

# ARCHAEOLOGY, MEDIA AND DOMINANT IDEOLOGY IN TODAY'S ROMANIA\*

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**Keywords:** archaeology, tells, Copper Age, written press, dominant ideology, Romania.

**Abstract:** In the present paper I focus on the results of the collaboration between journalists and archaeologists, taking as case studies two Copper Age tells. I will examine how journalists and archaeologists build upon the remote past an ideological discourse confirming and legitimizing liberal capitalism. I will argue that for the sake of the “visibility” offered by the written press, the archaeologists directly or indirectly confer a “scientific”, “objective” aura to the dominant ideology.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** arheologie, tell-uri, epoca cuprului, presa scrisă, ideologie dominantă, România.

**Rezumat:** În articolul de față, luând ca studii de caz două tell-uri din epoca cuprului, mi-am îndreptat atenția asupra rezultatelor colaborării dintre jurnaliști și arheologi. Voi arăta cum jurnaliștii și arheologii construiesc despre trecutul îndepărtat un discurs ideologic ce confirmă și legitimează capitalismul liberal. Susțin că de dragul “vizibilității” oferite de presa scrisă, arheologii conferă direct sau indirect o aură „științifică”, „obiectivă” ideologiei dominante.

## Introduction: on the dominant ideology

Should I define in a single phrase the dominant ideology in today's Romania, namely liberal capitalism, I would choose the impertinent remark of Jacques Séguéla, the publicity man close to the French president Nicolas Sarkozy – “Si, à 50 ans, on n'a pas une Rolex, c'est qu'on a raté sa vie”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, people's lives are evaluated and classified according to the purchasing power they attain and the objects they have access to due to it; human beings are identified with the objects they can afford consuming or not. Or, to use Jean Baudrillard's words, through the mechanisms of the industry of seduction, “Tout le destin du sujet passe dans l'objet”<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1). Everything is transformed into and consumed as commodity: the resources of any kind, the ideas, the subjectivity, sexuality, the human body itself.

As Ovidiu Țichindeleanu has noted, the factors that after the political changes in 1989 made it easier to impose liberal capitalism in the Eastern European countries are anticommunism, eurocentrism and capitalocentrism.<sup>3</sup> A decisive role in this process was played by the cultural elite. The anticommunist discourse of the latter had/has a repressive function: the Marxian critical thought was delegitimized by its mechanical association with communism, and, implicitly, with totalitarianism. Meanwhile, as Țichindeleanu puts it, the “intimate colonization” took place, namely “the import of the rhetorics and products of the cultural industry of the winners of the Cold War”.<sup>4</sup> Next to anticommunism, eurocentrism and capitalocentrism contributed to inculcating the idea that the only existing alternative to totalitarianism is liberal capitalism: concealing the issues of social inequality and discrimination in the West, we are told that the unique model to follow is that of the Western civilization, as the meaning of the word “civilization” is equated to the West; at the same time, we are told that the only alternative to state property is capitalism, falsely equated to democracy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Mandonnet, Vigogne 2009, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Baudrillard 1983, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> Țichindeleanu 2006.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

Similarly, the “right wing” opposition of the conservative radicals (not to be mistaken for “neocons”) and personalists, grounded in the critical virtues of Christianity was, in its turn, delegitimized by being labelled as “legionnaires”, “Orthodox fundamentalists” or “anti-West”.<sup>6</sup> The conservative radicals and personalists consider that “After 1989, instead of the long expected critical discourse, the Romanian ‘elites’ institutionalized conformity and the rhetoric of self-justification, turning to the implementation of the new ‘democratic’ ideologies”.<sup>7</sup> By emphasizing the aspects relating to material comfort (“western standards”), but concealing the harmful consequences (*e.g.* “the downfall of common language and traditional values and their replacement by a commercial spectacle dominated by techniques of adapting to the System”), the intellectual elites embarked upon an apologetics of integrating Romania into an European Union built on techno-economic globalist principles, and, implicitly, of consumerism.<sup>8</sup>

Many archaeologists have adapted to the new conditions after 1989 and have adopted an eurocentrist discourse. Relevant examples are the exhibition catalogues dedicated to the (E)Neolithic period in Romania.<sup>9</sup> Another means the archaeologists use to disseminate their message to the “general public” is the written press. In the present paper I focus on the results of the collaboration between journalists and archaeologists.<sup>10</sup> I will examine how journalists and archaeologists build upon the remote past an ideological discourse confirming and legitimizing liberal capitalism. I will argue that for the sake of the “visibility” offered by the written press, the archaeologists directly or indirectly confer a “scientific”, “objective” aura to the dominant ideology.

I have chosen two cases: the tells at Pietrele-*Gorgana* (commune of Băneasa, Giurgiu county), and at Bordușani-*Popină* (commune of Bordușani, Ialomița county). Both date to the Copper Age, were attributed to the so-called “Gumelnița culture”, and are the result of international collaboration: the excavations at Pietrele are part of a German-Romanian project started in 2002, while at Bordușani, the Romanian archaeologists have applied since 1993 the model of a French-Romanian research program used for the first time, in the same year, at Hârșova. In both cases the methods and techniques used are appreciated as novelties, and, consequently, the results obtained as well.<sup>11</sup> In the specific case of the tell at Bordușani, it is also worth mentioning its classification as an area of prime importance for archaeology, as one can notice from order no. 2483 from 12th of February 2006 by the minister of culture and religious affairs. In short, in the academic milieu, both research projects enjoy a special aura.

#### **The tell at Pietrele in the written press**

In July 2008, in the Romanian edition of the well known American journal *National Geographic* an article signed by the deputy editor in chief was published, dedicated to the archaeological excavations at Pietrele.<sup>12</sup> Based on the information provided by the archaeologists, the journalist builds around the Copper Age people at *Gorgana* a copycat image of the present. On the first page of the article, the project director from the German side invokes the rich graves at Varna, as a reflection of the emergence of social differences,



**Fig. 1.** Advertisement in the German edition of the French magazine *Elle*, October 2008, p. 317: “Portrait of a woman. Uptown Bag”.

<sup>6</sup> Hurduzeu, Platon 2008, p. 12ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 155.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

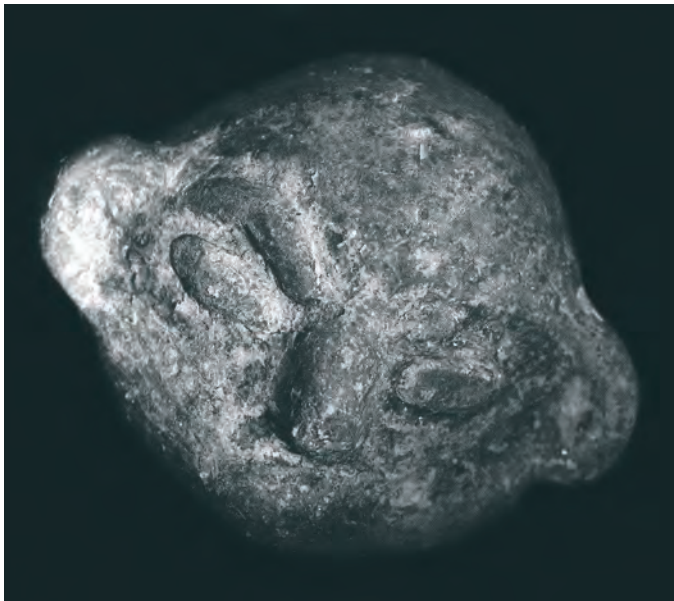
<sup>9</sup> For a critical analysis see Dragoman 2009.

<sup>10</sup> See also Gero, Root 1994.

<sup>11</sup> *E.g.* Hansen *et al.* 2005; Popovici 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Gruia 2008.

while further on, as a completion, another project representative specifies that the aim of investigating the tell at Pietrele is that of finding out how social inequality emerged. Therefore, right on the second page of the article, the journalist presents to the reader a sensational piece of news: “During the time of the Gumelnița people the first wealthy people in the history of mankind emerged”.<sup>13</sup> A head from an anthropomorphic figurine is described as a “portrait”, “a very rare artifact”, likely to have stood in the house of one of these “wealthy people” (Fig. 2). The terms used clearly indicate that this archaeological object is associated to art items decorating the houses of the wealthy nowadays. We also find out that “the wealthy” at *Gorgana* are those who organize various activities. They have access not only to rare goods, such as the so-called “portrait”, but also to luxury objects obtained from a distance, such as copper artifacts, owing to the fact that “Măgura-Gorgana used to be an important link in an trans-regional exchange network [...]”,<sup>14</sup> and the Danube was the “highway of the region”.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we are informed that “the wealthy” used metals as a symbol of their status and



**Fig. 2.** “Portrait” from the house of a Copper Age “wealthy” uncovered at the tell at Pietrele – according to *National Geographic România*, July 2008, p. 37.

event that ravished for a while the entire settlement”.<sup>19</sup> However, “The villagers did not enter the house to bury those nine”.<sup>20</sup> From the rest of the article we find out only banal things about the inhabitants of *Gorgana*. The tell appears to be a village made up of houses and paths. In the houses they practice various specialized activities, as the case with the neighbours across the road of the hunter-gatherers family: “a family of weavers whose weights from the weaving loom count among the oldest discovered in Europe”.<sup>21</sup>

that “In the Neolithic, the copper artifacts were like the present Rolexes – luxury items proving the social status of the bearer”.<sup>16</sup> The importance the journalist grants to the Copper Age “wealthy” results also from the published illustration: two out of the three photographs with archaeological artifacts refer to them (one with the “portrait”, and the second one with the “Rolexes”).

Leaving aside the “wealthy”, the first information provided to the reader on the inhabitants of *Gorgana* also has the form of a sensational news: “Nine people perished in a fire that destroyed their house 6370 years ago”.<sup>17</sup> We find out that we deal with a family of hunter-gatherers (as inside there were found many weapons and wild animal bones), made up of nine members: “a newborn, three children aged one, two and four, a teenager aged 14 or 15, a young woman aged between 18 and 25, a man, a woman and an old man aged about 50”.<sup>18</sup> The causes of the fire remain unknown: the house might have “burned by accident” or “following an

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 43 and 45.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38.

Instead, “On the paths [...] they used to throw the garbage and broken objects”.<sup>22</sup> Prehistoric people lived first of all on hunting and fishing, but also on animal breeding, plant cultivation and gathering. The reader is meant to understand that, like today, in the Copper Age, at *Gorgana*, private property existed: “There were farmers with small plots on the terrace, near the tell, where they cultivated grain (in the burned houses carbonized wheat and barley were found)”.<sup>23</sup> We are also told that the people at *Gorgana* used to have exchange relations with the neighbors, “due especially to marriages”, but with whom they “also must have fought: the weapons discovered were much too sophisticated to be used only for hunting”.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, the inhabitants’ lives were marked by various ceremonies relating to the cycle of the year or important events (birth, death, marriage, initiations), during which they used figurines that later they would break and throw to the garbage. When they died, they were buried in the cemetery situated to the southwest of the tell. Summarizing, in the text of the journalist, the Copper Age world is similar to that in which we live today: a hierarchical structure (with the wealthy at its top), specialized economic activities, private property, exchange/trade, wars, etc. Like modern man/woman, the Copper Age man/woman is a *homo oeconomicus*, who operates with the distinction between sacred and profane: the various activities conducted fall into the category of the secular, while the “ceremonies” belong to the religious domain.

The same division of the prehistoric community into “organizers of activities” (“the wealthy”) and the rest of the people is found in the archaeological community at Pietrele, composed of researchers, on the one hand, and local employees as workers on the other. Here is an example of how those who work in the field are presented:

“There are about 20 people on the tell: ten locals who carry earth with buckets and about ten archaeologists who ‘dig’ millimetre by millimetre with the trowel, brush and vacuum. Patience, care, many discussions before, measurements of all kinds with measuring tapes, coloured meters, photos, plans, and drawings.”<sup>25</sup>

The assertion is sustained by a two-page photograph prefacing the article: it renders one of the excavated areas, and in the foreground there is an archaeologist holding a scale for measuring depths; on the area one can also see buckets, folding meters and measuring tapes; in the background, near the field glass and other materials, there is another archaeologist; there are no workers. A legend reads: “By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, all the tell settlements had been deserted. The Gumelnița culture disappeared, but not for good. Due to the endeavours of some researchers like those from Măgura-Gorgana, it has been uncovered”.<sup>26</sup> The work of the archaeologists is likened with that of a “forensic”, as the project director from the German side himself says.<sup>27</sup> The activity of the latter is presented by the journalist as follows: “The white professor, wearing an orange head scarf and with a Leica camera hanging by the neck, is everywhere: kneeling here, digging a little farther, talking to one, to another, taking pictures, passing by”.<sup>28</sup> The leader of the excavation is endowed even with a portrait: with him “everything is a pale white, discoloured by the Danubian plain sun: the hair, smile, clothes”.<sup>29</sup> In sharp contrast to the description of the archaeologists, and especially to that of the project director, is the description of the workers’ activity:

“Most often, the workers from the village stand close together, like waiters with arms crossed, and look from the edge of the pit to the archaeologists bent over the reddish soil. When a bucket is full, they rush to disembarrass. They never excavate, but only carry the earth scratched by the archaeologists and then they pass it through a sieve.”<sup>30</sup>

It is precisely the image of liberal capitalism: The German-Romanian Archaeological Company brings its multinational team of specialists in the village to exploit the rich resources of the tell and employs

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 39 and 42.

ten workers in the service industry. What is not said is that, through these resources, the researchers will build or strengthen their academic careers and will travel with scholarships and/or to conferences, which means social prestige, and, thus material advantages. After they finish the resources they will leave for other horizons, and the workers will have to find something else to work. Although the journalist observes the social inequality, by the cheerful ironic style, the language he uses diminishes it to the point of making it sound trivial. The journalist leaves no room in his text for the poverty that can be found at Pietrele and its consequences upon the locals, including the workers. Why? The answer resides in one of the photographs published on two pages in the article: in the foreground, there is a cart pulled by a horse, driven by an old man and in the cart there is grass; in the background one can see the tell site. Under the photo it is written:

“The archaeological site of Gorgana is in the field, midway between the villages of Pietrele and Puieni, about 8 km from the Danube. The prehistoric village was built on a hill like a giant turtle shell failed at the edge of a high terrace that descends steeply to the Danube river meadow.”<sup>31</sup>

For the journalist from *National Geographic*, the locals are good to serve as a setting: they give the narrative its authenticity, but also a hint of exoticism. Furthermore: the picture with the locals is “archaic” (the presence of the horse-drawn cart), while the picture with archaeologists is “modern” (the presence of measurement instruments); in this way, the reader is subtly encouraged to believe in the superiority of technological modernity to the traditional rural society.

Not least, the article on the tell at Pietrele in the journal *National Geographic* is very similar to a text dedicated to the “general public” signed by two of the archaeologists representing the project.<sup>32</sup> Although in the latter text terms such as “Rolexes” or references to local people do not appear and the style is descriptive, the type of information is largely the same: for example, once again reference is made to the tragedy of the inhabitants “who obviously met their death in the conflagration of the house”.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, a series of journalistic terms are also present in the text of the archaeologists: for example, the “wealthy” are “the wealthy and politically leading families”.<sup>34</sup> Some phrases are almost identical to those of the journalist’s text, such as the claim that the weaving weights found in a burned house would be “among the oldest evidence for the loom in Europe”.<sup>35</sup> The main problem with the narrative disseminated by the archaeologists both through their own text and through the journalist’s is that they promote a “common sense” image that annihilates the otherness of the people in *Gorgana*. An example: while in both texts the tell is presented as a village consisting of houses separated by narrow spaces, called “paths”, if someone reads the excavation reports published in the journal *Eurasia Antiqua*, he or she will notice that in the so-called “paths” were found, among other things, numerous disjointed human bones and several whole copper artifacts/“Rolexes” (human bones were discovered also in some of the houses). I think that this example suffices to realize that the prehistoric man/women from *Gorgana* is not a *homo oeconomicus*, but a *homo symbolicus*, for whom there is no boundary between sacred and profane. Contrary to the “common sense” image given by these archaeologists and the journalist, the Copper Age is a different world. In the texts dedicated to the “general public”, the presence of the disarticulated human bones and complete copper artifacts in the “paths” is not mentioned. Once again, the problem is that the archaeologists domesticate the past by omission.

#### **The tell at Bordușani in the written press**

In its turn, the tell at Bordușani-*Popină* enjoyed the attention of journalists.<sup>36</sup> *Popina* is presented as a village consisting of houses and streets too. As in the case of Pietrele-*Gorgana*, the inhabitants practiced in houses various specialized activities: the “miller’s house” is mentioned (because in it were found several hand mills), as well as the “house of the tool maker” (in which there were raw chips, waste, flint cores, etc.),

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>32</sup> Hansen, Toderăș 2007.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> Surcel 2008.

the “weaver’s house” (containing several weights for the weaving loom), the “potter’s house” (in which incompletely finished pots were found).<sup>37</sup> Analogies with the present day are common: houses “were arranged in series, aligned ‘facing the street’”, “Gumelnița streets were ‘paved’ with small household waste”, “Periodically, the ‘boulevard’ was leveled with clay”.<sup>38</sup> Also here, some expressions, such as the “Gumelnița yards”, suggest the existence of private property during the Copper Age. Specific terms of liberal capitalism are not missing, such as “housing supply” or “the real estate developers in history”.<sup>39</sup> Even if such terms are put in quotation marks by the journalist, that changes nothing in the message conveyed to the reader. About the Copper Age people at *Popină* we learn that “they were not keen on agriculture”, because they ate mainly fish, but they also dealt in harvesting, animal breeding and hunting. We are also informed that they had “an average life expectancy of 30, maximum 35 years”, that some of them “suffered from degenerative diseases of the bones and joints, common in those days”, but that “regardless of age, their teeth were in good condition”.<sup>40</sup> Also this article lets us believe that the inhabitants in the tell at Bordușani used to make a distinction, specific of modernity, between sacred and profane; the field of domestic activities, presented in practical terms, is separated from that of the religious, to which reference is made only in the case of burials: “We do not know what was the religion they practiced. Nevertheless, they must have believed in an afterlife, as their dead were buried with a lot of grave goods”.<sup>41</sup>

The defining feature of the text written by the journalist is that it projects on *Popină* an image of the village of today. This projection cannot be ascribed (only) to the journalist, as even the director of Bordușani excavations in an interview with another newspaper, built the same image:

“And now imagine that we rise slightly above the village which occupied this almost round space. We see the populated narrow streets, people walking in the middle, and, like today, more throwing waste, bones, sherds, garbage, that form heaps near the walls. We see the smoke from kilns rising above the village, we see the domestic animals they had and that were the same as today, we see the lush forest surrounding the village and the forest, like the forests located on the Danube river today, sometimes flooded, especially in spring and autumn.”<sup>42</sup>

Roughly the same “common sense” information on the people in *Popină* as those in the text of the journalist appear in a booklet published by archaeologists for the “general public”, but without trivial terms and in a descriptive style.<sup>43</sup> In this booklet, the message of the “similarity” between the Copper Age people and those of today is revealed by the photographs depicting locals (Fig. 3): their lives are reduced to hypostases which are manipulated by archaeologists to create analogies with different prehistoric occupations (*e.g.* construction of houses, fishing). Instead, the elements that threaten the “likeness” between the Copper Age people and those of today, such as the presence of the disjointed human bones in the “streets” or in houses, are either concealed, in the texts of the written press, or included, in a facile way, like in a sort of quarantine, into the general category of “ritual”, in the booklet of the archaeologists. The present social conditions in which the locals live are also ignored. I doubt that statements such as “Regarded as a whole, the life of Gumelnița people was not really difficult” or “getting and preparing food was not a very tiring activity”<sup>44</sup> are valid for the residents of the present village of Bordușani and in general, for most people in contemporary Romanian society. Moreover, some statements are not only ideological, but also offensive. Referring to the Copper Age people, the director of the excavation says that:

“They were not too busy acquiring food, and that gave them time to ... think. There were times when they would eat more fish, periods when they would eat shellfish, periods when they ate meat, according to seasons and conditions.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>42</sup> Dragomir Popovici in Țurcanu 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Popovici, Vlad 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Surcel 2008.



**La cueillette.** La cueillette a été pratiquée, entre autres, aussi par les membres de la communauté Gumelnița de sur la Popina. Ceux-ci ramassaient des racines, des fruits, des œufs d'oiseau, du renouveau de la massette, des escargots ou des mollusques. Sûrement, très probablement, cette activité était pratiquée en principal pendant les saisons chaudes de l'année.

Les preuves archéologiques de la pratique de cette occupation sont sporadiques, étant représenté par des semences, divers restes des tiges des plantes, des fragments de coquilles d'œuf, etc.

La présence des mollusques est évidente dans les sédiments archéologiques des restes des coquilles. On a identifié des escargots aquatiques et terrestres, ainsi que des mollusques. De plus, il paraît que seulement les mollusques étaient consommés, étant aussi les plus abondantes dans la zone: la mollusque de ruisseau avec ses divers espèces est de dimensions plus petites (10-15 cm), en temps que la mollusque de lac est plus grande (15-25 cm). La modalité de les préparer n'a pas été encore mise en évidence, mais l'absence des traces qui attestent le forçement de la coquille nous fait croire que le plus probable celle-ci étaient préparées par bouillissage.

**Leur cueillette se faisait autant au bord du bras de la Bereca, que dans le large d'eau, dans les canaux ou dans les étangs (benis), qui gardaient l'eau toute l'année.** Les quantités ramassées étaient variables et étaient dépendantes du lieu de cueillette (fleuve, canal ou au large de l'eau), comme aussi d'après les caractéristiques du biotope (la nature et la consistance des sédiments, la vitesse de l'eau, le degré d'oxygénation et la transparence de l'eau etc.).

Les mollusques représentaient une source sûre de protéines animale pendant la période estivale.

**La pêche.** La position de la Popina dans la vallée invadable du Danube représente un avantage si pour persons à la pêche. Les mille restes d'arêtes de poisson découvertes, dans les niveaux, endothèques attestent que le poisson était l'un des principaux aliments.

Les études méticuleuses ont permis l'identification de 16 taxons provenant du Danube. Quelques espèces comme par exemple les esturgeons (esturgeon du Danube, esturgeon étoilé, la morue - vivent dans la

Fig. 3. Local people from the village of Bordușani in a booklet on the archaeological excavations in the tell – *Bordușani. Hommes, histoire milieu naturel*, p. 15.

It was an opportunistic type behaviour. They would not work too much. They were however very ingenious. Half in jest, half seriously, we can say that work failed to create man, despite to what some people said; on the contrary, progress stemmed from the fact that they had time. That cliché of the primitive, barbaric, prehistoric man has been shattered. In its place emerges the picture of a man very much like us, who are living today, who acted the same, thought the same, felt the same.”<sup>45</sup>

From this quotation results that those who toil to feed themselves and their families, and worry for the next day, do not think enough, nor are agents of progress. It also results that having an “opportunistic behaviour”, constantly adapting and exploiting the circumstances, are qualities worthy of admiration.

The fundamental difference from the discourse promoted in the article on the tell at Pietrele is that in the text on the tell at Bordușani a nationalist discourse is used:

“Gumelnița [...] was an ‘Everest’ of prehistory. During the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, it occupied, almost evenly, the area between the Carpathians and the Aegean Sea. Back then the civilized world was dominated by two large culture ‘blocks’: Gumelnița-Karanovo and Cucuteni-Tripolie. Now it seems hard to believe, but in those days the Balkan Peninsula was the place that gave the ‘exact time’ in prehistoric Europe. And beyond.”<sup>46</sup>

In the same spirit, in the interview mentioned above, the author of the excavations states:

“I want to prove that archaeology can make money. I have already tried here at Popina-Bordușani an experiment. We organized a sort of open gates day. [...] We will go further because my dream is to recreate that paradise of 7000 years ago fully, to declare the entire area protected, the whole ecosystem as well, to build Gumelnița and Getic houses, and beside them, Romanian and Lipova traditional houses. I want to prove the great endurance of that civilization, especially the fact that the endurance is owed to the symbiosis with the environment and respect for the environment. We have here a treasure, and I dare to say, even a national one, as things have remained unchanged for many millennia. It could become a place of cultural tourism, a source of wealth for local people and, why not,



Fig. 4. Advertisement for the “Murfatlar” wines: “Murfatlar. Here for 2000 years” (Photograph: A. Dragoman, July 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Dragomir Popovici in Țurcanu 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Surcel 2008.

a landmark on the cultural map of Europe. Others treasure every stone, no matter how small. We have here some of the most extraordinary archaeological remains and it is a pity that they are not known. Popina-Bordușani was a landmark on the map of ancient Europe. Why should it not be also now? As a matter of fact, the first Europeans were people from this place, right?”<sup>47</sup>

Taking into account what the archaeologist said, it is no wonder that the journalist who signs the article informs his readers that “European civilization emerged between the Danube and the Carpathians”.<sup>48</sup> This time, however, nationalism intertwines with eurocentrism and the past is transformed into a resource that, by means of market strategies, can make a profit.

### Conclusions

In the written press articles on the archaeological excavations at Pietrele and Bordușani, the so-called “facts” offered by the archaeologists can be best characterized by what Pierre Bourdieu called for television “les faits *omnibus*”.<sup>49</sup> These are facts that should not cause dissension, but consensus, should interest anyone, while failing to bear any relation to something really important. Bourdieu shows that “les faits *omnibus*” help create a segregation between people who are able to get information from sources alternative to television (*e.g.* serious newspapers, international journals, radio stations in foreign languages), on the one hand, and those who have television as a unique source of information, on the other. This segregation is apparent also in the case discussed here, but in a different way: those among the “general public”, having no access or tools for assessing academic texts must rely on the information provided by the newspapers or television as regards the archaeological themes; therefore, the only ones who can critically assess press articles and TV documentaries on an archaeological theme are the archaeologists themselves, because only they know the rules, instruments and dynamics of the field they belong to.

Extremely serious is that the people in the past are subjected to a symbolic violence, their otherness is annihilated,<sup>50</sup> and the prehistoric world is colonized and rebuilt in the image of the present. Archaeologists and journalists disseminate a discourse that serves the ideology of liberal capitalism: referring to *Gorgana* they talk about the “wealthy” who control the various activities and who have “Rolexes”, “very rare artifacts” and other “luxury items”, and who benefit from the location of the tell near the “highway”; referring to *Popinã* they talk about “housing supply”, “real estate developers” and “opportunistic behaviour” of the Copper Age people who “were like us”; one gets the impression that the current state of affairs is legitimate, natural, simply because for thousands and thousands of years the world has been this way. In the specific case of the tell at Bordușani, the dominant ideology is supported also by the nationalist and eurocentrist discourse. Transferred from communism to capitalism, nationalism is transformed into an advertising slogan of liberal capitalism (Fig. 4).

The archaeologists and journalists could argue that the words which I have criticized are simple metaphors; that does not render them free of their responsibilities, because “Nommer, on le sait, c’est faire voir, c’est créer, porter à l’existence. Et les mots peuvent faire des ravages [...]”.<sup>51</sup> Archaeologists could invoke in their defense that they have no connection with the terms used by journalists, that in academic texts such words or explanations do not appear. However, I should point out that exactly this split attitude was convenient, for example, to the communist power, as it invoked the “apolitical” academic works of the archaeologists for giving authenticity to the popularizing texts impregnated by the official ideology, as it can be seen from the following quotation:

“Concomitantly to the research work, the archaeology team fully engaged in the propaganda activity of spreading the scientific knowledge and of educating the young generation in the patriotic spirit. To this end we have published several popular works with themes of archaeology, ancient and medieval history as well as a series of related articles in newspapers

<sup>47</sup> Dragomir Popovici in Țurcanu 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Țurcanu 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Bourdieu 1996, p. 16ff.

<sup>50</sup> *Sensu* Lévinas 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Bourdieu 1996, p. 19.



and magazines of wide circulation. In this way, archaeology responds to a second major task of researchers in general, namely to contribute at various levels to building the socialist society in our country.”<sup>52</sup>

However, the archaeologists and journalists hide by showing, as Bourdieu says about television:

“[...] la télévision peut, paradoxalement, cacher en montrant, en montrant autre chose que ce qu’il faudrait montrer si on faisait ce que l’on est censé faire, c’est-à-dire informer; ou encore en montrant ce qu’il faut montrer, mais de telle manière qu’on ne le montre pas ou qu’on le rend insignifiant, ou en le construisant de telle manière qu’il prend un sens qui ne correspond pas du tout à la réalité.”<sup>53</sup>

In the case of the journalistic texts about the two sites, the main culprits are the archaeologists: for example, the contextual data contrary to the “common sense” interpretation are not mentioned, as in the case of the human bones deposited in the “paths”.

In the analyzed press articles there is no respect for the lives of the people living today either. The remarks on the activity of the workers at Pietrele are eloquent in this respect: one more proof of colonial behaviour. Someone might argue that the archaeologists did not know what the journalist was going to write in the article for *National Geographic*. I doubt it. But even if so, why did they not react so far? Likewise, some remarks in the interview on the tell at Bordușani are insulting for the people who struggle with the hardships of everyday life; even if the interviewed archaeologist was not aware of that, his remarks indicate nevertheless a lack of sensitivity and interest for the social conditions in which people live today. I strongly support the idea that the archaeological projects should constitute in the areas where they take place instruments of emancipation. The words poverty, suffering, closed horizon are not abstractions, but the very living conditions of many people. The meaning of the words emancipation, love, respect, compassion, solidarity should structure archaeological practice. As Randall McGuire puts it, archaeology is not able, nor is intended to determine social and political changes, but it may have an important role in the ideological battles that directly affect people’s lives.<sup>54</sup>

Archaeologists cannot separate their approach from the social and political context in which they live and practice their profession. Therefore, if they want to keep the relationship with truth, the archaeologists must oppose, in their sphere of competence, to any domination, be it communist, fascist, neo-liberal or whatever.

### Postscript

When I presented a version of this text to the round table entitled “Monument and propaganda” (25th of April 2009), at the 10th symposium *Architecture. Restoration. Archaeology (ARA)* held in Bucharest, I was accused that I equally criticise the communism and liberal capitalism. It was signalled to me that there were obvious differences between them, the latter being desirable, as well known by those who lived a fairly long time under the communist regime. I take this opportunity to respond to the remark addressed to me with the words of Father Gheorghe Calciu, a former political prisoner who went through one of the most terrifying prison experiences during the time of communist totalitarianism, namely the “Pitești experiment”: “[...] capitalism is very cruel. We have got used to the communist vision, but capitalism is no better”.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Preda 1984, p. 233.

<sup>53</sup> Bourdieu 1996, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup> McGuire 2008, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> *Viața* 2007, p. 123.

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