

Review of: Koranyi, J. & Hanscam, E. (eds) (2023). *Digging Politics. The Ancient Past and Contested Present in East-Central Europe*. Berlin: de Gruyter Oldenbourg. – 367 pp, 45 illustrations (b/w). ISBN: 978-31-1069-7339.

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This book studies the political use of the past in the archaeology of East-Central Europe. The thirteen articles are organised geographically. They are written by specialists from different fields of studies: Archaeology and Ancient History, Modern History, Political Sciences, Ethnology, Literature, Culture and Tourism, both from East-Central and Western Europe. The diversity of views on the subject is both a richness of the book and one of its weaknesses. Some of the articles therefore seem more difficult to connect to the central topic of this book: the political mobilisation of the past in the context of identity issues.

EMILY HANSCAM and JAMES KORANYI'S contribution, "Digging Politics: The Ancient Past and Contested Present", is more than an introduction to the volume. Although the volume focuses on Eastern Europe, they deny any East European exceptionalism in this quest for origins. Already in the 18th and 19th centuries, Western European travellers explored this ancient past in the region. In East-Central Europe, this relationship to the past is gradually being mobilised for national purposes. The authors present the situation in Romania – which is largely studied in this volume – as an example of the mobilisation of the ancient past for political purposes. According to the authors, this situation, which is also found in other countries of the region (and beyond), requires a critical understanding of the use of the past.

In "Balkan Antiquity as Decolonial Eurocentrism During the Cold War", BOGDAN C. IACOB presents a study on the AIESEE (International Association of South-East European Studies), founded in 1963. This organisation participates in the decolonisation of the Balkans by the Western European historical narrative, giving this Eastern space more weight in European identity. In the 1960s, it promoted the emergence of interdisciplinary studies that supported the local narrative, linking modern states with ancient peoples. In the context of decolonisation, the AIESEE serves as an example for other regions, notably Africa. Nevertheless, these initiatives adhere to European world domination by highlighting the classical period and the Mediterranean world. Thus, AIESEE training activities in the Maghreb allowed local archaeologists to develop their scientific skills.

However, training courses soon shifted from local history to Graeco-Roman history, emphasising the importance of the European narrative. This program ended in 1981, after a certain number of grantees failed to submit reports, making new funding impossible. The author suggests that this negligence of grantees was due to the fact that the subaltern status of North African scholars in the world of classicists was reaffirmed by the development of the AIESEE.

FLORIAN-JAN OSTROWSKI'S contribution, "Thracian Archaeology and National Identity in Communist Bulgaria: The Ideological Pattern of Museum Exhibitions", highlights the diplomatic role of exhibitions about on Thracian world and on Bulgaria in a broader sense. This "rhyton diplomacy" desired by the Bulgarian government aims to strengthen the international recognition of Bulgaria, show its prosperity and develop cultural diplomacy. These exhibitions, which also take place in Bulgaria, are part of an identity construction that is sought at the top of the State, building a bond between the Thracians, the inhabitants of the south-eastern Balkans, with the Bulgarians. As in Romania, the development of Thracology in the late 1960s allowed the affirmation of local identity towards the USSR and the Balkan neighbours by adapting to national political developments. After 1989, new actors became involved in the enhancement of the Thracian past, especially to attract tourists and profits.

CHRISTOPH DOPPELHOFFER'S article, "Imagining King's Landing: Dubrovnik, the Diegetic Heritage of Game of Thrones, and the Imperialism of Popular Culture", reveals that the contemporary identity of the city of Dubrovnik in Croatia is heavily influenced by *Game of Thrones*, as it was one of the filming locations. This attracts many tourists, and even some locations are being renamed with the names of the series on the digital mapping tools. While the author underlines the resistance of some local residents to this development, he is struggling to prove that it is due to the *Game of Thrones* fans' re-appropriation of Ragusa's past. In my opinion, this reaction of the local inhabitants is more related to the excesses of mass tourism in Dubrovnik, similar to Venice. If these movie fans have a common identity, then it should be a transnational one, but they have only a fictional and temporary attachment to the city that cannot be compared to the attachment to a country's past (even mythologised).

ANNE KLUGER conducts a comparative study, "Slavic Archaeology as 'A Special Obligation'? Researching the Early Slavs in Communist Poland and East Germany", of Slavic archaeology through two portraits of archaeologists: Witold Hensel (Poland)

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and Joachim Hermann (GDR). There are similarities between the two countries: Slavic archaeology is anti-Nazi and facilitates the political connection with the USSR and the socialist brother states. The emphasis is on material culture to give research a scientific character and to adapt to the new times that favour historical materialism, even if the emphasis on ethnicity is not very consistent with Marxism-Leninism. The difference lies mainly in relation to the previous generation of researchers: in Poland there is a certain continuity, while in Germany the nationalist rhetoric of the interwar period is condemned for its use by the Nazis.

MATTHIAS E. CICHON, in "Allies out of Ashes? Polish Ideas for the Refounding of Medieval Western Slavic States after 1945", underlines the diffusion of 19th century Pan-Slavic ideas by the communist power between 1945 and 1948 to gain acceptance from the Polish population, notably through the Slavic Committee in Poland (KSwP). It thus allows the ideas of two Polish nationalists, who want to restore a Slavic state around the Sorbs in East Germany, to spread in intellectual circles. It also shows abroad that Polish communists respect democracy by allowing non-communist researchers to express themselves and that they are moderate by being satisfied with the Oder-Neisse line as Poland's western border.

MELINDA HARLOV-CSORTÁN studies "The Case of the Fertőrákos Mithraeum on the Iron Curtain" and wants to show that Roman Heritage in Hungary has been neglected since 1945. Heritage protection was limited to a few projects for financial and political reasons during the communist period and was marked by a certain inefficiency. The Mithraeum, discovered in 1866, was little studied and developed after 1918 due to its location on the border with Austria. Despite a UNESCO classification of the region in 2001, this Roman monument received little attention due to the difficulty of integrating it into the mainstream discourse on Hungarianness. The article shows the impact of politics on heritage preservation, without really showing the conflicts over the past, which are addressed more widely in Katrin Kremmler's article, "'Eurasian Magyars': The Making of a New Hegemonic National Prehistory in Illiberal Hungary". She draws attention to the scientific "illiberalism" in Hungary, which emphasises a continuity between different migratory peoples, the Huns, the Avars and the Magyars, who came from the Eurasian steppe. Initially pushed by local far right organisations, this stream of thought is illustrated every two years in a big festival, *Kurultáj*, which highlights Eurasian nomadic steppe peoples. This festival is now supported by the ruling *Fidesz*, which can use it to deploy cultural diplomacy on

behalf of Turanism with the states the Hungarian government considers important: Turkey and Kazakhstan. Turanism developed in Hungary after 1918 and received scientific support, notably from physical anthropology. Today, archaeogenomics and archaeogenetics are also involved. In 2019, the Hungarian government established the *Magyarságkutató Intézet* (Hungarianness Studies Institute) to support research on the origins of the Hungarian people from an identity perspective. Some Hungarian scientists in these disciplines seem to have a double discourse: the scientific discourse along with the language of popularisation that develops the discourse on "our ancestors" expected by *Fidesz*. The article shows the mobilisation of Hungarianness by the Hungarian government for domestic and foreign policy purposes.

RADU CINPOES'S contribution "Beyond Radical Right Politics: LGBTQ+ Rights in Hungary and Romania" offers a comparison of the steps taken to include the principle of marriage between a man and a woman in the Hungarian and Romanian constitutions in order to prohibit same-sex marriages. If the process succeeded in Hungary, it didn't come off in Romania. Indeed, the Hungarian *Fidesz* in power mobilised the electorate for a traditionalist vision of the family borrowed from Christianity, whereas the situation in Romania was quite different. Conservative and religious associations of different denominations initiated the organisation of a referendum with a discourse anchored in the traditional conception of the Christian family. The referendum proved a failure as opponents succeeded to fall below the turnout threshold (30%) required for the referendum to be valid. The author rightly points out the disappearance of representatives of far-right parties in Romania between 2008 and 2020, but seems to overlook the chauvinism of the *Partidul Social-Democrat* and its conservative family vision inherited from the communist era. This governing party campaigned for the "yes". As the author argues, a religious identity has been indeed mobilised in Hungary and Romania, but it seems to me that it is disconnected from the past. When, as in many states, religion is mobilised by nationalist or chauvinist movements, there was no support in these campaigns for an ancient national past, but simply for a traditionalist vision of society that combines nation and religion. This association is of central importance for the believers of the two main Romanian churches (CONOVICI, 2009, pp. 309-351) whose discourse refers to a bi-millennial tradition inherited from Jesus Christ. The past was not really involved in the conflict in Romania, and this is the main difference with the following articles.

For the following report “The Protochronistic Depiction of the Transylvanian Saxons in Nicolae Ceausescu’s History Textbooks (1976-1989)” CLAUDIA SPIRIDON-SERBU analyses these history textbooks to examine the integration of the Saxons, the German settled in Transylvania in the Middle Ages and thus into the Romanian nation. The historical discourse of the textbooks during the communist period is the continuity of settlement between Daco-Romans and Romanians, and the textbooks present the Germans as harmoniously integrated into this medieval “Romanian” world. Their particularity has been erased, but their innovations have been integrated into the Romanian protochronic discourse, even by romanianising the names of the most famous Saxons.

In his article “Dacian Blood: Autochthonous Discourse in Romania during the Interwar Period”, ALEXANDER RUBEL develops the idea that the main root of the contemporary discourse on the Dacian origins of the Romanian people originates from the interwar period, during which this thesis was developed by Romanian nationalist intellectuals, some of whom were close to the fascist Iron Guard movement: Lucian Blaga, Nae Ionescu, Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, Mircea Eliade, Mircea Vulcănescu... The works and ideas of this group enjoyed an uncritical reception after the Romanian Revolution of 1989, as they were considered victims of communism. Their conception of a particular spirituality peculiar to Romanians, combining Dacian and Orthodox roots, has had a lasting influence on the Romanian elites. In addition to the communist policy that favoured the Dacian origin of the Romanian people in the 1970s and 1980s, this has led to a focus on the Dacian people, both with a permanent exhibition at the Bucharest airport and in the logo of the Romanian Presidency of the European Union in 2019. The discourse of some scholars is also contaminated by these ideas about the autochthony of the Dacians.

GHEORGHE ALEXANDRU NICULESCU proposes in his article “Why Nationalism Survives in Romanian Archaeology and What Could Limit its Impact” a critical analysis of the material and intellectual context of Romanian archaeology since 1970s. He draws attention to the continuities in Romanian archaeology between the communist and post-communist periods. He attributes it to a cultural-historical paradigm respectful of political and scientific authorities, which has been maintained by the same scientists and the same conceptions. After 1989, the Romanian archaeology has only been marginally modernised by some theoretical reflection and by collaboration with natural scientists. The article

provides an interesting reflection by a Romanian archaeologist on the limited development of Romanian archaeology since the 1970s. The issue of nationalism in archaeology is addressed as only one of many continuities of the communist past.

EMILY HANSCAM proposes considerations on the “Challenge of Continuity in the archaeological study of East-Central Europe during the Age of Migrations”, mainly on the basis of the Romanian case. She criticises the cultural-historical paradigm that insists on the continuity between the Daco-Roman settlement and the Romanian settlement in Romania and attributes ethnic names to the different cultures that developed on the today Romanian territory during this period. This article seems to me to be one of the most relevant because it mobilises knowledge of the ancient and medieval period to show the weaknesses of the discourse on autochthonous continuity. She calls for writing about the continuity of places rather than peoples in order to create an archaeological narrative of belonging and to better understand the complex interaction between the different populations that lived on Romanian territory during the Age of Migrations.

The illustrations in this book are well chosen, but the maps are often too small and difficult to read. The book as a whole fulfils its purpose: to examine chauvinistic claims about the past. It makes an important contribution to a better understanding of Eastern European historiography and the mobilisation of identity in the past. The recent discovery (December 2022) of a rich tomb of a 4th or 5th c. AD warrior near Mizil in Romania testifies to the relevance of this work: numerous Hungarian scientific institutions have approached the Romanian archaeologist and offered their scientific and financial support for the analysis of this warrior’s tomb, as it could be a Hun, who is regarded by the Hungarian majority as the ancestor of the Hungarians.

Reference

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