ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND ROMANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE AGE OF MANELE

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Abstract: Starting from opinions of the public collected by the author over approx. 25 years, these comments on Gh. Al. Niculescu's article maintain that by following the latter's ideas for the reformation of the specialists – public relationship in Romania the archeological heritage would be even more endangered, rather than better conserved. The causes originate in the dominance among the public of a view of the past as backward and consequently as irrelevant for present human lives. This view is promoted primarily by the school system, the press and the Church, but it is also supported by archaeological exhibitions, the vast majority of which convey a simplistic, even caricatural image of humanity, often comparable with that of the lyrics and subject matters of the manele. Before reforming its relationship with the public, Romanian archaeology needs to reform itself.

Rezumat: Pornind de la păreri ale publicului adunate de autoare în cursul a cca. un sfert de secol, acest comentariu la articolul lui Gh. Al. Niculescu susţine că, dacă am urma ideile celui din urmă pentru reformarea relaţiei dintre specialişti în patrimoniu şi public, patrimoniul ar fi periclitat şi mai mult decât în prezent şi niciodată conservat mai bine. Cauzele îşi au originea în dominaţia în rândul publicului a viziunii despre trecut ca ceva depăşit şi prin urmare irelevant pentru umanitatea prezentă. Această viziune este răspândită în principal prin școala, presei şi Biserica, dar şi prin expoziţii de arheologie, a căror mare majoritate promovează o imagine simplistă, chiar caricaturală a umanităţii, a adesea comparabilă cu textele și temele manelelor. Înainte de a-şi reforma relaţia cu publicul, arheologia românească trebuie să se rearmeze pe sine însăşi.

My comments on Gh. Al. Niculescu’s article ‘From owners and authorized interpreters to people who care about cultural heritage and their views’ focus on two related aspects. One is his statement that heritage would be better protected if Romanian archaeologists would give up the state supported right to decide the fate of monuments (based mainly on legislation copied from other countries) and accept the right of the wider public to participate in heritage protection; that it is better for archaeologists to accept that the public would want to protect monuments for reasons other than theirs than to hope that the public would start thinking like archaeologists. Examples of such other reasons would be: ‘pietas due to the traces of what has lived’ and ‘resistance to the arrogance of the local present’.

The second aspect is Niculescu’s argument that archaeological interpretations would have only to gain if, instead of considering the public incompetent, Romanian archaeologists would encourage the former to think about heritage, as this might lead to a fresh view; to encourage people to think and even challenge ‘scientific knowledge’ is a democratic act; people should not refrain from expressing opinions for fear that these might be ‘unscientific’, all the more so after having experienced ‘the disastrous consequences on scientific knowledge of a political regime that repressed autonomous thinking’. New ideas are expected primarily from ‘amateurs’ understood in the primary sense of the word – non-archaeologists who love archaeology –, as well as workers from excavations. Niculescu argues that we cannot know the outcome of such relationships as no such experience exists so far.

While I agree that the relationship between Romanian archaeologists and the wider public needs fundamental changes, I maintain that given the present state of Romanian archaeology and the image of archaeology among the Romanian public, the changes suggested by Gh. Al. Niculescu will most probably endanger the archeological heritage more than it already is. My argument is based on a series of opinions – limited for reasons of editorial space – about archaeological artefacts (monuments included) and past human lives – both in archaeological and non-archaeological visions – which I have collected over the last twenty years of interaction with workers, professionals from domains connected to archaeology (archaeometry, biology, etc.) as well as a public not particularly interested in archaeology.

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1 Manele (sg. manea) is a Romanian music style, which I use here for comparison because of the poor quality of the themes and lyrics (for an overview of the style see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manele).