

ALEXANDRU POPA, *Romains ou Barbares? Architecture en pierre dans le Barbaricum à l'époque romaine tardive (sur le matériel archéologique du Nord-Ouest du Pont Euxin)*, Research series of Cartdidact Publisher, Basarabica 3, Chişinău, 2001, 180 p. text, 182 p. exhibits.

In his monograph, *Romains ou Barbares? Architecture en pierre dans le Barbaricum à l'époque romaine tardive (sur le matériel archéologique du Nord-Ouest du Pont Euxin)*, the archaeologist Alexandru Popa tackles the difficult and controversial issue of reconstructing the realities of late antiquity. More specifically, the difficulty concerns the examination of stone structures in the Sântana de Mureş-Černjahov settlements (3th-4th centuries AD). We therefore find the title of the study quite appropriate, since it grips the issue at hand from the very outset – Romans or Barbarians? By analyzing the stone structures located in the area north-west of the Black Sea, the author has attempted to make a contribution to the study of human settlements in the south-east Europe of the late Roman period.

The study is structured into eight parts and closes with the author's conclusions concerning the subject under study and a summary in Romanian. The monograph comes with a rich bibliography (composed in accordance with internationally-accepted criteria, as is the study's entire analytical framework), an index of settlement names, and illustrations; the latter are commendable not only for their diversity but also for their quality. This underlines the author's high level of competence and professionalism in archaeological research.

In *Introduction* (p. 7-15), the author describes the current level of knowledge of the Sântana de Mureş-Černjahov culture and reviews the history of stone

structures research conducted in the area of this culture. This ancient civilization, stretching over a geographic territory which today is located within three countries - Romania, Moldova and Ukraine - represents a cultural unity which is exceptional for such a wide area. The first remains of this culture were discovered in 1899, and more and more new discoveries have been made of Sântana de Mureş-Černjahov-type settlements and necropolises, although the historical and cultural profile of this civilization is still quite blurry. Concerning archaeology in the Prut-Nistru space, the study of this ancient civilization is the more important since Sântana de Mureş-Černjahov-type settlements are many and representative, e.g. the archaeological complex at Sobari, district of Soroca, which is a unique monument of its kind. This is part of Moldova's historical heritage, which awaits to be uncovered and made known to the entire world.

The study rests on the foundation of the *Catalogue des découvertes* (p. 16-103), which was compiled primarily due to the lack of a full and concise database, which could supply information for further analyses. The Catalogue thus represents an analytical and detailed review of existing information, which incorporates numerous older or small print-run publications, or publications containing gaps or contradictions; most of these sources are not accessible to foreign specialists who might be interested in this issue. The composition of the

⁵ *IMS*, II, 61.

⁶ *CIL*, III, 7485.

⁷ *IGB*, III, 2, 1590.

⁸ *CIL*, III, 7761; *IDR*, III, 2, 203.

Catalogue required a significant amount of tenacity in research, selection and classification, and it seems that all the pieces of information – even the faintest references – have been included. The discoveries made within the settlements have been grouped in alphabetical order, with brief descriptions. The archaeological material has been catalogued and divided by settlements. An exhaustive bibliography and numerous illustrations crown this presentation. Each reference in the Catalogue is accompanied by the author's view on the method of publication, dating and interpretation of each monument found in the literature. All these details make the Catalogue of discoveries into a true working instrument, which is indispensable both for experienced specialists and students.

The third part of the study, *A propos du problème de l'apparition des constructions de pierre dans la région nord-ouest-pontique* (p. 104–119), focuses on the issue of the emergence of stone structures in the region north-west of the Black Sea. This part is divided into three sections, each covering a specific time period, which makes it easier to discern the qualitative leap of this “phenomenon” from the Bronze Age to the Greek and finally Roman periods.

The fourth part, *Caractéristique générale des sites avec constructions de pierre* (p. 120–123), focuses both on the area over which the sites are spread and their topography, as well as on the shape and size of the settlements featuring stone structures; all this contributes to a better understanding of how complex the issue under study is. Thus, moving from the general to the particular, the author found that the settlements which have stone structures are situated primarily on the north-western coast of Pontus Euxinus. However, some stone structures were found outside of this area, e.g. on the right bank of the Nistru – this shows the scope of the area over which this phenomenon was spread in territories adjacent to the Roman Empire in the 3rd and 4th centuries. The presence of stone structures in the immediate vicinity and within settlements with different types of dwellings points to the degree to which provincial Roman culture penetrated into the Barbarian world.

As a natural continuation of the issues discussed here, in the following part, *Le problème des sites fortifiés de l'aire de la Culture Sântana de Mureș-Černjachov* (p. 124–128), the author uses factual material to propose a typology of stone structures, developed in relation to the buildings' layout, which revises the traditional classification based on whether or not stone was used as a construction material. The typology that Al. Popa proposes considers the layout, which includes the shape of the structures and their interior organization, to be the defining structural-typological criterion. A strong argument in favor of this classification is the traditional, conservative nature of the architectural layout. In terms of importance, it could be compared to the funerary ritual of a community – both elements last in time and are among the few relatively stable factors in archaeological research.

In the sixth part of the study, *La typologie des constructions de pierre* (p. 129–141), the author establishes

a typology of the structures under analysis based on their size and interior organization. The author thus distinguishes between structures with a single room (few in number), structures with two or more rooms, *villa rustica* type structures, and the Sobari complex as a distinct type of stone structures. The analysis of these types of stone buildings and their comparison to similar structures found in other regions of the provincial and extra-imperial space enables the author to demonstrate the existence of a direct link between them, or rather the fact that Roman techniques were used by the populations living in the Empire as well as in regions in the Empire's proximity.

Another chapter, *L'inventaire des sites avec constructions de pierre* (p. 142–148), deals with agricultural tools, household implements, objects of dress and jewelry, coins, weapons, and bronze and ceramic vessels. The study of the finds discovered at sites with stone structures, and their comparison with similar objects discovered in other regions, allows the author to establish not only the level of economic development of the settlements' inhabitants but also their contacts with Roman centers. The proof that there were such contacts is the high proportion of ceramics originating on Roman territory or made according to Roman patterns that have been discovered in the cultural strata of the sites and within the settlements under study.

In the seventh part of the paper, *Constructions de pierre du Moyen Danube au-delà des frontières de L'Empire Roman* (p. 149–150), the author tries to analyze the archaeological relations in the Middle Danube region, in order to focus in more detail on the features of stone structures. He notices from the very outset the provincial Roman character of the stone structures known in this area, which is a salient feature of all the stone buildings known in the north-west Black Sea area. Thus, the identification of analogies in the details of stone structures in these two areas shows the common features of this phenomenon and, in all probability, the fact that it belonged to a common cultural area - provincial Rome.

The final part (p. 151–155) of the study features a series of conclusions and their summary in Romanian (p. 156–159) concerning the emergence and development of stone structures in the area populated by the Sântana de Mureș-Černjahov culture. Besides identifying the location of their geographical area and establishing the typology of such structures, the author's conclusions support the idea that “these constructions do not reflect a local phenomenon, but rather the influence of the provincial Roman civilization on the populations inhabiting the immediate vicinity of the Empire” (p. 154, 159). That is, the author's final answer is that the Barbarian populations which bordered the Roman Empire assimilated a series of elements from Roman material culture, including the technique of erecting stone buildings. The author hopes that subsequent research will bring more clarity to the issue of identifying the purpose and ethnic affiliation of the structures, which indicates the topicality and future prospects of the subject.

The following section is *Bibliographie* (p. 160–176), which contains most of the works on this subject known

to the author at the time of publication. The complexity of the bibliography enhances the quality of the study by directing readers interested in the Sântana de Mureș-Černjachov culture to the relevant literature.

The last section is *Annexes*, containing an index of settlement names (p. 177–180) and illustrations (p. 181–362). The illustrations include 171 figures, 11 maps and 9 charts. The settlement index, composed by transliterating place names from Russian and Ukrainian, helps one locate rapidly a site mentioned in the body of the study. The illustrations, which are of high quality and accurate, offer graphic information which enriches and diversifies the study by A. Popa. Thus, the layout of some sites and stone structures, and the presentation of the inventories discovered there, help the reader compare the descriptions and conclusions drawn by the author with specific archaeological pictures.

The book is strongly comparative. Being convinced of the advantages of a comprehensive approach, A. Popa places the issue under study in a very diverse context of historical and typological relations. The cultural traditions and cross-over displayed by the stone structures found in the north-west Black Sea area are studied diachronically, starting in the Bronze Age. In terms of synchronous study, the comparative analysis allows the author to expand the horizon significantly: he studies similar archaeological sites from the entire European *barbaricum*, both outside of the Roman Empire, especially in the Middle Danube area and Scandinavia, as well as in the Roman provinces in Europe and North Africa. This method allows the author to present a synoptic picture of the phenomenon under study and emphasize special structural elements.

An unstated purpose of the author is to smoothly introduce in this archaeological context the recent discoveries made in Sobari, district of Soroca, and thus propel them onto the international research stage. That site, given its originality, does deserve special attention. The author suggests hypotheses concerning the affiliation, purpose and fate of one building in particular, which has pronounced provincial Roman features. The structural-typological analogies with other buildings found in various areas of Europe and in Algeria allow for an interpretation of this stone structure as an early

Christian church. The discovery of a lamp featuring the Holy Cross incised on the bottom suggests that at least some of the Sobari inhabitants might have been Christians.

The modern scientific process is characterized by rapid and intense information exchanges (congresses and symposia, traditional and electronic publications, translations, international projects). In order to catch up with the rest of Europe, East European researchers should take a more active attitude, and ideas should move in *both directions*: not only from West to East but in the other direction too. We believe that the publication of studies by Moldovan authors in international languages (English, French, German, etc.) is an effective way to achieve European integration and promote our own values. These circumstances grant legitimacy to A. Popa's choice to publish his study in French. This will help disseminate the information and hypotheses contained in the study to the foreign research community; in the future this could engender practical outcomes, e.g. the possibility that European institutions would fund archaeological research conducted in Moldova, or perhaps international archaeological excavations could break new ground. While the publication of this study in French provides a wider access to this study for researchers interested in the topic, this will not diminish the dissemination of the study in Moldova since French is widely used in Moldovan academia.

A. Popa's study is the first comprehensive work which tackles the problem of the emergence and development of stone structures in the settlements of the Sântana de Mureș-Černjachov culture. The author has managed not only to collect and make full use of the archaeological data available as of 1998, but also to promote recent archaeological discoveries made in Moldova and integrate them into the international research circuit. Thus, this study is not only a working instrument that can be used by researchers, students and members of the public interested in ancient history, but also a reference work in the study of the Sântana de Mureș-Černjachov culture.

SERGIU MUSTEAȚĂ