

NOTE ȘI DISCUȚII

Nona Palincaș*. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE AT POPEȘTI (CO. GIURGIU) AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN RESEARCH, CONSERVATION, AND PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

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Abstract: For several decades, archaeologists considered the site at Popești (belonging to the town of Mihăilești, Co. Giurgiu) from the perspective of basic research and, secondarily, from that of site conservation. The initiative of constructing a local museum related to such an important site was welcome both because it could offer the possibility to present the archaeological research to the wider public, and it could turn into an important element for the future development of the tourism in the region. Nevertheless, quite from the very beginning of the project, it became obvious that such a construction raises a lot of problems. This article discusses the most difficult of them – that of the appropriate location of the museum – from an archaeologist's perspective.

Rezumat: Decenii la rând, arheologii s-au ocupat de situl arheologic de la Popești (oraș Mihăilești, jud. Giurgiu) din perspectiva cercetării fundamentale și, în plan secundar, și din aceea a conservării. Dată fiind importanța sitului, inițiativa construirii unui muzeu local nu putea fi decât binevenită atât pentru că oferea posibilitatea valorificării cercetării arheologice pentru publicul larg, cât și pentru că ar fi putut contribui la o viitoare dezvoltare a turismului în zonă. Totuși, încă de la demararea studiului de fezabilitate a devenit evident faptul că o asemenea construcție pune multe probleme. Articolul o discută pe cea mai dificilă dintre ele, aceea a alegerii amplasamentului, din perspectiva arheologului.

The archaeological site at Popești (belonging to the town of Mihăilești, Co. Giurgiu – see Fig. 1), code RAN¹ 104172.01, is registered as a category A site. From the first systematic excavations, which began in 1954, to date, the site has been permanently in the scientific responsibility of the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest and was always considered from the perspective of archaeological research. The problem of its conservation was raised repeatedly, but postponed because the research was perceived as more urgent.

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¹ RAN stands for Registrul Arheologic Național (The National Archaeological Register).

As the site also contains a late medieval church (called 'Holy Trinity'), which is itself a historical monument from the 17th century,² the local priest initiated the paperwork for the construction of a museum devoted to the church (which was also meant to include a section on archaeology and one on ethnography). Under the circumstances, the archaeologists working on the site saw themselves forced to assess the relation between three aspects: scientific interests, the obligation of conserving the site, and the possibility of engaging with the wider public. These relations and their implications are the topic of the present paper.

Seen from the view of the researcher.

The site is located on the right bank of the Argeș River (25 km south-west of Bucharest), on the longest promontory in the Romanian Plain (Fig. 2). It is an exceptional topographic position owing to its closest possible location to the Argeș – the main line of communication between southeastern Transylvania, a large part of the Lower Danube, and the west shore of the Black Sea (Fig. 1). It is also easily defensible; the only access way – that from the promontory – was protected by one wall and three ditches (Fig. 3). Two of the ditches are visible today even from far away (Fig. 2).

The aims of the archaeological research were twofold: 1. gathering of primary archaeological data such as dwelling structures, artefacts, stratigraphic relations; 2. aspects that pertain to basic research proper. I shall present them together, briefly.

Generally on the site there are 11 walking levels, but in some parts there are as many as 13. One layer dates to the Early Bronze Age (Glina Culture), 2–4 layers to the Late Bronze Age (Fundeni-Govora and Radovanu³), 2 to the early Hallstatt period (Pre-Basarabi), one to the middle Hallstatt period (Basarabi), and 5 to the classical La Tène period. From the early La Tène period there are only isolated features and stray finds (Fig. 4). Despite several interruptions of the habitation of the site, there are no corresponding sterile strata. The interruptions are identifiable in some cases by the large time-gaps between successive layers (see Fig. 4). In other cases, pedological analyses were necessary to prove these interruptions: between the Pre-Basarabi walking levels Ha I1 and Ha I2, and between the latter and the Basarabi walking level.⁴

² Trajanescu 1911.

³ The layer referred to here as Radovanu appears in my previous publications (e.g. Palincaș 1996; Palincaș 2004-2005a, Palincaș 2007) as Zimnicea-Plovdiv. I decided to change the label after the publication of the article by C. Schuster (2007).

⁴ This information is based on an unpublished pedological report by C. Haită.