

# IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS IN RESEARCHING THE (E)NEOLITHIC IN ROMANIA<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** In the present article I intend to point out some aspects of the archaeological practice in communist and post-communist Romania which I think deserve more attention than has been paid to them so far, taking as a case study the research on the (E)Neolithic period. The first part of the paper deals with the dominant types of discourse, their proponents and their beneficiaries; in other words, the policy pursued by the academic world, and the power relationships within the discipline. The second part discusses the relationships between the archaeologists' approach and the socio-political context, and their consequences.

**Rezumat.** În articolul de față intenționez să relievez o serie de aspecte ale practicii arheologice din România comunistă și post-comunistă ce consider că merită mai multă atenție, luând ca studiu de caz cercetarea (e)neoliticului. În prima parte a acestui articol voi discuta despre tipurile de discurs dominante, despre emițătorii și beneficiarii lor; cu alte cuvinte, mă voi referi la politica academică și universitară, la relațiile de putere din cadrul disciplinei. În cea de a doua parte voi lua în discuție relațiile dintre demersul arheologilor și contextul socio-politic, precum și consecințele ce au decurs/decurg de aici.

## Introduction

Anyone who cares to take a look into the works published in the past or at present by most Romanian archaeologists will notice that the research of the (E)Neolithic is dominated by the cultural-historical approach: the epistemology is positivist-empiricist and the main theoretical concept used continues to be that of “archaeological culture,” as defined in early 20th century by Gustaf Kossinna. The perpetuation of the cultural-historical approach is also shown by the fact that since the interwar period the number of (E)Neolithic “archaeological cultures” has kept on growing: in a review dedicated to pre- and proto-history in Romania, published in 1933 by Ion Nestor, six “cultures” are presented (Nestor 1932), and in 2000 mention is made of the existence of about 22 Neolithic “cultures,” “groups” and “cultural aspects” (Mantu 1998-2000: 76). If we add to these the Eneolithic “cultures,” “groups” and “cultural aspects,” we obtain an overall figure of around 31.

A further argument regarding the continuity of the cultural-historical approach is the fact that the graphic representation of the “archaeological cultures” by maps or correlation tables, used by V. Gordon Childe in *The Danube in Prehistory* (1929), continues to be a current practice in Romanian archaeology.

As a matter of fact, if someone should take a look at the thematic-chronological index of the journals *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie* (*Studies and Researches of Ancient History and Archaeology*) (36 [1-2], 1985, p. 154ff; 46 [3-4], 1995, p. 334ff) or *Dacia* (43-45, 1999-2001, p. 318ff), two of the most lasting and prestigious publications in Romania, will find that for the (E)Neolithic

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period, the main presentation criterion is the grouping of the articles according to the “cultures,” “assemblages,” “complexes” or “cultural groups.”

Even during the communist regime, established in Romania after World War II, the fundamentals of the discipline have remained the same. In spite of what we might think, in communist Romania a Marxist archaeology similar to the western ones was not practised. In Romania the so-called Marxist interpretations consisted only in assertions mechanically added at the beginning or end of some absolutely traditional (positivist-empiricist) archaeological works. In short, the type of archaeological approach in communist Romania is best defined by the following phrase: “Engels on the outside, Kossinna on the inside” (Gebühr 1987: 111 cited in Jacobs 2000: 350).

After 1989, a series of critical works on cultural-historical archaeology appeared (e.g. Niculescu 1997; 2000; Vulpe 2001; Anghelinu 2003; Dragoman and Oanță-Marghitu 2006; Palincaș 2006a). I am not going to repeat the objections raised as regards the cultural-historical approach. However, I intend to give a short account of a few aspects of archaeological practice in communist and post-communist Romania, that in my opinion deserve more attention, by taking the research of the (E)Neolithic as a case study. In the first part of this article I will discuss the dominant types of discourse, their proponents and beneficiaries; in other words, I will refer to the academic and university policy, to the power relations within the discipline. In the second part I will discuss the relationships between the archaeologists’ approach and the socio-political context, and their consequences.

### **On discourse, power and ideology**

The terms of “discourse,” “power” and “ideology” were discussed in detail in the “post-procesualist” archaeological literature (e.g. Shanks and Tilley 1982: 130-132; 1987: 75-78, 180-181; 1992: 129-130; Miller and Tilley 1984: 5-14; Tilley 1990a), one of the analysed topics being the academic discourse (e.g. Tilley 1990b; 1993; 1995). Therefore, I will no longer insist on these concepts and directly present the “Romanian case” (see also Palincaș 2006b).

A fundamental trait of the discourse associated to the positivist-empiricist approach in Romanian archaeology consists in the frequent use of the terms “science”/“scientific,” with a view to emphasizing the objective nature of archaeological practice, in which the results produced by the archaeologist are regarded as a direct reflection of a past reality. A good example of this is the review published in 1981 by Mircea Babeș – *Marile etape ale dezvoltării arheologiei în România (The main stages of the development of archaeology in Romania)*. The structure of that article follows a genealogical tree that should justify the current archaeological practice by the filiation with an idealized past, peopled with a sequence of “great personalities” making up a true pantheon. According to Babeș, the discipline develops by the collecting and “scientific” and “objective” ordering of the archaeological finds: “[...] Romanian archaeology has covered a long way, always going upwards to attain what it is today: a scientific discipline [...]” (*ibid.*: 319). Wishing to convince the readers of the objectivity and truthfulness of his assertions, in this eleven page text, Babeș uses the words “science”/“scientific” no less than 18 times (four times on the first page!), that is a frequency average of 1.63 times per page.

A similar image can be found in the case of the homage articles. I have analysed 23 such texts on some of the best known archaeologists from Romania who researched or are researching the (E)Neolithic period (see Appendix 1). I have chosen to analyse homage texts because this kind of writings is one of the most important sources of information on the way the archaeologists in this country regard the discipline they belong to.

The type of discourse in these texts expresses a true cult of the personality, proven by phrases such as “the unquestionable superiority of the Master,” “he used to be for us the embodiment of the true professor on whose every word we used to hang lustily,” “a pillar of Romanian archaeology,” “He had the ethics of a philosopher of Martin Heidegger’s size,” “he was born for archaeology,” “The lady of Romanian prehistory,” “the restless fighter for scholarly ideals,” “Maître érudit,” etc. Some of the authors use terms that remind of the fanaticism specific of religious sects: “he burned on the fire lit on the altar of science and culture,” “the museum, the city [...] worship him and keep his memory,” “disciple(s),” “apprentice,” “mentor,” “spiritual mentor,” “vocational profession,” “model for life,” “stratégie clairvoyante,” etc. The homage articles say more about their authors than the people to whom they are dedicated, as they

are rather autobiographical. The relation between the person who pays homage and the homager is one of the patron–client type: by investing in the cult of the personality of a “master,” the homager/disciple is, in his/her turn, justified and confirmed as archaeologist/“scientist” by the aura surrounding the “master.” That way a series of genealogies are developed, starting from the “founders” of Romanian prehistorical archaeology and ending in the present, with more or less direct references to the person who writes the text. To exemplify, I present the following genealogies regarding a series of archaeologists interested above all in the (E)Neolithic period:

(1) Vasile Pârvan – Vladimir Dumitrescu – Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu – the former and current Ph D candidates of the latter. About Pârvan, Dumitrescu writes that “To him we owe the creation of modern Romanian archaeological school, whose prestige was recognized right after his death and still is an honour for Romanian science, as his disciples and descendants are striving, each according to his abilities and temperament, to fulfill his work” (Dumitrescu 1993: 27). According to Marinescu-Bîlcu (2002), Dumitrescu was “remarked and appreciated by the master Vasile Pârvan as early as his undergraduate years” (*ibid.*: 8) and played an important role “in continuing the goals initiated by and, perhaps, even the ideals put forward in the unwritten testament of his Master” (*ibid.*: 9). Symptomatically, the homage text dedicated to Marinescu-Bîlcu begins as follows: “A distinguished heiress and follower of the prestigious activity of Vladimir Dumitrescu, Mrs Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu devoted her entire life to archaeological research [...]” (Neagu 2005: 9). Thus, from the very beginning, the professional activity of the honoured person is authenticated by relating to the “prestigious activity” of Dumitrescu who is described by Marinescu-Bîlcu as a “scholar.” That it is not by chance is proven by the fact that, further on, the professional behaviour of the honoured person is again compared with that of Dumitrescu (*ibid.*: 9). Obviously, the justification has run to this day: “Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu has not been only a Ph D supervisor, but she also assumed an *educational* role for at least two generations of archaeologists or prehistorical researchers” (*ibid.*: 9; original emphasis). The stress on the word “educational” is not fortuitous: “Working on one’s Ph D theses or the simple encounters with Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu have become a true school of prehistory that educated *outstanding* archaeologists or researchers, such as [the enumeration of former and current Ph D students follows]” (*ibid.*: 9; my emphasis). Although the author is not included in the above enumeration, as a former Ph D applicant of Marinescu-Bîlcu, his presence among the “outstanding archaeologists” is well understood.

(2) Vasile Pârvan / Ioan Andrieşescu – Ion Nestor – Mircea Petrescu-Dîmboviţa – Nicolae Ursulescu / Dan Monah. One of his former students, Petrescu-Dîmboviţa (2005) describes Nestor as a “creator of Romanian archaeological school, like his famous master Vasile Pârvan” (*ibid.*: 13), “a distinguished follower of his predecessors V. Pârvan and I. Andrieşescu” (*ibid.*: 15), as one of his most important merits consists in the fact that, “owing to his exquisite qualities as a professor and a scientist, he succeeded in creating, due to his disciples, a modern Romanian archaeological school in the field of prehistory, of the period of the formation of the Romanian people, and of medieval archaeology, whose results have contributed and continue to contribute to the advancement of Romanian archaeology in this country and abroad” (*ibid.*: 19). In his turn, Petrescu-Dîmboviţa was educated “under the direct guidance of some great professors, such as Ioan Andrieşescu and Ion Nestor,” as one of his former students asserts (Ursulescu 2005: 14). The latter underlines in the very first part of his text that “we have the joy and pride of having been a pupil and later collaborator and follower at the chair” (*ibid.*: 13). According to Ursulescu, Petrescu-Dîmboviţa’s activity focused on “training specialists, by paying close attention to the students who had abilities for research and passion for archaeological research” (*ibid.*: 14), a reason for which, the “archaeological excavations he coordinated [...] were also examples of field research for the practising students’ groups, for the young researchers who accompanied him” (*ibid.*: 14). The emphasize of Petrescu-Dîmboviţa’s professional activity is not fortuitous, as the author himself underlines in the following clause: “I point out that first of all, because I counted among those who benefited of the careful supervision, advices, but also of the high standards of Professor Mircea Petrescu-Dîmboviţa on the site of Cucuteni” (*ibid.*: 14).

A similar image can be found in Monah (2005: 26): “As a professor and a Ph D supervisor, as a director of the ‘A. D. Xenopol’ Institute of History and Archaeology and of the Museum of the History of

Moldavia, M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița was constantly preoccupied with training young archaeologists. Moreover, he tried to get the most from them. Excavations, surveys and publications: these were the requirements of the professor. In these respects he would accept no rebate and no slowing down of the rhythm whatsoever.” These valorizing assertions also point to Monah, as proven in a homage article dedicated to him on his 60th anniversary (Iconomu 2003: 10): “His scientific personality [Monah’s], representative for the Romanian Neolithic research, can be considered to be the result of Iassy archaeological school, built up and headed by the academician Mircea Petrescu-Dîmbovița.”

(3) Ioan Andrieșescu / Scarlet Lambrino – Dumitru Berciu – Sebastian Morintz. Berciu is not said to be the heir and follower of Andrieșescu or Lambrino, but only that “during his undergraduate years he was an apprentice in fieldwork next to I. Andrieșescu at Oinacu and Agighiol, and next to Scarlet Lambrino at Histria” (Morintz 1977: 298). Despite that, the fact that Morintz, the author of the homage text dedicated to Berciu, mentions it is relevant. Equally important for Morintz is also the fact that he considers himself to be a “disciple of Professor D. Berciu since his undergraduate years” (*ibid.*: 300).

In the analysed bibliographic sample, with only one exception (Marinescu-Bîlcu 2002), the frequency average of the terms “science”/“scientific”/“scientist” is at least once per each page, and there are cases when the frequency average is no less than four times per page (see Iconomu 2003; Preda 1987; maximum 4.67 in Ursulescu 2005). As regards the exception, the singular use of the expression “scientist” is made up for by using three times per text, with direct reference to the person to whom tribute is paid, of the word “scholar.” In the other situations in which it occurs (between one and five times per text), the latter term reinforces the value of the words “science”/“scientific” (see Dumitrescu 1993; Morintz 1977; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 2005; Spinei 2005a; 2005b; Székely 1973; Teodor 2005a; 2005b; Ursulescu 2005). “The scientists” are *par excellence* men; the research on the (E)Neolithic in Romania is man dominated as shown by the fact that there is only one homage text dedicated to a woman (Neagu 2005), but even in this case one of the main reasons to praised her is that of being the “heiress and follower” of her (male) “master.”

To use Christopher Tilley’s phrase (1992: 164), one could say that this frequent usage of the words “science”/“scientific” is not an argument, but an incantation. The terms “science” or “scientific” are authoritarian, as they contain the idea of objectivity and truth, confirm, justify and authenticate, create an aura that strengthens, defends and ensures the status of an archaeologist of a person (more precisely the professional status and, implicitly, the social one). True knowledge could be attained only due to an education and a “scientific work” (see the role of academic education in building up the future “scientist” and valorizing this education while practising the profession). Equally, these terms contain the idea of exclusion. The reader gets the impression that Romanian archaeological practice is free of imagination, subjectivism, uncertainties, contradictions or introspection (as proven by the fact that these words are never used), that any archaeologist should follow the scientific orthodoxy established and promoted by the academic and university elites (as proven by the successful careers). The person who attempts to deviate from the scientific path is symbolically banished from the “scientific community,” labelled as “not an archaeologist,” and – consequently – doomed to be an outsider of the “caste académique” (term used in Spinei 2005b: 8) or the “grande famille des archéologues” (term used in László 2000).

Hence, whenever someone criticizes the cultural-historical approach of the “great professors” and their “scientific” results, the reactions are virulent. For instance, the only book so far on the Cucuteni pottery technology was published in 1984 by the American researcher Linda Ellis. In that volume Ellis doubted, on the one hand, the existence of the Precucuteni culture, and on the other, Dumitrescu’s subdivision of the Cucuteni culture phases and the chronological value of the six decorative “styles” this subdivision is based upon. Ellis also states that one of the Cucuteni culture phases was defined by Dumitrescu even before it had been found, while another phase was suggested by Dumitrescu with a view to challenging future researchers. Her “boldness” brought about harsh criticism from Marinescu-Bîlcu, the author of a monograph on the Precucuteni culture and Dumitrescu’s pupil (Marinescu-Bîlcu 1987). It is interesting that the book review written by Marinescu-Bîlcu is entirely dedicated to “unmasking” the errors and shortcomings found in what Ellis knows about the cultural-chronological attribution of the (Pre)Cucuteni materials or sites, but there is no reference to the most interesting part of the work: the

technological analysis of the pottery and its interpretation. The author of the review herself now admits that the text was written with “retained passion” (Marinescu-Bîlcu, pers. com.).

Similar reactions get the young people who “dare” to dispute some of the intellectual products of the “great professors” (e.g. Lazarovici 2005; see also Cârciumaru 2003, even if he refers to the Paleolithic). The latter rely on the academic authority they have and on the symbolic capital they enjoy within the discipline to call off and defy the approach of the “heretics.”

Where does this virulence come from? The “scientific discourse” is in no way disinterested, in spite of the fact that it is supposed to be neutral, objective. Within the Romanian archaeological field, the position of a “scientist” has entailed many advantages: gaining prestige, social recognition, and, last but not least, material privileges. Here is an example:

“In recognition of his merits in training the staff and *as a scientist* with outstanding results, Professor Dumitru Berciu has been granted various titles and awards: professor, Ph.D., reader in historical sciences, merited university professor, president of the Bucharest Subsidiary of the Historical Sciences Society, a member in the Permanent Council of the International Union of Pre- and Proto-Historical Sciences, a member of the Institute of Prehistory in Vienna, corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute, a honorary member of the Yugoslav Archaeological Society, a member of the Pre-History Society in Ariège. He was awarded the orders (The Star of the Republic), *The Scientific Merit* and the medal of the University of Liège, and on behalf of the Academy he received the Vasile Pârvan and Nicolae Bălcescu prizes. In 1997 he was elected a honorary member of the Romanian Academy.” (Comşa 1997: 321; my emphasis)

It is worth mentioning the emergence, after 1989, of a new element that is the initiation of several international cooperation projects, most of them (if not all) with partners from Western Europe. The “opening” towards the West brought about a new type of discourse whose strategy consists in using key terms regarding modern means of research. I will only present two of the well-known projects. In some texts on the excavations carried out as part of a British-Romanian project in Teleorman Valley (Southern Romania Archaeological Project – SRAP) we are informed that “within it we used modern methodologies and efficient equipment, some of the activities carried out there being absolute novelties in Romanian archaeology (site mapping in GPS, GIS, alluvial archaeology)” (Andreescu 2003: 350) or that “all the data obtained were included in a database especially developed for that project, V.L.A.D. Base (Very Large Archaeological Data Base)” (Andreescu 2005: 422).

By taking over the SRAP methodology, the Romanian project director developed another project aiming at researching the (E)Neolithic sites in southern Romania. In the six texts I analysed (Andreescu 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008), the project is singled out by the following key terms: “scientific” (appearing five times), “complex” (five times), “interdisciplinary” (four times), “efficiency” (three times), “multidisciplinary” (three times), “complete” and “premiere” (each appearing once). One should remark also the expressions “a new way of tackling” or “a new approach” (each appearing once). These key terms are located strategically either in the introductory part, or in the paragraph after the description of the researches, before the concluding part, or in both. Mention is made also of raising “scientific research” to European standards or adapting it to the “realities of this beginning of a millenary” (Andreescu 2007: 399). In other words, “the project counts among the most important projects in south-east Europe for the Neo-Eneolithic period” and, at the same time, contributes to “establishing Romanian prehistorical archaeological research internationally” (Andreescu 2003: 350).

Similar “arguments” can be found also in the case of the excavations in the Eneolithic tell of Hârşova, conducted within a French-Romanian cooperation programme. An article lets us know that the first aim of the programme consists in “applying a conception as well as excavating methods and techniques, (for the first time in this country!), that should improve the quality of the excavations; therefore, implicitly, of the data obtained” (Popovici 2006: 44). In order to emphasize in the reader’s mind the notion of novelty, on the same page, below, a reiteration is made of the fact that the excavation programme at Hârşova was “an absolute premiere” for Romanian archaeology. “Multidisciplinary researches” are underlined, and the average of using this term is 1.2 per page. The frequency average of the word “complex” is one per page. The term of “scientific” appears four times in the text summing up about five pages. To rule out any doubt, the project manager asserts: “we consider the Hârşova

programme to be one of the most ambitious and complete ever conducted in Romanian archaeology” (*ibid.*: 45). Meanwhile, in several excavation reports it is mentioned that the data were put into the site “Database” (Popovici *et al.* 2005: 172; 2006: 176; 2007: 174; 2008: 147).

The use of capital letters in reference to the databases clearly points to the extent to which the new working tools were converted into fetishes, as if their mere utilization turned the analysis of archaeological finds somehow into a more “scientific” and “objective” one, according to the principle “Machines do not lie.” In both projects the most important key terms are “interdisciplinary” and/or “multidisciplinary,” “complex”/“complexity” and “scientific.” In that way, the directors of the two projects intend to prove that their endeavours surpass in quality those practised by their predecessors. Such phrases are by no means harmless. A competition is going on to win the benevolence of the higher authorities who grant legitimacy. Their use boosts the “scientific aura” of the projects, as well as the professional and social status of the directors of the excavations in question, and, implicitly, provides the opportunity to obtain considerable financial support from the higher fora for continuing the excavations. However, it is interesting that, in the texts on the two projects mentioned above, we find the same traditional presentation, namely the cultural-historical one (Andreescu 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; Popovici and Riialand 1996: 12-19).

Starting from Tilley’s assertion (1990b), that in the analysis of archaeological texts we can distinguish between discourses that perpetuate the domination and discourses that oppose domination, I state that the “scientific discourse,” in all its forms, is a strategy aiming either at preserving and perpetuating the domination held by the current academic and university elites in Romania over the archaeological field, or at acceding inside the already existing hierarchy to privileged positions. In this struggle for power, the main weapon of persuasion is using terms of great symbolic significance, such as “science”/“scientific,” “scholar,” “inter- or multidisciplinary.” In short, the “scientific discourse” represents the ideology of the current academic and university elites in Romania. However, I should add, following Louis Althusser (1970: 59ff), that this ideology is not a tool deliberately used by those elites to achieve their goals; the elites believe in their own ideology: thus, they confer moral authority to their own positions, and, on the other hand, attempt to persuade the others to accept their dominant position as a justified and natural one. The ideology helps out the elites, not only as regards the control over archaeological practice, but also to establish themselves as a prevailing group. As I am going to argue in the next chapter, the ideology consists in the very fact that what the discourses present as “neutral,” “objective” and “scientific” is, in fact, political.

### **On archaeology and politics**

To prove what I have just stated, I focused on the type of interpretations generated both by cultural-historical archaeology, and by the researches considered to be an alternative to the cultural-historical approach – the archaeological excavations at Hârșova. Meanwhile, I took into account the political message promoted by the archaeologists from Romania who researched or are researching the (E)Neolithic period.

#### *Theoretical premises*

I start from the idea that the archaeologist’s approach cannot be neutral or apolitical, as it permanently is confronted and constrained by the political structures. Taking refuge into the ivory tower of neutrality is an illusion. An archaeologist cannot ignore the social and political circumstances (s)he lives and works in: no one practises his or her profession in a *vacuum*. In the ‘70s that issue was debated by a series of South American archaeologists:

“La tesis que queremos defender [...] es que no existe trabajo arqueológico sin una vinculación con la realidad que vive el arqueólogo; que esa vinculación es política (tiene como referencia al Estado), y que, por consiguiente, la necesidad de la ausencia de una posición política para alcanzar científicidad, es un mito.” (Panameño and Nalda 1979: 113)

In the ‘80s it was considered also by some British archaeologists who have pointed out that “Archaeology, as cultural practice, is always a politics, a morality” (Shanks and Tilley 1987: 212; see also

Tilley 1989a); since then the number of the works dedicated to the relations between the archaeological practice and the socio-political contexts have increased significantly (see McGuire 2008 with literature).

The adherents of empiricism have always claimed the independence of archaeological practice towards the political, and considered their approach to be neutral, objective and apolitical. During the communist dictatorship, to avoid collaboration with the regime, many researchers took refuge in descriptivism, as that attitude was considered to be a form of resistance against the ideological pressure. Such a strategy is thorny. Taking a critical attitude towards the empiricism of the practice of historians, Althusser shows that they refuse the theory and replace it with the methodology (1970: 167-168). In the absence of a discussion over the system of the theoretical concepts grounding their methods and practice, the place of the missing scientific theory is occupied by an ideological theory (ibid.: 168). The lack of interest in the critical analysis of the epistemological foundations of the discipline renders the results of the empiricist approach liable to be manipulated and subjected to the official ideology. For instance, the myths of “objectivity” and “scientific truth” were used in the national-communist political discourse, as can be seen, among others, in a paper signed by Nicolae Ceaușescu himself and cited in an account presented during the meeting of the History and Archaeology Department of the Academy of Social and Political Sciences from the 23rd of March 1972, with the relevant title – *Historical Science in the Light of the Present Ideological Commandments*:

“The *scientific, objective* interpretation of social and political events in their entire complexity can be conducted only in the light of dialectic and historical materialism. [...] The value of a truly *scientific* history consists in the *objective* depiction of facts, in their true interpretation, emerging into a mirror of the self consciousness of the people.” (Ceaușescu cited in *Referat* 1972: 429; my emphasis)

Thus, the archaeologists become – (often) in spite of their will – some of the most important providers of symbolic capital for the political regimes in power at a given moment.

No less disturbing is that empiricist archaeology shapes people from the past after those of today, failing to realize the difference between them (Olsen 2001). Emmanuel Levinas (2000; 2006) draws the attention to the uniqueness of human beings and the fact that we are responsible for the others beyond our intentions. By claiming that we are able to know everything about *the Other* we control him/her, or, the reduction of the otherness of *the Other* to *the Same*, the annihilation of the difference, represents an act of violence that contains the germs of domination and crime (Lévinas 2000; 2006). Following Lévinas, several archaeologists have pointed out that our relationship to the past people should be an ethical one, that we are responsible for what we write about them, even if they are no longer alive; by reducing the past people’s lives to a historical narrative, social system or evolution, we create an unjust relationship to *the Other* (Hegardt 1996: 11-13; 2000: 96-99; Thomas 2004a: 238; 2004b: 31). According to Julian Thomas, by believing that people’s lives can be fully integrated into our conceptual schemes, we learn nothing from the past, we only organize it; moreover, this kind of totalization is closely related to totalitarianism, because if we organize the lives of the people from the past according to our conceptual schemes, will find it acceptable to tackle the lives of the present people in the same way (Thomas 2004a: 238; 2004b: 31).

Consequently, the archaeologists have to respect the otherness of the lives of the people from the past, to be sensitive, to dialogue with *the Other*, not to confine them into discourses claiming to be “objective,” “scientific.” As Axel Honneth puts it (2008: 62-63), “Our recognition of the individuality of other persons demands that we perceive objects in the particularity of all those aspects that they attach to these objects in their respective views of them.” By failing to do that, the archaeologists’ attitude towards the human beings from the past, similar to the attitude towards the people in the present, can be labelled as an “insult” or “degradation,” to use two of the terms discussed by Honneth (1992).

#### *Researching the (E)Neolithic in Romania: from empiricism to empiricism*

The “founders” of modern Romanian archaeology (many of them educated in the inter-war Germany) promoted the idea that the task of a researcher is first to organize the finds culturally and chronologically, by means of objective methods, and only afterwards to interpret them (e.g. Nestor 1937: 155-156).

Through the master-disciple relation, the empiricism of the inter-war German prehistoric archaeology has been perpetuated to the present:

“Il a transmis [Petrescu-Dîmbovița] à ses élèves et collaborateurs plusieurs valeurs de l’archéologie préhistorique allemande (héritées de ses maîtres, I. Andrieșescu et I. Nestor, formés en Allemagne, près de Hubert Schmidt, respectivement, Gero von Merhart), comme la rigueur de la méthode, l’exigence de la précision des observations sur le terrain et de leur enregistrement adéquate – la condition préalable d’une correcte interprétation historique ultérieure.” (László 2000: 3)

Gradually, this research philosophy entailed the defining of many “archaeological cultures,” as already mentioned.

In the papers referring to the (E)Neolithic period, I have noticed that two types of narrations are used, that (often) coexist in the same text. In the first type of narration, the language used is appropriated from biology: the “archaeological cultures” emerge, live on, reach maturity, intermingle with other “cultures,” generate new “cultures” and vanish, either naturally or subside as other “cultures” appear. In the second type of narration the “archaeological cultures” play on the stage of prehistory the role that the nations play on the stage of history: social and political facts specific of modernity are projected into the past. The fact that the Romanian archaeologists regard an “archaeological culture” as a modern nation with an ethnic basis is proven by the frequent use of phrases like “ethno-cultural,” “bearers of the culture X,” “X populations,” “X people,” etc. The literature dedicated to the (E)Neolithic is pervaded by “conflicting states” between various “archaeological cultures,” such as those between Starčevo-Criș and Schela Cladovei (e.g. Mogoșanu 1978: 348-349), between Vinča and Starčevo-Criș (e.g. Ursulescu 1998: 75-76; Luca 2006: 30-31), between the Linear Pottery, on the one hand, and Dudești, Vinča and Lumea Nouă-Cheile Turzii, on the other (e.g. Ursulescu 1998: 82; Luca 2006: 34), between Boian and Vădastra (e.g. Nica and Ciucă 1989: 35 and 41; Comșa 1998-2000: 303), between Petrești and Turdaș (e.g. Drașovean 1996: 99), between the local Eneolithic “groups” and the steppe communities (e.g. Roman 1973; 1981), etc. Inside these conflicts, some “archaeological cultures” “penetrate”/“storm” others’ territories as a result of a process of “territory extension”/“territorial expansion” and “dislocate” them, “assimilate” them or even “bring to an end their evolution.” The confrontations were “hazardous or auspicious,” the very reason why some “cultures” “did not lose so much ground” as others. There is also a case when, “for reasons beyond anyone’s control” (the “domination threat” inflicted by a certain “culture”), several “cultures” unite and form a “cultural complex.” Some authors use terms with a great dramatic weight: the impact that the migration of a “culture” might have had over another “culture” is described as a true “shock” (e.g. Roman 1973: 74; Lazarovici 1987: 33). The projection into the past of the nation-state image goes so far that some authors even refer to the language spoken by the “bearers of a culture.” For instance, with Eugen Comșa “it is obvious that the initial *linguistic unity* of the bearers of the Boian culture began to crumble upon the spreading of the Giulești phase communities to south-east Transylvania and west Moldavia” (Comșa 1974: 51; my emphasis). Racist connotations do not lack: “The *purest* Vinča A materials in Transylvania are in the A2/A3 horizon at Balomir” (Maxim 1999: 64; my emphasis). The same phrasing somewhere else: “we think that the house B6/1985 at Liubcova-Ornița has the *purest* archaeological finds to illustrate phase A1 of the Vinča culture on the Danube line” (Luca 1998: 98; my emphasis). I have even met colonialist assertions, for instance with Zoia Maxim, who describes the “neolithization” as a civilizing process for the local Mesolithic communities: “on the Transylvanian territory there were Tardenoasian communities that were ‘civilized’ gradually at each new impulse” (Maxim 1999: 27). Even if the term is between quotation marks, the idea remains the same. Similarly, Ursulescu talks about the “cultural superiority” of the Neolithic communities of southern origin as compared with the central European ones out of whose “intermingling” some “cultures” or “cultural groups” might have resulted (Ursulescu 1993: 18). The same author asserts that “in the relations with the neighbouring populations, the Cucuteni people played the role of representatives of a superior civilization, as they were the conveyors of some elements of material and spiritual culture, received by the tribes around” (Ursulescu 2007b: 12). Another example, among many others, of totalitarian logic is the book on the Neolithic cemetery at Cernica (Comșa and Cantacuzino 2001): the final result of the analysis of the over 300 graves only consists in changing the “cultural” attribution; the cemetery is no

longer attributed to the “bearers of the Boian culture” of the Bolintineanu phase, but to the “bearers of the Dudești culture” of the Cernica phase! After 1989, one of the best examples counterbalancing cultural-historical archaeology is considered to be that of the French-Romanian excavations in the (E)Neolithic tell at Hârșova, begun in 1993 (e.g. Anghelinu 2003: 271-274). The excavating and recording technique used there are presented as a dramatic break from the traditional research manner, a true methodological revolution. Due to those schooled at Hârșova, the method was exported also to other sites, such as Bucșani (Marinescu-Bîlcu *et al.* 1996-1998), Bordușani (Marinescu-Bîlcu *et al.* 1997; Popovici 2003), Luncavița (Micu and Maillé 2001; 2006), Poduri (Monah *et al.* 2003). Although I do not deny the merits of this project, I have a few objections, the very reason for which I reproduce the following excerpt:

“From the point of view of the research philosophy, this approach represents not a denial of empiricism, but a deliberate return to it, by the limitation of the subjective interferences and of the qualitative remarks. They do not disappear: the description of each stratigraphical unit depends on the excavator, and, in spite of the precise and standardized diagnostic criteria, it may vary. Nevertheless, the method is probably an upper limit one can reach in the attempt of removing subjectivity.

On the other hand, understanding the context in a positive manner presupposes ignoring the possible similarities with situations stemming from other sites, belonging to the same culture. That endeavour of getting rid from the archaeological data of the subjective reflexes allows for a lucid understanding of the context and provides a solid foundation for the interpretation effort. In other words, this team, in principle, refuses to believe that they *know* anything about the “cultural rules” under investigation: the knowledge on the similar situations (from other tells, for instance) is not relevant for the consistent application of the excavating method.” (Anghelinu 2003: 272-273; original emphasis).

The difference from cultural-historical archaeology is considered to be “significant from the point of view of the research purposes: they are focused on the use of the space and on the paleoeconomy.” Further on we are told that “the method is handled only as a natural means of achieving these purposes [...]” (*ibid.*: 273).

From my point of view, the deliberate return to empiricism is harmful. There is a difference between being empirical and being empiricist: the two terms should not be mistaken one for the other (see Tilley 1989a: 112). It is one thing to be empirical out of the wish to take into account all the aspects of the archaeological data and the contextual associations, and another one to be empiricist, that is to think that by applying scientific methods, the archaeological data will “speak” for themselves. The situations encountered during the excavations do not reveal by themselves which research method should be used: the manner in which the archaeological contexts are researched and interpreted depend on the archaeologist’s training, experience, knowledge and questions (s)he asks herself/himself, while the questions and interpretations change according to the data in the field – the relation between theory and practice is a dialectic one (e.g. Tilley 1989b; Bender *et al.* 1997; Hodder 1999: 80-104; 2000; 2003; Lucas 2000; Berggren and Hodder 2003; Thomas 2004a: 243-247). To deliberately ignore the contextual situations from other tells is a fake objectivism. The contexts encountered in other tells and the interpretations proposed for them are important, not for establishing formal analogies, or for applying them as a recipe, but as an incentive for thinking.

In order to illustrate where the deliberate return to empiricism leads in the case of the excavations at Hârșova, I am going to give a short account of the reports published (Popovici *et al.* 1998-2000). Following the excavations conducted, the authors state that they have identified depositions of a domestic kind, well delimited in space and from a functionally point of view. These complexes were named “domestic waste areas”. According to the authors, they reflect the human activities that generated them. One of these “domestic waste areas” (Complex 521) was thoroughly analysed typologically (the lithic material only), sedimentologically, archaeozoologically, carpologically, palynologically and anthracologically. The surface of Complex 521 is about 55 sq.m. and is included in the perimeter of a deserted and demolished building, that it covers. Starting from the results, the authors consider that the large amount of domestic waste (about 10 tons) must have come from the inhabitants of four houses and gathered during a period of 12-18 months that more or less covered two warm periods partially and a cold period entirely. The thorough excavation in Complex 521 could have led to a better understanding of the evolution of the Gumelnița community at Hârșova in a paleoeconomic context. Interested above all in paleoeconomic issues, the authors of the concluding chapter use a series of phrases such as “food

management” or “opportunistic behaviour.” The environment is regarded just as a resource available to the Eneolithic community at Hârșova to be exploited. That perspective is more relevant for the capitalist society in today’s Romania, rather than for the lives of the people in the past. The inhabitants of the Eneolithic tell at Hârșova are submitted to a logic typical of the present, without taking into account that the notions of “garbage” or “waste” (let alone that of “hygiene”), as we understand them nowadays, are products of modernity (see Chapman 2000). Meanwhile, due to the functionalist approach, the authors of the conclusions in the excavating report build up an exotic image upon the inhabitants in the tell at Hârșova. The human bones discovered in Complex 521 among the “domestic waste” probably evidence the practice of cannibalism by the Gumelnița populations! Colin Richards’s critical view upon the functionalist interpretations stands also in the current case:

“Despite an acknowledgement by archaeologists that Neolithic societies constitute totally alien entities, there remains a tendency in interpretation towards ideas of ‘common sense’ and ‘practicality’. Often, however, it is forgotten that such conceptions are contingent and therefore ‘alien’ to the society under investigation.” (Richards 1996: 171)

The fact that the project directors see the people from the past with the eyes of a person of our times clearly results from another text, also referring to the excavations at Hârșova: “Pour édifier les constructions [...], les habitants du tell ont fait usage, d’une *manière rationnelle*, des matériaux disponible autour d’eux” (Popovici and Rialland 1996: 29; my emphasis). Then, why should anyone excavate if the past serves only to confirm the present?

#### *The (E)Neolithic material culture as propaganda: from Greater Romania to European Union*

The political agenda of the prehistorical research in Romania is clearly revealed from the very first review dedicated to the (E)Neolithic and issued before World War I, as noticed in the quotation below:

“Prehistorical archaeology, due to deep thorough knowledge constantly proven, is meant to unravel entirely and on the basis of positive science, – the beginnings of all the nations, for us, given the fatal scarcity of written sources, it can turn out to be a true revelation. Because one thing is beyond any doubt: while the origin of the Romanian people relates to the territory of the Roman colonization, its culture does not begin with Augustus and Trajan. Therefore, the issue of the locals is the beginning of Romanian history and prehistorical archaeology, the most precious knowledge tool.” (Andrieșescu 1912: vii)

The very discovery of the ancient origin of the Romanian nation, the importance and significance of the ancient history of Romania in the world and south-east European context, are the goals pursued from the first pre- and protohistory systematic research programme, initiated by Pârvan after 1922 (Ștefan 1982: 304; 1984: 137-138). Then systematic excavations were conducted in a series of (E)Neolithic sites. Pârvan’s objectives were taken over by those who walked in his shoes. Thus, Nestor stated in 1933:

“Pre- and Protohistory have an overwhelming social and political importance [...] as they deepen in the souls and minds of the citizens of the current political configuration named Greater Romania in a palpable way the consciousness of a past steeped in time. [...] As *realistic* as possible a consciousness of the most remote past is the most sound support of the national feeling and of national cohesion.” (Nestor 1988 [1933]: 278-279; original emphasis).

We find the same idea in a text published by Berciu in 1938:

“For our national history, prehistory remains the only means to pursue and prove our thousands of years old soul, the filiation and descendance from the remote ancestors, creators of the ancient civilizations on a much larger territory than that of today’s Romania. Only this way shall we understand and old in high esteem what has been conveyed from the physical and spiritual being of the ancestors, while patriotism [...] will grow in *intensity and quality*. Knowing and valorizing our past – that begins with the emergence of the first community in Dacia and southeast Europe –, are to be a duty, and the love for this past and for the ancestors should become a belief of the current and future generations [...]” (Berciu 1938: 31-32; original emphasis)

Following the Ribbentrop-Molotov 1939 pact, the Soviet Union annexed in 1940 the east part of the Romanian province of Moldavia (Bessarabia – the territory between the rivers Pruth and Dniester) and northern Bucovina; later, Romania joined the Axis and accepted to take part in the invasion of the Soviet Union in order to liberate Bessarabia and Bucovina (1941). Under the circumstances, the archaeological finds, including the (E)Neolithic ones, were brought also by Berciu to support the condemnation of the Soviet occupation and to justify the actions necessary to recover the lost territory, as resulted from a text published in a review edited by the well known historian Nicolae Iorga (republished in Berciu 1993: 3-25). As regards the (E)Neolithic, the “painted pottery civilization” (Cucuteni-Tripolje) was invoked as unquestionable evidence of the legitimacy of Romania pertaining not only to the territory between the rivers Pruth and Dniester, but also to the territories beyond the river Dniester (*ibid.*: 7-12). That civilization is considered to be a “great cultural and ethnic unity” (*ibid.*: 8), “the highest manifestation in ancient Europe entirely” (*ibid.*: 11). The creators of the “painted pottery civilization” are described as “the wealthiest in the entire prehistorical Europe, except for, obviously, the Mediterranean world, that has passed to a higher urban civilization” (*ibid.*: 11). The fact that the “painted pottery civilization” stretched from the Eastern Carpathians to the river Dnieper, that is beyond the east borders of Greater Romania, was not a problem, as the “the origin of painted pottery lies within the extent of Neolithic Dacia, meaning it is a local creation” (*ibid.*: 12). Geographically the painted pottery spread up to the river Dnieper, which was interpreted as follows:

“[...] the painted pottery people quickly spread to the East, as they occupied Moldavia, Bessarabia and Bucovina, and in times of prosperity they *colonized the territories beyond the river Dniester, up to the river Dnieper, in search of better freer lands. This colonizing movement brought, for the first time to the occupied regions, the wellness of a stable brilliant civilization. According to the available archaeological data, it seems that that it is the first Neoeolithic civilization encountered in the lands mentioned. That way, the foundations of a life organized not only in Bessarabia and Bucovina, but also over the entire territory from the river Dniester to the old river Borysthenes (Dnieper), were laid 4500 years ago by our remote ancestors in the Carpathians, the Pre-Thracians, from who, in spite of all the shortcomings of a turbulent history, an uninterrupted thread of life has lasted to this day.*” (*ibid.*: 12; original emphasis).

Thus, Berciu brings up archaeological arguments that Bessarabia and Bucovina “has belonged to us for thousands of years as regards the ethnic and cultural majority,” that we deal with a “tradition of *dwelling, of civilizing* the lands of Bessarabia and those beyond the river Dniester,” or, in other words, with a “constant determination to spread the light of civilization from the Carpathian territory to the East, as far as possible to the East” (*ibid.*: 23; original emphasis). This message returns obsessively: “Watching the eastern gates of ancient Europe, while creating and spreading the specific European culture, – and especially the southeast European one –, that is how our ancestors from prehistorical times used to be” (*ibid.*: 23-24). That is how he tried to justify the annexation of some territories beyond the borders of Greater Romania (by taking part in the Barbarossa operation, for a short time Romania annexed not only the territories that had belonged to it – Bessarabia and northern Bucovina –, but also the territory between the rivers Dniester and Bug that had never been part of the mediaeval state of Moldavia, nor of Greater Romania): Berciu asserts that the Romanians cannot feel as strangers beyond the river Dniester

“[...] because *the endeavours to civilize the lands beyond the river Dniester were made by the Romanians, who remained there, abode there deep in that soil, [...] and the seed of a stable civilization, as first known by the prehistorical mankind, was sown as early as four and a half thousand years ago by the pre-Thracian stock on the lands of Moldavia.*” (*ibid.*: 24; original emphasis)

During the Stalinist period, the essential goal of the archaeological research remains the same as that of the period before World War II:

“What tasks do we face?

We carry on the task of clearing up the development of human society, from the most remote times up to the present day. Until now the historians of the bourgeois-landowner regime failed to do that, because our country used to be enslaved by the foreign imperialism, and the imperialists from outside this country and the exploiting classes from this country had no interest that the history of the people, its struggle should be known. By studying the development of human society on the territory of the People’s Republic of Romania from the most remote

times, we intend to prove that this people has a history of thousands and thousands of years, that has not been studied until now, that we have begun to study, in order to reveal the labour, concerns and struggle of this people on the way of building up its history. We strive to know, scientifically, the millenary history of the people on the territory of the People's Republic of Romania. We are driven to this study by patriotism, the principle of proletarian internationalism, the conception of the working class. The working class teaches us that we should cherish the people. To love the people means to study and explain the labour and struggle of the people over the time, gaining wisdom for carrying on the struggle of today." (Roller 1950: 156)

Under Ceaușescu's regime (the national-communist period), the nationalist discourse promoted during the interwar period was resumed, as proven, for example, by the republication in 1988 of Nestor's 1933 text, in a journal of the Romanian Academy, in a section entitled "Returns" (Nestor 1988 [1933]).

From the interwar period until now, the image promoted by the "scientific" narratives on pre- and protohistory (e.g. Nestor 1932; Berciu 1966; 1968; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1978; Dumitrescu and Vulpe 1988; Ursulescu 1993; 1998; Luca 2006), has been that of a sequence of "archaeological cultures" that – explicitly or implicitly – pushed the origins of the Romanian nation back into an ever deeper past. Thus, the results of the cultural-historical approach have been useful for the nationalist political purposes. We can find evidence of that in a relatively recent review on Romanian (E)Neolithic, included in the first volume of the new *History of the Romanians* whose relevant subtitle is *The Legacy of Remote Times* (Petrescu-Dîmbovița and Vulpe 2001). It is also relevant that the maps used to show the (E)Neolithic sites distribution depict the area from the Danube and Black Sea to Tisza and Dniester rivers, which represents the geographical extension of the ideal Greater Romania. The treaty was published on the initiative and under the aegis of the Romanian Academy, considered to be the highest cultural forum in the country. As Gheorghe Alexandru Niculescu convincingly noted in a critical account of the first three volumes, the new review of the history of the Romanians, invested with the highest authority by the Romanian Academy, is actually an anticipation of the political needs whose content and message is profoundly nationalist:

"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, ritualised discourses about the nation, disguised in professional knowledge about the past, are offered." (Niculescu 2004-2005: 123)

Extremely dangerous is that the so-called reconstructions produced by archaeologists are turned into legitimate culture, and, consequently, have a major impact upon the discipline. In high schools, until the system of alternative manuals was put into place, the image of "continuity" from prehistory to the present day was disseminated by means of the history manual of the Romanians for the 12th grade, a legacy from the national-communist period. After 2001, considering that the president of the Department of Historical Sciences and Archaeology of the Romanian Academy himself talks about the "necessities for *national education*" (Berindei cited in Niculescu 2004-2005: 100; original emphasis), the same scenario is disseminated due to the new history treaty of the Romanians, turned into an easy working tool both in high schools and in universities.<sup>3</sup>

Both before, and after 1989, the message of the oldness of the Romanian people was promoted also by means of exhibitions. For example, under Ceaușescu's regime, the main role in presenting the past was attributed to a new institution, especially founded for this purpose – the National History Museum of Romania (1970); the image offered to the visitors was that of an uninterrupted continuity from the "Paleolithic Age" to Ceaușescu's "Golden Age" (e.g. Schiță tematică 1970). The main element underlying the archaeological exhibitions in the Romanian museums is the notion of "archaeological culture:" the exhibitions either display a sequence of "archaeological cultures," or are dedicated to a certain "culture" or

<sup>3</sup> According to Alexandru Vulpe, one of the coordinators of the first volume, "The 'Treaty' was conceived (at least the first volume) above all as a working tool for a full information of the current data in the prehistory and protohistory of Romania. That was the first goal. The rest can be judged depending on the authors involved" (Vulpe, pers. com.).

“civilization.” In the ’90s, some museums specialized, especially in studying and displaying the finds of a single “civilization,” such as those in Piatra Neamț (Cucuteni) or Oltenița (Gumelnița).

Following the political upheavals after 1989, besides the nationalist discourse, a new orientation emerges; as Vulpe has noted, “the trend is to emphasize the alleged European values, be they real or imaginary, a phenomenon matching the interest in EU adhesion [...]” (Vulpe 1999-2000: 15). That can be noticed very well in the case of the exhibitions. A series of finds from the tell at Hârșova were included in a Romanian-French itinerary exhibition that travelled between 1996 and 1997 through many towns in Romania and in France (Popovici and Riolland 1996). The reason for presenting this exhibition is revealed by the director of the National History Museum of Romania, under whose aegis the archaeological excavations have been conducted:

“L’exposition présentée ici est une forme encore plus ouverte d’intégration culturelle des résultats de la recherche. Dans l’intention des organisateurs, elle se doit d’être une contribution à l’identité culturelle européenne, non seulement grâce au travail des chercheurs roumains et français d’Hârșova, mais surtout par une compréhension plus large et plus intense de cette identité par tous les visiteurs.” (Florescu 1996: 4)

The French heritage manager states:

“Présentant, à partir des résultats acquis sur le tell, un aperçu de la vie quotidienne au bord du Bas Danube il y a environ 6 500 ans, cette exposition permet avant tout de découvrir les lointaines origines d’une histoire commune, fruit de l’expérience acquise et transmise par des centaines de millions d’hommes, qui constitue le trait d’union de l’Europe entière.” (Saint Pulgent 1996: 3)

The examples above are not isolated cases. One of the best achieved exhibition catalogues is the one on the “Cucuteni culture,” published in 1997 under the aegis of the Romanian Ministry of Culture, the Romanian Academy and the Greek Ministry of Culture (Mantu *et al.* 1997). The title of that catalogue is eloquent: *Cucuteni. The last great chalcolithic civilization of Europe*. It is not by chance that the volume starts with a motto chosen from a work published by Marija Gimbutas (“Cucuteni is one of the best explored and richest cultures of Old Europe, a true civilization in the best meaning of the word”), although the notion of “Old Europe,” as defined by Gimbutas, bears political connotations (see Chapman 1998). There are two introductory texts signed by the Romanian and Greek culture ministers, both relevant to the same extent, in my opinion:

“This exhibition is highly illustrative of the culture of Old Europe. I am certain that today’s visitors will experience a culture shock on witnessing the artistic horizon of their remote ancestors. Consequently, I am certain that this exhibition is a welcome attempt to present a brilliant culture of Old Europe in the 1997 capital of European culture, Thessaloniki.” (Caramitru 1997: 11)

“Through this exhibition, Thessaloniki acts as a gate by way of which this great civilization, which flourished both inside and outside the borders of modern Romania, will become more widely known to the Greek public, and also a gate through which Europe will become acquainted with another step in the historical progress of mankind.” (Venizelos 1997: 11)

I do not think that it is of no importance that the texts from which I selected the excerpts from above were drawn up in the circumstances surrounding the hard efforts made by the Romanian politicians in view of European Union accession (at the time when Emil Constantinescu was president). From that perspective, the notions of “Old Europe” and “Cucuteni civilization” bear new (political) significance. The “Cucuteni Civilization” no longer contributes to the exacerbation of the national identity as opposed to other nations, but to illustrating the cultural contribution of Romania to the common European cultural identity. The message, the way I interpret it, is the following: if from a social and political point of view Romania still has a lot to do to be accepted into the European Union, culturally it is already part of it. The past is evoked in order to boost a present political project or, as the poet Mihai Eminescu put it, “*La trecutu-ți mare, mare viitor*” (“Great as the past was, so be the future”).

The same type of message can be found in the case of other exhibitions and projects. For instance, the Romanian-British project Southern Romania Archaeological Project was included (in 2001) by the

representative of the Romanian part into a larger project, whose politically correct title is *Începuturile civilizației europene. Neo-eneoliticul la Dunărea de Jos (The Beginnings of the European Civilization. The Neo-Eneolithic in the Lower Danube)* (Andreescu 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008):

“The main goal is the study of complex cultural phenomena occurred in south-east Europe starting with the 7th millennia BC, the very phenomena that would lead to the emergence of the Neolithic society. The characteristics of the new society, the settling, the productive economy, the spiritual life, architecture would lay the foundation of all societies that would succeed on the European continent.” (Andreescu 2007: 399)

The project was promoted also in several exhibitions (Andreescu 2008: 333).

Once Romania has been accepted into the European Union (on the 1st of January 2007), some Romanian archaeologists once again committed themselves to a “great cause.” Together with Swiss partners, they laid the foundation of a new exhibition entitled *Meister der Steinzeitkunst. Frühe Kulturen aus Rumänien/A l’aube de l’Europe. Les grandes cultures néolithiques de Roumanie*. The “best specialists in the field” of archaeology from all over the country were involved in this project, as all the regions of the country were represented (Chrzanovski 2008: 8). At the same time, “the Romanian élite had adhered to the project en masse” (*ibid.*: 8). The project was under the patronage of the prime minister of Romania, the minister of foreign affairs of Romania and the minister of culture and religious affairs of Romania. So far, the project materialized in an “art book,” meant for the general public, and published on the occasion of the exhibition at Historisches Museum Olten, Switzerland (Wullschleger 2008). We deal with a major event: “the largest Romanian archaeological exhibition ever held abroad” and “one of the five major exhibitions of 2008 in the entire world” (Comanescu in Wullschleger 2008: 68). In my opinion the “art book,” entitled *Neolithic art in Romania*, is rather a propaganda volume (for a selection of relevant quotations see Appendix 2), as can be noticed, for example, from the text published on the backcover:

“The territory of present day Romania saw the birth and development of some twenty different cultures: Vinča, Hamangia, Gumelnița, Cucuteni, Cernavodă..., which extended well beyond the original sites, thus significantly contributing to the shaping of European identity.”

The political message is clear: one should well understand that the Romanians have been “Europeans” since the Neolithic, that Romania and western Europe have belonged to the same world since prehistorical times, therefore we have a common identity. Thus, an archaeological contribution is brought to the “scientific” confirmation of the legitimacy of a current political establishment – the European Union.

Next to the traditional exhibitions also multimedia ones begin to appear, such as *A day in the life of a eneolithic community* (Bem 2006) referring to the tell at Bucșani and the surrounding area. The CD is “a promotional material, for cultural and educational purposes only” that “will be distributed for free in the museums, gymnasiums, secondary schools and universities, in any countries” (Bem and Radu 2006). The exhibition starts with the integration of the tell at Bucșani into a universal chronology; the spectator is quickly borne into a time travel marked by key moments: from dinosaurs, the domestication of dogs, the emergence of agriculture, Cucuteni, Bucșani, Stonehenge, Tutankamon, Christ, Trajan’s Column, the Crusades, Stephen the Great to 1998 A.D., the year when the excavations began. It is relevant that this chronology includes symbolic figures of national identity (the Column of Emperor Trajan and the ruler of mediaeval Moldavia – Stephen the Great, next to symbols of religious identity (Jesus Christ). Also this exhibition includes references to the “great European civilizations” Cucuteni and Gumelnița – the pride of Romanian (E)Neolithic archaeology.

As it results from the language used by the archaeologists, there is a hierarchy of the “cultures”: not any “culture” can be named “civilization.” As regards the (E)Neolithic period in Romania, “civilizations” are considered to be above all two “cultures,” Cucuteni and Gumelnița (see also the title of another exhibition – *O civilizație necunoscută: Gumelnița/An Unknown Civilization: Gumelnița*; Marinescu-Bîlcu 2001). In 1999, a few archaeologists, discontent with the position occupied by the “Boian culture” within the other (E)Neolithic “archaeological cultures” in Romania, organized an exhibition with a view to raising it from the rank of a “cinderella of prehistorical archaeology” to that of a “civilization” (Neagu 1999: 5). The term of “civilization” contains the idea of progress, representing the highest developing stage of a “culture” (see Cuche 2003: 25-26). From that perspective, the current use of the term of

“civilization” also has a political value. Thus, the (E)Neolithic “civilizations” constitute “evidence” of a glorious past and – implicitly – the guarantee or promise of a shiny future.

### *On grants*

A topic worth drawing attention to consists in the strategy of obtaining grants, but I am going to point out just a few aspects. While I am writing these lines, the trend in Romanian archaeology is to search for or expect grants. Everybody struggles to get grants. The causes are numerous: gathering compulsory credits for promotion in the academic hierarchy; getting considerable financial resources for carrying out a research project; the possibility of heightening wages (an extremely important factor given the living conditions in Romania); travels for training abroad with all the expenses covered from the money obtained; purchasing material necessary for the participating institutions (above all IT); etc. To be as successful as possible, the project managers applying for various grants have adopted a politically opportunistic language. From this point of view the title of the following project is defining: *Dimensiunea europeană a civilizației eneolitice de la est de Carpați (The European Dimension of the Eneolithic Civilization East of the Carpathians)*, stating that “the Eneolithic in the east-Carpathian spaces stands out, due to its exceptional achievements, as one of the most brilliant civilizations of European and world prehistory” (Ursulescu 2007b: 5). It is worth mentioning the strategic use of the word “European” in the titles of the first two articles at the beginning of the volume published as part of this project (Ursulescu 2007a): (1) *Civilizația cucuteniană: argumente ale dimensiunii europene (Cucuteni Civilization: Arguments for European Dimension)* and (2) *Debutul culturii Cucuteni în arheologia europeană (The Emergence of the Cucuteni Culture in European Archaeology)*.

### **Afterword: on the ethics of responsibility**

More often than not, as an excuse for the compromises with the communist political power, it is claimed that the archaeologists carried out a honest scientific work, that was hindered and/or corrupted by compulsory references to the “classics of Marxism-Leninism,” against their own will. They say that “There was no other way!” According to this “argument,” once the political part was removed from the text, what remains is the “scientific analysis” and only that matters. As far as I am concerned, I share the opinion of Costica Bradatan (2005: 278/footnote 42), according to which,

“Placing a well-chosen quotation from Marx or Engels at least in the Introduction to one’s book was a matter not only of placing one’s scholarship within an ideologically orthodox epistemic context, but also of signaling one’s political obedience to the system, and of one’s readiness to accept the current rules of the game. This was a promise to the censors that no problems would be caused.”

The assumption that “there was no other way” is not true at all. For instance, in 1974 the Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania published two monographs on the Neolithic age: in the introduction of one of the works the application of the Marxist-Leninist principles in archaeological research is mentioned, and in the chapters “Social-Economic Organization” and “Magical-Religious Manifestations,” on the second and first page respectively, there are references to the works of Marx and Engels (Comșa 1974: 7, 187, 192); the other work does not contain any references to the “classics” (Marinescu-Bîlcu 1974). As in the latter case, some archaeologists boast about having adopted a purely descriptive, apparently impregnable style that, in their opinion, helped them to avoid the collaboration with the communist regime. After 1989, as a reaction to the previous ideological pressure – “the Engels syndrom” (Jacobs 2000) –, a new justification of empiricism was built up. The compromises towards the new ideology imported from the European Union are justified by the need for obtaining the craved financial resources necessary for continuing the “scientific research.” It is made clear that, leaving aside the possible compromises, the archaeological approach is “scientific” and “neutral.”

In spite of presenting archaeological practice as “scientific” and “neutral,” the results of empiricist archaeology have always been useful for the prevailing ideologies, irrespective if we deal with nationalism (the interwar one, the communist one from Ceaușescu’s period or the one after 1989), or with

neo-liberalism. The causes of this collaboration (undesired by some archaeologists), reside in the very positivist-empiricist philosophy underlying Romanian archaeology. The products of a non-critical archaeology (stubbornly refusing to discuss the social and political circumstances generating the theoretical grounds of the methods and practice, and where archaeologists conduct their activity), will always suit the political power, as they “do not disturb” and, besides, confer prestige and legitimacy. As this attitude has been extremely convenient for the political arena, it has been rewarded by awards (e.g. “Vasile Pârvan,” “Nicolae Bălcescu,” awards of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs), medals (e.g. “Scientific Merit,” “Star of the Republic,” etc.), finance and public positions.

Daniel Barbu’s assertion that “Romanian intellectuals are not critical towards the power unless [...] the institution of opposition is tolerated, with more or less benevolence” and “they accept to be in opposition only out of the desire to accede to power as soon as possible” (Barbu 2004: 118), stands also in the case of Romanian archaeologists. In fact, the compromises towards the political power are not a “necessary harm” as some of them would like us to believe, but a strategy aimed at obtaining and ensuring a privileged position in the academic hierarchy, deriving a series of advantages, including material ones. To that end they use terms such as “scientific,” “inter- or multidisciplinary,” “complexity,” etc. Moreover, the “scientific discourse” is justifying political projects. Irrespective of the political regimes, the logic of that discourse has not changed, as it has remained essentially nationalist: the people from the past are reduced by archaeologists either to the status of “ancestors,” examples of the glorious multi-millenary history of the Romanian people, or to that of the “first Europeans.” We deal with an obsession with origins. Both those who carry on the tradition of the cultural-historical school, and the promoters of the programme at Hârșova annihilate the otherness of *the Other* and impose an image of modernity. With the former, the people from the past are subordinated to an “archaeological culture” that has the characteristics of a nation-state, and are a collective character in a historical narration. With the latter, the “first Europeans” are “like us,” and the neo-liberal values are eternal, they have existed since the Neolithic: like the people of today who have to be “efficient,” to “adapt” the hardships easily (e.g. to change their jobs often), the prehistorical people are “practical,” have an “opportunistic economic behaviour,” “manage” their food and “adapt” to the environmental conditions. Besides various forms of nationalism (national-socialism, national-comunism), Europe is preparing to experience a nationalist-liberal discourse. Romanian archaeology, a beneficiary of a vast experience in serving great causes, can be proud of contributing to its emergence.

In conclusion, any approach, including my own, *volens volens* is political. The major problem lies in the fact that many Romanian archaeologists do not want to acknowledge it. The archaeologists should not hide behind a false neutrality provided by a “scientific” approach; instead, they should establish a political agenda of their own work, because, otherwise, others will do it for them (Kristiansen 1993: 3). A lesson that should be learned from the communist experience is that the “‘resistance through culture,’ the resistance inside ‘one’s own mind’ can in fact equate an almost pathological form of ethnic autism” (Barbu 2004: 63). The archaeologists have to be thoughtful in pursuing their purposes and always to criticize publicly any attempt to manipulate their work for the sake of a domination; in other words, the archaeologists have to defend the autonomy of their field:

“The struggle for autonomy is thus, first of all, a struggle against the institutions and agents which, inside the field, introduce dependence upon external economic, political, or religious powers, whether those who subordinate their production to commercial ends or those, such as publicists who, more subtly, make concessions to the law of success, or those who use their privileged connections with external powers (such as the State or the Party, with all their forms of Zhdanovism) in order to impose their domination inside the field.” (Bourdieu 1991: 663)

Moreover, as Paloma Gonzalez-Marcén and Roberto Risch<sup>4</sup> (1990: 101) proposed,

“It is left to the archaeological community to push its work and aims into a wider context, by which the contradictions and inequalities of the present can be challenged, rather than creating a discipline whose point of view lies only in itself.”

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<sup>4</sup> The authors are Spanish, and not South Americans as I wrote by mistake in the Romanian version of this article (p. 141).

Obviously, such an attitude is not comfortable and can entail many disagreements, but otherwise, the archaeologists could become co-authors of an oppressive system, as it happened during the communist dictatorship.

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### **Appendix 1: list with the analysed homage texts**

- On Dumitru Berciu: Morintz 1977; Preda 1987;
- On Eugen Comșa: Vulpe 1993;
- On Marin Dinu: Ursulescu 2000;
- On Vladimir Dumitrescu: Marinescu-Bîlcu 2002;
- On Ferenc László: Székely 1973;
- On Gheorghe Lazarovici: Opriș 2001;
- On Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu: Neagu 2005;
- On Dan Monah: Iconomu 2003;
- On Ion Nestor: Teodor 2005a; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 2005; Zaharia 2005; Bâzru 2005; Diaconu 2005;
- On Vasile Pârvan: Dumitrescu 1993;
- On Mircea Petrescu-Dîmbovița: Teodor 1995; László 2000; Spinei 2005a; 2005b; Ursulescu 2005; Teodor 2005b; Dumitroaia 2005; Monah 2005.

### **Appendix 2: quotations selected from the volume *Neolithic art in Romania* (2008)**

- “We can only be amazed at the level of development reached by the cultures that lived on Romanian soil. [...] We owe those cultures much more than we think.” (p. 45)
- “This project is also unusual: we, who have so recently joined the big family of the old continent, have assembled this collection of our Neolithic treasures, all but unknown to our fellow Europeans. This is a significant and bold venture.” (p. 62)
- “The mosaic of Neolithic cultures in Romania prefigures, paradoxically, the cultural landscape of modern Romania which is as diverse as symbolic of the essence of Europe today.” (p. 66)
- “Knowledge about Romania’s Neolithic civilizations is an indispensable key to understanding Europe’s continental history. These ‘ambassadors’ [the exhibits] are evidence, both real and spiritual, of all that represents the strength of our young Europe: the community of values which goes hand in hand with cultural diversity, a source of beauty.” (p. 68)
- “We applaud the efforts made [...] to present to the whole world some of the formidable heritage, unknown until now, of a nation that recently married into Europe, but that has been tied to the evolution of the continent since its deepest origins.” (p. 98)
- “The history lover who desires to know about a country whose rich heritage is so little known outside its borders, will be amazed to discover, thanks to this exhibition, that this country played an important role in the most distant past of Europe. Romanians themselves, whether they live in their nation or abroad, will learn much about their history [...]” (p. 136)

- “We are therefore convinced that the present book and the broader project of which it is part, will play a determining role in developing a better knowledge of the spirituality of contemporary Romanian culture and its environment.” (p. 164)
- “What we have here is something totally diferent, an even more ancient Europe, the cradle of our contemporary European civilization, brought to us by these extraordinary objects which defy our very notion of time and space.” (p. 166)
- “Their contribution [of the Neolithic civilizations from Romania] to the further development of all of Europe was fundamental. The increasing knowledge about these civilizations gained by numerous researchers from many countries contributes to a better understanding of the genesis of today’s populations.” (p. 190)
- “Craftsmanship and art – because it was already art – of the Neolithic period spread so rapidly from what is now known as Romania, from Euxin to the Baltic, from the Aegean to the Iberian peninsula that one is entitled to ask if this is the birth place of European art? Appreciation can only be gained through knowledge. I have great hopes that this project and this book will permit a better appreciation of my country.” (p. 192)

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