

TREASURE HUNTERS IN ROMANIA AT THE END OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH

Vasilica Mîrza*

Keywords: treasures, Romania, 19th century, 20th century, archival documents

Abstract: Treasures hunters, antiques or ancient monuments, during the studied period are the subject of many files from the archives of the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction, the prefect's offices, city halls, The National Museum of Antiquities, etc. The analysis of the content of those documents has not been the subject of much research in Romanian historiography, an interpretive void which the present study seeks to fill. Firstly, I will analyse the types of discoveries invoked in the petitions addressed to the legally competent authorities to issue research authorisations, and secondly, I will analyse the discourse used in the discoverers' applications including all the sensational elements that made a discovery spark the interest of the authorities. These initiatives underlie the development of the archaeological field in Romania, one of the author's main research topic in the last years trying to decipher the conceptions, methods of archaeological research in Romania, and the development of the museum network, as well as the capitalisation of these discoveries.

Rezumat: Descoperitorii de comori sau de obiecte și monumente antice din perioada analizată fac subiectul multor dosare din Arhiva Ministerului Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice, a Prefecturilor, Primăriilor, Arhiva Muzeului Național de Antichități etc. O analiză a conținutului acelor documente nu a făcut subiectul multor cercetări în istoriografia românească, iar acest studiu vine să completeze acest gol de interpretare. În primul rând vor fi vizate tipurile de descoperiri invocate în petițiile adresate autorităților apte să dea, conform legii, autorizația de cercetare, iar în al doilea rând va fi analizat discursul folosit în cererile descoperitorilor, cu toate elementele de senzațional, care făceau ca o descoperire să stârnească interesul autorităților. Aceste inițiative stau la baza dezvoltării domeniului arheologiei în România, subiect care face obiectul cercetărilor mele din ultimii ani, în încercarea de a descifra concepțiile și metodele de cercetare arheologică și dezvoltarea rețelei muzeistice și valorificarea acestor descoperiri.

In Romania at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century there is a community of historians and philologists that set the tone for numerous activities in the field of archaeology. The decades spanning from 1874 to 1916 met with significant preoccupation in the improvement and the filling of gaps in the functioning of such activities. Numerous archaeological discoveries throughout the country, made at first by dilettantes and afterwards by professionals, who used a few modern research methods, had to be salvage and studied in order to explain the context of those discoveries. This happened through the publication of research results at the level of the knowledge of the time, but also by exhibiting the discoveries in museums across the country. A variety of objects were collected, starting from prehistorical artefacts, inscriptions, liturgical objects, garments, jewellery, coins, medals, seals, weapons, watches, ethnographic objects etc. All these were initially exhibited in the natural history museums in Iași and Bucharest, then in museums of antiquities, starting with the National Museum of Antiquities. Towards the end of the nineteenth century local museums were opened, in order to preserve the regional heritage (the Museum of Fălticeni, Gorj, Tg. Jiu, Constanța, Craiova, Virgil Hălăceanu's museum in Iași and the Museum of Antiquities in Iași, founded after the model of the University Museum in Bucharest), and at the beginning of the twentieth century the site museums in Dobruja.

Several personalities got involved in the archaeological activity in Romania through the coordination of archaeological expeditions, research activities, the study of antiquities, but also through the initiations of laws concerning the protection of historical monuments as well as the museums hosting the archaeological heritage. Among them we enumerate: Cezar Bolliac, Dimitrie Butculescu, Alexandru Odobescu, Grigore Tocilescu, Pamfil Polonic, Teohari Antonescu, Vasile Pârvan, Oreste Tafrali. The pioneers of Romanian archaeology contributed essentially to the creation and improvement of the legislative system in Romania in relation to the archaeological heritage, determining us to investigate further down the framework they created in this domain.

The objectives of the present study based on the research of archival documents and legislation of the period (1874-1916) consist of answering the following questions: Which is the substratum of the requests to

* The Museum of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași, e-mail: asandei_vasilica@yahoo.co.uk