past, are offered.

²³² How important the origins continued to be after 1989 in Romania is shown by the time taken by our politicians to discuss about the history of the nation during the debates on a new Constitution in 1990-1991 (C. Preda, *Romanian Political Science Review* 1, 1999, 3, p. 733–762.

²³³ Ph. L. Kohl, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27, 1998, p. 232.

²³⁴ For instance by writing *ad narrandum*, as some of the authors to the second volume have done (A. Suceveanu, "Înceiere" (ms.) [1999], an afterword prepared for the second volume of the *IR*, not published). I am grateful to the author for allowing me to use this text, an afterword to the second volume, rejected by D. Protase, for reasons which might have to do with some unorthodox ideas presented here, such as the possibility that the national territory was inhabited at times by an ethnic mosaic and the rejection of a global characterization of the "migrators".

²³⁵ In *IR1*, p. 800–802.

When what matters is the adequacy to the political present, not the quality of the interpretation, the limited autonomy of archaeology in Romania and its auxiliary status, become easier to explain. When the outcome of the research is validated from the outside, no wonder that lack of confidence and purpose sets in:

restricted to the information offered by archaeology, even when correlated with ethnographic models, the researchers have to remain in the world of hypotheses, without any chance of verification, with the risk of projecting modern models and obsessions²³⁶.

I suggest that this condition is not inherent to archaeology, but is a local state of despondency to which the intervention of political priorities has contributed by discouraging the formation of professional validation criteria and procedures, which have a dynamics of their own, developing in a framework which is not that of the national state and being able to resist the imperatives of local political presents. They would also limit the readiness of archaeologists to accommodate contradictory evidence²³⁷ and enable them to trust their fragile scholarship more than the sacred truths of the national ideology.

²³⁶ D. Mohah, in *IR1*, p. 173.

²³⁷ Ph. L. Kohl, *op.cit.*, p. 239.