

RUINS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, ARCHEOLOGY AND MEMORY: ON THE CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT POLICY IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA*

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Abstract: The text refers to a neglected category of monuments from Romania, namely the Second World War blockhouses built on the Black Sea shore against a possible invasion by the Soviet Union. Starting from the premise that the archaeological vestiges constitute the “material memory” of the past (Olivier 2008), I argue that the Second World War blockhouses from Romania are ignored because of the memories they contain – memories that can not be used in “heroic” narratives about the recent past and uncomfortable for the socio-political projects of the present.

Rezumat: Textul se referă la o categorie neglijată de monumente din România, și anume cazematele din al doilea război mondial construite pe malul Mării Negre împotriva unei posibile invazii a Uniunii Sovietice. Pornind de la premisa că vestigiile arheologice constituie “memoria materială” a trecutului (Olivier 2008), susțin ideea conform căreia cazematele din cel de-al doilea război mondial din România sunt neglijate datorită amintirilor pe care le conțin – amintiri ce nu pot fi utilizate în narațiuni “eroice” despre trecutul recent și inconfortabile pentru proiectele socio-politice ale prezentului.

Introduction: forgotten ruins

The ruins of the ancient (but also medieval) cities of Romania attracted and continue to attract the interest of the archaeologists, evidence, among other things, the longevity of the excavations carried out in such sites, as is the case of those from Histria (Constanța County), started by Vasile Pârvan, the founder of Romanian archeology, and being continuously unfolded. The ancient ruins have been the subject of numerous studies, such are those dedicated to the system of fortifications, architecture or the so-called “sacred area” of the fortress of Histria. Neither are missing analyses of how some of these monuments, such as the Roman mausoleum from Adamclisi (Constanța County), were (re)invested with new meanings and manipulated in different socio-political contexts of the recent past.¹ In an entire series of ancient sites, restoration works were done (or at least preservation works), the gates were opened to the “general public”, guide books were drawn up for visitors² and even site museums were built, for example at Histria.

In deep contrast with the interest in ancient ruins, the monuments from the recent past are almost completely ignored from the archaeological point of view, a good example being the blockhouses of the Second World War in Dobrogea, on the shore of the Black Sea. The main reason behind the lack of interest towards the monuments from the recent or contemporary past is that, explicitly or implicitly, the archeology continues to be understood by many as a historical discipline, which has as a purpose the restoration of some past “realities” for which there are not or there are few written sources.³ According to the dominant philosophy of research, through their quest the archaeologists discover the past, reveal it, or, given the fact that the past of the blockhouses was already known as many historical data are available, this type of monuments was not considered “archaeological”. Moreover, unlike many ancient ruins, the blockhouses (or at least some of them)

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¹ Panaite, Barnea 2010.

² E.g. Buzoianu, Chera 2009; Suceveanu, Angelescu 2012.

³ See, for example, Babeș 1994; Petrescu-Dîmbovița, Vulpe 2001.