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Bărbulescu, Mihai, *Arheologia azi, în România (Archaeology today in Romania)*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Idea, 2016. ISBN 978-606-8265-36-0, 224 p.

The book published by the Idea Design and Print Publishing House from Cluj is a rare one not only in the biography of the author, but generally, on the Romanian bibliography of archaeology. As Aurel Codoban highlighted in the foreword of the book (5-6 p.), this well designed and beautifully edited book is a “novel” of an accomplished archaeologist, a great name and dominant presence in Romanian archaeology and cultural heritage studies. But it is more than just a semi-academic memoir of the author: it is one of the most sincere self-reflection of Roman archaeology in the last few decades. How sincere can be such a subjective topic however, needs a closer analysis.

In the introduction the author mentions, that this book is indeed, a summary of his own, personal experiences and ideas, views and opinion on the evolution and major issues of Romanian archaeology in the last five decades – half a century dedicated to a discipline. His experience as field archaeologist begun in 1966 and since 1971, his name is inseparable from the excavations of the legionary fort of Potaissa (Turda, Torda). Bărbulescu however, is more than just a field archaeologist: he dominated the field of Roman religious studies in the last four decades since his influential book on religious interferences of Roman religion in Dacia and participated actively in reforming public archaeological education, education diplomacy and the reform of the National Archaeological Commission (served as president between 2004 and 2008). His role and impact on this particular institution still exists.

The book has four main chapters, each having several short articles, some of them published previously in local newspapers, academic journals or cultural periodicals. The

book has also two annexes. The first main chapter entitled "*We and the classical antiquity*" (11-26. pp.) is a short note on the role and changes of classical antiquity and the classics, as discipline in the 21st century. It is a very eclectic, sometimes hard to follow flow of ideas and subjective views on what it means the word "Roman", "Romanisation", "Roman culture" and the heritage of this waste empire and its impact on contemporary society. Contemporary however is not really accurate in this chapter, written 25 years ago and slightly changed for this volume. The examples in this chapter are focusing mostly on the divergence of antique ideas and historical analogies during fascism and communism.

The second and probably, the most important chapter of this book (*The Romanian archaeologist* 27-70. pp.) gives the very first and most intriguing zoom-in of the processes and problems of the Romanian archaeological education system and the work of Romanian archaeologists. The first question asked by the author is: how you became an archaeologist (in Romania)? His answer is more a short historiography of archaeological research in Romania. The second question is focusing on "how many archaeologists we need?" Recently, there are more than 900 archaeologists enrolled in the Register of Archaeologists from Romania in three categories (debutant, specialist, expert), although a big part of them are not working as field archaeologists or not even practicing his job since many years. That means – after the optimistic calculation of the author – that there is one archaeologist for 25.000 people in Romania, while in France there is 1 for 14.000. In the next subchapter, Bărbulescu criticizes the bachelor education in archaeology. After his opinion, the once existing admission system and first examination with a severe test of knowledge would be essential to filter the more and more uneducated and unprepared generations. Currently, there are 105 universities in Romania with yearly 500.000 new students – an absurd number, which doesn't follow the needs and necessities

of Romanian market. There are at least, ten universities producing yearly new students of archaeology – sometimes directly to the unemployment market. Some of them having even the very same topic of research for their bachelor thesis due to the catastrophic communication system between the institutions. Bărbulescu shortly, but firmly mentioned also, that since 1989 not only the educational quality and intellectual background of the newly emerging student generations deprived, but also the professors and teachers’.

He criticises severely also the Bologna system, which seems to failed in the last two decades in Romania. The M.A. theses of the archaeological students and the educational program of many faculties are good examples for the problems in graduate education of classical archaeology in Romania. Finally, he presents the tragicomedy of Ph.D. students: only between 2000 and 2015 there were 55.000 doctoral theses written in Romania. A part of them – he didn’t give an exact number – were of course, archaeological Ph.Ds. In many cases – especially after 2008 – archaeologists and historians with a Ph.D. face a severe unemployed crisis in Romania and not only. Living in Italy for many years as the director of the Romanian Academy from Rome, Bărbulescu gave numerous examples and statistics regarding the unemployment of archaeologists from Italy, where 40% of archaeologists are living with short term contracts or working outside of their field. In a short subchapter, he deals also with the eternal problem of plagiarism in classical studies and archaeology.

One subchapter deals with the contemporary problem of research grants, fellowships and short term contracts – symbols of instability, intellectual nomadism in Europe and beyond and the so called ideological buzz-words of humanities in crisis. Bărbulescu highlights the importance of a healthy balance between field work and library research, two qualities beside the personal passion, which are essential for every archaeologist. He emphasized, that during his directorate

in front of the National Committee of Archaeologists, he introduced a selection procedure for the three categories of archaeologists (debutant, specialist, expert), where publications and fieldwork experience plays both an important role. Obviously, this is however, just an ideal structure. In reality – and this part is not presented in the book – publications are very heterogeneous, as the notion of the fieldwork too. While some archaeologists enrol as “book” or “monograph” their unpublished or hardly accessible Ph.Ds, other have well known books in renowned international publishing houses. Similarly, the simple presence on an archaeological site doesn’t really makes you a good field archaeologist. The selection of experts is even more based on sympathy, grouping and guild networks.

Among the qualities of an archaeologist, Bărbulescu emphasized honesty among the most important – and probably, one of the most problematic in contemporary Romania. Intellectual dispassion and objectivity of course, is an illusion especially in humanities, but as the *Liberté pour l’histoire* manifesto of Pierre Nora, Paul Vayne and others from 2005 shown, the liberty of historiography and distance from political ideologies of historians would be essential. Archaeological discourses in Romania however, are still fuelled and full with nationalism or various political ideologies, especially in some sensible topics, as the ethnogenesis, continuity or ethnicity. From this group unfortunately, the author of the book is not really a good example to follow, although recently he was one of the few academicians, who didn’t sign the nationalist manifesto of Ioan Aurel Pop in February, 2017.

The author discussed shortly also the problematic relationship of real sciences (physics, statistics, archaeobotany, osteological studies, paleogenetics genomic studies) with contemporary archaeology in Romania and the languages and vocabulary we use when we write archaeological discourses. Citing himself, he also stated that although archaeology today

became more a science, than a winckelmanian art of philology, the sense of *vieux monsieur* would be necessary for every archaeologist. It is not sure, what Bărbulescu want to say here: if he means a well educated and highly cultured intellectual, it may work, but one cannot expect anymore an archaeologist excavating in suits and expensive hat – especially because we are not academicians, so we don't have money for the material appearance of a *monsieur*.

The third big chapter repeats the title of the book: archaeology today, in Romania (71-136.pp). It presents the history of archaeological legislation of Romania after 1920, focusing especially on the situation since 1992 when the National Committee of Archaeologists changed radically several times. Here one can observe the compatibility and experience of the author as an excellent diplomat of public education and politics. His skills and charisma is well known in local archaeological contexts and it revels also from this chapter. In contrast with the previous chapter, where Bărbulescu seems to be very dark and critical, without constructive ideas and suggestions for changes, here he comes with new ideas and a 'to do list' too. He gives several case studies from rescue excavations fallen in the labyrinth of bureaucracy and legal misunderstandings. Most of his examples however are from other Museums and institutions where he never was directly related. He also discusses the problem of the use of metal detectors in Romania – an essential problem for the country and generally, in Central-East Europe. He discussed also two very sensible case studies, where society, finance, law and archaeology met in a very conflictual way: one is the case study of Alburnus Maior (Rosia Montana, Verespatak) and the excavations in the city centre of Cluj. While the first case is an etalon for public education and awareness for our cultural and archaeological heritage, the second one is a good example, how archaeologists failed to present an excavation for the greater

public and to dismiss political and ideological waves, which should never be part of any academic discussion or field work.

In the fourth chapter, Bărbulescu presents the archaeology and mass-media (137-180 pp.). It is an essential chapter, which – similarly to several attempts already in the contemporary Romanian historiography – tries to deconstruct some well established dilatants and false historians and their works. This chapter is a short, but well argued manifesto of an archaeologist against the dacomania, dacopatia and other nationalist movements, which present the archaeological heritage of Romania falsely and with forged arguments. Bărbulescu also urged the necessity of professional and academic channels on social networks and mass-media promoting public archaeology, which barely exist in the country. In this chapter one can read a slight criticism of re-enactment movements, which – although are highly popular in Romania today – not always express and mediate the results of the academic research.

In the first annexe of the book, Bărbulescu presents his masters and the great names of Romanian archaeology and classical studies in the last half a century. Among many unnamed, this chapter presents in a very delicate and charming notes the life of Emil Condurachi, Dumitru Tudor, Constantin Daicoviciu, Mihail Macrea and Ion Iosif Russu. These semi-biographies or memories with these grand names of Romanian scholarship are eulogies, presenting mostly the positive heritage of these personalities and rarely discussing their controversial activities. In the second annexe, he presents two small articles from the Tribuna journal and the reports of the National Committee of Archaeology from 2005 and 2006, when he served as the president of this institution.

The book of Bărbulescu – although accessible only for the Romanian public – is a great summary of the problems and frustrations of a discipline, where his generation was still

able to succeed till the highest ranks and levels of academic carrier. It is a subjective and very personal kaleidoscope of a life-experience through a discipline, which constantly changed in Europe and in Romania too and needs not only questions, self-reflection, but also, answers and solutions. His book could be, a first step toward a renewal of the discipline in Romania.

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