

## ALEXANDRU PĂUNESCU

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Says the Psalmist: “Man is alike a blade of grass; his days like wild flowers; so he will blossom. As soon as the wind blows over him, he will disappear and his place will be seen no more” (Ps. 102, 15–16).

These words match perfectly the personality of Alexandru Păunescu, archaeologist of the Romanian Paleolithic. His last wish was that the cremated remainders of his body should be dispersed over the waters of the Prut, at Ripiceni-Izvor, so that he might forever be present there where he had revealed the traces of the most ancient inhabitants of the area between the Carpathians and the Dniester.

Alexandru Păunescu was born on March 3, 1931 at Nana, Călărași district, where he attended the elementary school. In 1950, he graduated the reputed high school “Mihai Viteazul” in Bucharest, which, even under the communist regime had preserved the value of the pre-war Romanian education.

Between 1950 and 1954 he was a student of the Bucharest University, the Faculty of History, and between 1955-1960 he worked at the Bucharest Institute of Archaeology, where he followed the professional “steps” imposed by the administrative system of the institution: laboratory-assistant, preparator, assistant researcher and researcher-on-probation. In 1960 he was appointed a researcher, in 1963, a scientific researcher, in 1968, a main researcher, in 1970 a 3rd degree main researcher, in 1991 a second degree main researcher and finally, in 1993, a first degree main researcher, the highest research position in the Romanian academic system.

In 1966, he began the work for his doctor’s degree; his final thesis on the *Evolution of carved stone tools and weapons discovered in Romania*, finished in 1970, was a remarkable synthesis concerning the pre-history of the Carpathian-Danubian space.

From the beginning, Alexandru Păunescu was able to make important efforts and proved an extraordinary organizing ability at the Permanent Exhibition of the National Museum of Antiquities, one of the first institutions dedicated to modern archaeological research as far back as the early 19th century.

Al. Păunescu was persistently concerned with the results of his predecessors, ‘his mates’ and his own research work. That is why, in 1973, when the project of a great *Romanian archaeological repertory* was initiated he was one of the first researchers who totally assumed the huge effort to investigate archives, libraries, museums as well as field researches. However, he rapidly realized that such a task was impossible to achieve at the time, therefore he centered his work on district archeological catalogues, which, by accumulation might lead to a complete repertory of the national territory. Consequently, since at that moment he was doing vast systematic excavations within the large Paleolithic settlement of the Ripiceni-Izvor, on the Prut (Botoșani district), Al. Păunescu decided to draw the *Archaeological repertory of the Botoșani district*, following a personal methodology, meant to highlight not only the prehistorical and protohistorical settlements, but also their evolution, within a specific geographical-administrative area during the modern and contemporary times. In order to achieve this ambitious goal, Al. Păunescu found the best way to cooperate with P. Șadurski, director of the District History Museum in Botoșani and V. Chirica, a researcher of the Institute of History and Archaeology *A.D. Xenopol*, in Iași, who, at that time was intensely working in the excavations of the Paleolithic settlements Mitoc: Malu Galben, Pârâul lui Strate and Valea lui Stan. The repertory was published in two volumes in 1976 and got the *Vasile Pârvan Award* of the Romanian Academy. It became a model for other district archaeological repertories. Aiming at an exhaustive archaeological research, Al. Păunescu initiated periodical investigations in each and every settlement and the results of his first research in the Botoșani district (in

the alphabetical order of the localities) were published in several volumes of *Hierasus*, review of the Botoșani District Museum of History. Unfortunately, for a number of years these investigations had to stop because of many difficulties. However, Al. Păunescu did not abandon his purpose, therefore, in the year 2000, he advanced a project for the *Archaeological Repertory of Romania* in cooperation with the Institute for Cultural Memory, coordinated by the Ministry of Culture.

In 1974, Al. Păunescu was appointed Head of the Documentary Department of the Bucharest Institute of Archaeology, due to his passion for the remote past, to his constant interest in emphasizing the value of the archaeological research before World War II, and to his remarkable professional level. In this position, the archaeologist Al. Păunescu also proved his multiple organizational talents in a series of activities, which implied a great effort, meant to facilitate specialists' access to archaeological materials preserved by the Institute: the reorganization of the Institute's storehouses, starting with those belonging to the former National Museum of Antiquities; computer processing of all Paleolithic discoveries in the recent storehouses of the Academy House, in Bucharest; the initiation of computer evidence of all the collections of the former National Museum of Antiquities, gathered from their previous locations after World War II; the reorganization of the record-library, the film library and photograph collections of the former Museum of Antiquities and of the Institute; the evidence of the patrimonial objects and collections of the Institute of Archaeology.

Another dimension of Al. Păunescu's activity within the Bucharest Institute of Archaeology was his permanent preoccupation for field-surveys, in order to make an inventory of all Paleolithic settlements in Romania. In this respect, he was the only specialist in Paleolithic history who actually crossed the entire country and made such field researches, stratigraphic tests, systematic excavations, some of them of great extent, in all Romanian districts. His monographic works of exceptional value were organized considering vast geographic areas: the territory east of the Carpathians; the zone between the Carpathians and the Siret river, the Siret and the Prut rivers, respectively; the South Danubian territory (Dobruja); the region between the Carpathians and the Danube, the Banat region and the Romanian Plane included; Transylvania, including Maramureș and Oaș counties. They are complete inventories of all the archaeological discoveries belonging to early, middle and late Paleolithic and Epipaleolithic-Mezolithic ages, including the fossil sites of the late Pleistocene. These works are not only exceptional auxiliary instruments, but also remarkable multi-disciplinary studies. Clearly, at least a century from now on, no scientific work on the Romanian Paleolithic will be possible without reference to these volumes.

Al. Păunescu had not the chance to be present in international scientific meetings on the Paleolithic. He was a member in the 8th Commission of the Late Paleolithic, within the International Union of Pre- and Proto- Historical Sciences, but never participated in this organization's symposiums or congresses. He was even deprived of the opportunity to make documentary trips in Europe. We must emphasize that the political regime – which Al. Păunescu profoundly detested – was not always the factor which put an obstacle to his researches abroad; three times he was expected in France by specialists, but he was replaced, as the former director of the Institute put it “by the very person who had proposed his name”. The mirage of the West was too strong for some of those who, under the communist regime governed the destinies of the Romanian archaeologists and Romanian archaeology. But the value of his studies imposed his name to the European academic world, and he was invited to write for important publications, such as *L'Homme de Neandertal*, *L'anthropologie* (Paris). Al. Păunescu published a series of valuable studies in *Dacia*, meant to present the Romanian archaeological and historical realities to the world.

Although I was one of his closest co-workers, it is hard even for myself to weigh a scientific activity illustrated by 13 personal volumes (monographs, syntheses) and over 19 studies, articles and notes. Al. Păunescu proved to have vast knowledge of geography, geology, pedology and stratigraphy, crucial in characterizing the Paleolithic settlements in their correlation with the elements of the environment; at the same time, he had solid information on the lithic material belonging to the Paleolithic and the Neolithic, although he lacked contacts with Western specialists, the direct sources being replaced by a thorough assimilation of the specialized literature. In his continuous effort to integrate Romanian archaeological discoveries within the European context, he made use of inter-disciplinary research, mainly of chronology, thus circumscribing the Paleolithic and the Epipaleolithic-Mezolithic Romanian settlements to those of the South-East and Central East European area; by his research, the Romanian territory was no longer a blank on the European Paleolithic map. I feel myself entitled to make these assertions as a

member of the 8th Commission and of the Permanent Council of the International Union of Pre- and Proto- Historical Sciences, as a participant in numerous international scientific meeting and as a co-worker in the most recent five volumes of the 8th Commission's scientific "balances".

Al. Păunescu was a member in the Scientific Council of the Bucharest Institute of Archaeology and the editorial committee of *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche (și arheologie)*, published by the Institute. In this latter position, Al. Păunescu was one of the co-authors of another exceptional work: the SCIVA index, beginning with the first number of the review (SCIVA, I, 1950, 1), up to the volume XLV, 1994, 4; it includes summaries of all the volumes, authors indexes, settlement indexes, index of themes and chronology, numismatic index, etc. Along with monographs on the Romanian Paleolithic and Epipaleolithic-Mezolithic, this index represents an instrument indispensable to any archaeologist, specialist, student or simply enthusiast of the national past. Al. Păunescu had a major contribution in the new synthesis of the national history: the *Romanian History Treatise*, published by the Romanian Academy, Bucharest 2001.

I had the privilege to work together with Al. Păunescu in the archaeological sites of Ripiceni-Izvor, as well as during archaeological tests at Mamaia, Cremenea-Sita Buzăului, Costanda-Lădăuți, Ceahlău (the sites Poiana-La Scaune, Dârțu, Podiș, Bistricioara-Lutărie, Baia de Fier-Peștera Muierii, Cioclovina, Nandru (the sites Peștera Curată and Peștera Spurcată), Gura Cheii and Râșnov. It is hard for me to say anything about his qualities as a man and as a colleague. He certainly had such qualities, but the people around him did not always succeed in coming close to him, and remaining so. Maybe it was his fault too that he could not always keep his true friends; but there is one thing which is certain: Al. Păunescu kept his dignity throughout the ill-fated moments of his life, due to the love, understanding and tranquility he found at home, within his family.

Vasile Chirica

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