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THE DACIAN ARISTOCRACY (1st century BC-1st century AD).
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
ON SOCIAL STATUS
- PhD THESIS -

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SUMMARY

KEYWORDS: social archaeology, identity, Dacians, Late Iron Age, northern Balkan area, aristocracy, élites, social status, historiography, subjectivism

INTRODUCTION

The social landscape of Late Iron Age communities from the northern Balkan area produced an impressive amount of literature in a century and a half of Romanian archaeology. Nevertheless, the (re)constructions derived almost exclusively from the subjectivity of the ancient written texts. In this context, Strabo, Dio Chrysostom, Dio Cassius and Jordanes were the main ones targeted. The archaeological data overshadowed, or when it was given somewhat importance, it was modelled into „classical” patterns provided by the ancient textual sources. Thus, the main purpose of the work was to put in spotlight archaeology, and more important to bring forth the archaeological evidence

I have started this scientific approach in 2014 from some ideas expressed by Al Vulpe, in a paper that summarized the current state of knowledge about northern Balkan communities in the 1st century BC – 1st century AD. Vulpe emphasized the fact that „much has been written, but little is known, and what is not well known is supplemented by hypotheses, often marked by historical prejudices, based on literary information that is very fragmented and exposed to speculation” (VULPE 2005). I have tried, as far as possible, not to fall into the traps of "historiographical licenses", often stated in the literature, but on the contrary to analyse them through a critical lens. Perhaps more importantly, I have endeavoured to bring my discourse to that of the contemporary Western European archaeology by integrating up to date methodological and theoretical concepts.

The second guiding idea has been expressed in many ways by L. Boia (most recently BOIA 2018). For Professor Boia, there are two types of history. On the one hand, there is a *History* with a capital *H*, which means the objective process, that is, what really happened in the past. On the other hand, we have *histories* with small *h* that do not mean the past, but rather the past seen from the present. Therefore, in this paper, I proposed a simplified narrative, but invested with meaning, a narrative that was passed through a strainer to filter out subjectivity and then structured according to present day ideologies.

I. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This first introductory chapter intended to clarify the exact meaning of the terms used in the title of this paper „The Dacian Aristocracy (1st century BC – 1st century AD). An Archaeological Perspective on Social Status” in the form of a dialogue between theory and practice, and also to highlight the limits regarding the application of these concepts and theories in the context of this paper.

I have integrated in the discussion the most recent epistemological research directions („archaeology of identity”, „social archaeology”, „anthropology”) and I have discussed concepts like „ethnic identity”, „collective identity”, „social status”, „aristocracy”, „élites”, generators of fresh new perspectives on the social realities of Late Iron Age Dacia.

II. THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE PROBLEM OR THE PROBLEM OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Because an investigation of the past cannot be made without a presentation of the ideas already stated in the literature, the second chapter was dedicated to the ancient sources and to the discourse offered in the historiography based on them. In the Romanian archaeological literature, most scholars agreed to see in the first category mentioned by the ancient sources – *tarabostes*, *pilophoros*, and *pilleatus* – the aristocracy. Moreover, according to information provided by Iordanes, this had a dual vocation, both military and sacerdotal. Furthermore all authors agree on one issue: the existence of a status symbol – the *pileus* as an expression of appartenance to this aristocracy (military or sacerdotal). The discussions on the structure of the Dacian society could be followed on the basis of the other social category – *comatus*, *capillatus* –. Thus we have:

a. The bi-partite structure of the Dacian society taking into account the scheme aristocracy, respectively common people; this thesis was embraced by Grigore Tocilescu, A.D. Xenopol, Vasile Pârvan, Constantin and Hadrian Daicoviciu, Andrei Bodor, Nicolae Gostar and Vasile Lica, as well as Ioan Glodariu. Most likely due to political pressure and manipulative tendencies, during Communist period the historiography often chose to interpret the *kometai*, *capillati* as an "exploited class". This interpretation was obviously done according to the classical Marxist dogma, in which the state appeared as a consequence of splitting-up the society in opposed social classes. b. According to the other perspective the *kometai*, *capillati* are an intermediate category between aristocracy and common people. The most eloquent examples in this case are: the parallel done by I. H Crişan with the knights (*equites*) of Gallia mentioned by Caesar and the way Z. Petre saw them as warriors, according to the trifunctional and tripartite Indo-European ideology.

Within the same chapter, I tried to follow the theoretical debate in historiography, which can be noticed only after the establishment of the Communist regime. The whole debate can be followed in close connection to the history of Romanian Communism. Traditionally, the history of Romanian Communism has been divided in three periods: the

Sovietization stage (1947-1960); the years of ideological openness (1960-1974); the period of Ceaușescu's cult of personality and National-Communism (1974-1989).

III. ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE SEARCH OF SOCIAL STATUS

In the third chapter, the theoretical one, I have followed the way in which archaeology, throughout its history, has attempted to pursue social inequalities. The discussion started from the most important theses on social inequality expressed since the Age of Enlightenment and continued with K. Marx or M. Weber. Subsequently, the emphasis was moved towards archaeology. In this way, I could observe how in order to develop this discipline borrowed concepts, methods and theories from other sciences.

IV. ANTECEDENTS... OR *THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE GETAE ARISTOCRACY*

At first sight, the social edifice of the 4th and 3rd centuries BC appears to be dominated by aristocracy, who manifests itself from an archaeological point of view through three categories of monuments: fortifications, tombs and treasures of precious metals. Moreover, there is an increase in commercial relations with the Greek and later Hellenistic world. The geographical area of this phenomenon includes Moldavia (historical region, now part of Romania and the Republic of Moldova), Dobruja, Muntenia, Oltenia and northern Bulgaria, while the time frame is a relatively short period of time. This chronological period, namely the one stretching between the middle of the 4th century BC and the middle of the 3rd century BC, was labelled in the Romanian historiography as „the Golden Age of Getae Aristocracy” (SÎRBU, FLOREA 1997).

The archaeological phenomenon does not appear to be singular and specific to the extra-Carpathian region; it also occurs in other areas with different cultural identities, located at the edge of the classical world. From nowadays Spain to Central Europe and the northern Black Sea region, archaeology seems to demonstrate more or less the same things: the proliferation of fortifications and settlements, an increase in the volume of trade visible through the existence of the imports and the presence of some sumptuous burials, most of them located in the proximity of fortified settlements. From a chronological point of view, the phenomenon seems to be starting in the aforementioned areas at the end of the 7th century a. AD, while in *Thracian* area, it seems to have started only in the first half of the 5th century BC, possibly right in the middle of this century.

Most of the pieces that come to emphasize this character come from the inventory of some tombs – Agighiol (Tulcea County), Peretu (Teleorman County) – or treasures – Cucuteni-Băiceni (Iași County), Craiova, Poiana-Coțofenești (Prahova County), Poroina and „Iron Gates” (Mehedinți County) – more likely belonging to the inventory of some graves as well. Discovered in the last century and a half by treasure hunters or due to agricultural and public works, only some of them enjoyed further archaeological research. Nevertheless, there are also some pieces of adornment or harness discovered in the fortifications - the cases from Bunești-Averești (Vaslui County) and Stâncești (Botoșani County)

Most of the archaeological literature focused on the analysis of the artistic value of these pieces, while few things were expressed about the social landscape of this period. I proposed three perspectives for the interpretation of the social realities of this chronological period. The first one starts from the anthropological model of the *gift institution*; the second one, from the concepts of capital, as they were expressed by the French theoretician P. Bourdieu (BOURDIEU 1984); while the third one, is based on the Post-Processual idea according to which the funeral was made by family, group or community (PARKER PEARSON 1999).

V. THE DACIAN ARISTOCRACY (1st century BC – 1st century AD)

More than a decade ago, after a brief analysis of the *Dacian* aristocracy, G. Florea wondered himself if we were dealing with several kinds of aristocracies, well-defined from a regional point of view (FLOREA 2006). Given the ideas discussed in this chapter, the answer that can be offered, can only be affirmative. We are dealing with more archaeological expressions of aristocracy both in space and in time.

First of all, there are significant differences in the location of fortifications within the landscape. On the one hand, the fortified settlements were located on promontories and high terraces around some important rivers, which were, most probably, also main commercial routes. On the other hand, the stone fortifications, especially those from the Orăștiei Mountains, betray a more defensive attitude, being relatively far from the commercial routes. If the *davae* from the extra-Carpathian space seem to have articulated their economic and commercial functions, the fortresses from of the Carpathian Basin can be classified as „consumers of goods”. Identity elements are also different. The dwelling towers specific to fortresses indicate a rather private attitude, whereas the acropolis of the fortified settlements shows another public scenario of prestige. Besides aristocratic dwellings and public elements it includes possible gathering places or sanctuaries as well.

However, the most significant differences can be observed in time. For the period between the second half of the 2nd century BC and the first half of the 1st century BC we have a funerary expression that emphasizes the image of the deceased as warrior. This model is found in both barrow burials and flat burials. In the 1st century BC, even if the tombs almost disappear, the ones near the centres of Siret: Brad, Răcățâu, and Poiana, show a different image of the deceased. If in the previous century identity was expressed through weapons and military equipment, during this period the identity expressed through costume and adornment pieces.

CONCLUSIONS

Certainly all of the examples discussed in this work should be the subject of new studies. They should start from „unity and diversity”, two concepts introduced by G. Woolf (WOOLF 1997) in the study of temperate Europe populations at the time of the Roman conquest. Although *unity* under its various forms, material, cultural, spiritual, and ethnic, has often been embraced by the historiography dedicated to the 1st century BC – 1st century AD, from now on it should be coupled with the other element that seems to have dominated Late Iron Age Europe, namely *diversity*.

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