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Vlad-Andrei Lăzărescu, *Locuirea în Transilvania din ultimele decenii ale provinciei Dacia și până la prăbușirea „imperului” hunic (250–450)*, [Minerva 3, Acta Europea 4], Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, 2015. 257 pag., ISBN 9786068694221

Vlad Andrei Lăzărescu's (hereafter V.A.L.) book breaks with the local historiographical tradition in at least two major points. Firstly, a macro-regional analysis of the 4th century AD Transylvanian Basin from an 'international' perspective has hitherto not been undertaken. Secondly, its historical-archaeological assertions have far-reaching implications on the research history of the aforementioned region, as the study points out that it is impossible to speak of ethnical continuity in the Transylvanian Basin. It is important to underline the fact that identities are sociological and socio-historical phenomena (constructs) brought to life by political will. Furthermore, the notion of continuity itself is also multidimensional, and in a political sense its emergence can be traced back to the early phases of 'nation-building' in the 18th–19th century.

In the introduction of the book the author addresses one of the most heavily debated issues throughout the previous decade, i.e. the problematic relation between ethnic identity and material culture, although without clearly expressing his own views on the matter. The potential for identifying instances of ethnical identity based on the archaeological record varies from case to case. Nonetheless, often what appear as manifestations of a collective identity are in reality archaeological reflections of social, political or military networks, or just merely cases of technology-transfer. These complex issues that have produced vast amounts of literature were not raised by the author as such, and therefore will not be addressed in the present review. Even so, it needs to be underlined that the various archaeological phenomena often arching over multiple and distant regions should not be interpreted according to the modern notion of 'ethnicity', but rather need be understood in terms of processes connected the evolution of fashion in the context of group identities and attitudes based on common lifestyles.

While the author does not address the issue of ethnicity, the question of early Christianity – a fundamental subject used to underpin the continuity thesis – is thoroughly discussed (pages 41–44). V.A.L. once again displays a highly critical stance. He starts by unravelling the research history of the subject starting with the work of Constantin Daicoviciu, whose critical attitude regarding the said question – according to the author – was not followed by the subsequent generations of researchers. As a result, for instance, the institutional presence of the Church was asserted based purely on certain archaeological finds. Accordingly, V.A.L. adopts Uwe Fiedler's view regarding the *donarium* discovered in Biertan, whereby the artefact was proven to be the result of a barbarian looting expedition in the Balkans and therefore in its new environment it was redefined as a pagan artefact by its new owners.¹

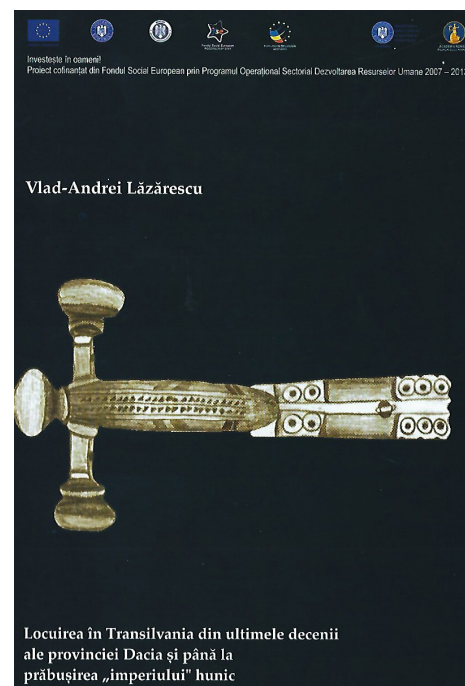
¹ FIEDLER 1996–1998, 389–397. In this respect see also: MANNHEIM 1995, 176.

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Furthermore, along similar lines, V.A.L. points to the fact that despite claims of institutional Christianity, not a single church building is known on the territory of the former province of Dacia, even though numerous researchers tried to prove the existence of such early churches in Porolissum, Biertan, or Pălatca. However, the lack of references to works by Peter Brown or Robert A. Markus² regarding the question of Christianity has a negative impact on the theoretical edge of the book, as does the absence of a detailed analysis of what can be regarded as Christian beyond the borders of the Empire from an archaeological point of view.

The next significant part of the study is the analysis of the coin distribution carried out with the help of so-called *hot spot analysis*. The issue of coin distribution is highly relevant to the assessment of cultural and demographical transformations following the Roman withdrawal, being one of the cornerstones of the continuity thesis. In fact it was intensely used as an argument for the survival of the Roman economic network in the respective region by entire generations of researchers especially in the period between the 60s and the 90s. Conversely, V.A.L. extensively demonstrated through 25 statistical charts (Figs. 21–47) and almost 30 pages (46–74) that there is effectively no link between coin circulation and the alleged persistence of the old provincial structures, the coin finds reflecting instead the commercial activities between the Empire and the *Barbaricum*.

The next chapter III.1 deals with the power structures that asserted their control over the region in the wake of the Roman withdrawal in the context of the Empire's state of acute crisis, the author using the ethnic names of these groups featured in the literary sources. The abandonment of the province in addition to the obvious demographical changes prompted by the influx of new populations, had far-reaching cultural and civilizational implications as well. The latter resulted in the total loss of previous architectural and urbanistical know-how and practice in just a few decades which brought about a general rural transformation of the region's settlement network. This is well illustrated by numerous archaeological situations whereby 4th century sunken houses were documented inside abandoned Roman *villa rustica*-type farm complexes (Chinteni-Tulgheș, Succeag-Oradba/Orat, Jucu-Tetarom III, site II) or Roman settlements were simply transformed into cemeteries (Pălatca-Tag/Coastă). This effectively translates into the disruption of the administrative and legal framework which previously regulated most aspects of social life. Furthermore, there is no reason to assume that any written legal system was in place at that time. In light of this, the notion of 'former Dacia – no-man's-land' seems appropriate. These issues are dealt with in detail by the author (pages 75–76), followed by the analysis of the 'Carps' known from the literary sources (pages 76–80),³ the 'Cipău-Gârle' group (pages 80–83), and the Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov group (pages 83–105). Each of these groups is the result of a migration model, accounting for the archaeological reflection of the new populations which emerged in the territory of the former province. This well-illustrated by the statistical table from Fig. 50, as well as by

the table at page 80 which comprises the classification of incineration graves based on their characteristics.

Next, the author analyses the so-called 'Cipău-Gârle' group (pages 80–83), which – as he states – arrived into the former province from the north-west. Previous studies identified this group with the so-called population of 'free Dacians', this ethnic interpretation being rejected (although not deconstructed) by the author, who decided only to analyse the distribution of the finds related to the group. Furthermore his assertion whereby the said population is linked to areas in today's Poland is also highly plausible.

The two shorter sections are followed by a more comprehensive discussion regarding the Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov group which has a more straightforward dating based on the highly diverse nature of funerary finds (grave goods) associated with the respective group. According to the author we are dealing with the archaeological manifestations of a Germanic population, however our view is that the respective archaeological record accounts for a much more complex situation.

Based on the 4th century archaeological map of the Transylvanian Basin it is evident that the eastern and south-eastern part of the region was the scene of multiple migrations involving both large and small groups, occasionally resulting in the military and political takeover of the respective parts. In light of this, the concept of an all-encompassing Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov Culture can have a distorting effect on the interpretation of a whole series of military and political events of varying nature. The distribution of the brooches with semicircular head-plates suggests that the territory is linked with the power structure known from the literary sources and affiliated to the 'Visigoths' led by Athanarik.

The question of the relation between the population names and the power structures is unfortunately not addressed by the author, the issue being absent in general from the research agenda of Romanian archaeology. Furthermore, the clarification of what should we understand under the term population in a legal, political, and cultural sense, is also absent from the discussion. Despite the fact that starting with the mid-4th century AD, the vast region between the Someșul Mic and the Dniester Rivers is characterized by a homogenous material culture and funerary practice, to ascribe this phenomenon to a single 'population' is tributary to modern notions of nationhood and nationalism, which in other parts of the book are treated a highly critical fashion (see page 100).

Besides the archaeological record, historical accounts of the late antique barbarian society are also provided by the Ulfila's Bible, the martyrdom accounts of Sabbas the Goth, and by contemporary authors such as Ammianus Marcellinus. Based on these literary sources we can say that the top of the hierarchy of the 4th century society was occupied by the *thiudans*, a function corresponding to the Greek *basileus*. The fact that the population at that time was already stratified due to the emergence of territorial units, indicates that some kind of legal framework was in place that sanctioned this situation.

The situation of the 'guests' (*gasteis*) is not entirely clear, but two points can be made here: 1) the structural integration was an individual process, 2) the 4th century

² BROWN 2003; MARKUS 1990.

³ BICHIR 1973; BICHIR 1976.

'Visigoth' society was centred around local elites arranged in a pyramidal fashion. The divide between the conqueror and the conquered groups as well as the groups which settled down later on did not only remain in place, but also resulted in a vertical stratification. All this indicates the existence of a network of vertical structures, indispensable for any power structure which expanded on larger areas. Athanarik was clearly a *thiudans* being the only one who held talks on equal terms with Emperor Valens in 369, indicating that he was the sole leader of the respective power structure. The literary sources paint the picture of the beginnings of a new political and military centralization at the end of the 4th century. The author's assertion whereby the political formation known as 'Gothia' had a highly heterogeneous population as indicated by the category known as *gasteis*, seems to be viable. Furthermore it is equally tenable that any assessment regarding the ethnic composition of the population is impossible at this moment.

The date of the influx of respective population as well as the direction of the arrival was, and still remains a contentious matter, as highlighted by V.A.L. in the section dedicated to the history of research (pages 85–87). It is increasingly evident that new data can only be obtained through the research of new cemeteries along with archaeometric investigations, especially strontium isotope analysis. Moreover it needs to be underlined again that most comprehensive researched cemetery belonging to this population was published by István Kovács in 1912!

This power structure was brought down at the end of the 4th century by an Asian nomadic structure, i.e. the 'Huns', the issue being addressed by the author in Chapter III.3. The section also deals with the disappearance of the Sântana de Mureş-Cerneahov Culture as well as the so-called post-Cerneahov horizon (pages 105–145). This part further addresses the concepts of nomadism and migration, as well as the notion of 'empire' (quotation marks of the author).

Nomadism is often confused with migration although the two notions only occasionally do overlap while denoting totally different social, political and economic phenomena. First of all, nomadism describes a lifestyle based on movement and it has various classifications in anthropology. Mainly it is used by the degree of sedentarism and economic activity (nomad, semi-nomad, semi-settled) or we can talk about vertical (moving between seasonal camps: mountains and plains)/horizontal (associated with flat areas searching for grazing facilities) patterns, but it is also possible to distinguish between Eurasian horse-breeder nomads, Hunter-gatherers, African Bedouins etc. or Boreal nomads.

The importance of nomadism is the change of space or, in other words, the moving from one place to another, which means that the community visits various territories while taking their property (livestock and tent/camp) over the year. This movement can happen within a smaller or wider area: some nomads wander only between 2-15, others 50-70 and some of them even 100-200 km in each year and the direction and occurrence of such movements can be different.

Unlike this, migration is a social phenomenon in the first instance and cannot be described as economic system. Migration as a sociological phenomenon is as old

as humankind itself,⁴ however the notion was generally adopted as a topic of investigations by historians from representatives of the German classical studies school ('*Völkerwanderung*'). The investigation of the phenomenon was for a long time profoundly influenced by the frame of mind of Romanticism, prompting Stefan Burmeister to assert that '*A striking gap is revealed here between archaeological research and that of the other social sciences*'.⁵ Consequently it can be said that the phenomenon of migration is atemporal as it periodically crops up being fuelled by external factors and the predilection for mobility of human communities. For example, if we speak of nomadic Huns, then we can see that these peoples do not participate in migration in this sense, so they cannot be appointed with the modern term 'migrator', but rather nomads – at least, in some aspects.⁶

The history of nomadic peoples is a quite complex question in the scientific research, but at the same time, it is very fascinating topic as well providing a wide range of possibilities for future studies, mainly in interdisciplinary terms.

First of all, the problem of the nomads' history is that it is hard to find them both in the written sources and archaeological material.⁷ If there are some valuable mentions about these peoples, then we must always consider that the accounts were written by an author from the 'settled' world, as an outsider and mostly considered them as barbarian enemies, however he was also fascinated by their military skills and in some ways, by the lifestyle of nomads. The archaeology can provide us with some useful details as well, but in this case, we cannot ignore the question of ethnicity. Ethnoarchaeology is a very interesting approach, but next to its helpful results, it has its own methodological issues too.

Unfortunately, the ambiguity of ethnic identification based on such archaeological material or DNA can never give us a solution.⁸ Nevertheless, the archaeological descriptions of various sites and finds – especially from earlier ages - connected to nomadic cultures can still shed some light on the history of these peoples and we can see many articles and new projects in the field of migration and nomads' archaeology that consider and examine these methodological issues too.⁹ Just to mention a very simple and obvious one: if nomads did not have fixed territorial units and they migrated from one place to another – even only once a year – , then how it is possible to identify which settlement this site could be?

As regards this question, anthropology and geography may provide us some useful information like the consideration of landscape's features or the path ways of today nomads. But again, this raises methodological issues, since the factors of nomads' migration could be also various and changing over time according to natural phenomena (like the *dzud* in Mongolia), wars and the like and the projection of present circumstances of nomads' life is also

⁴ HAUTZINGER/HEGEDÜS/KLENNER 2014, 5, 18. See also: FRACHETTI 2011, 195–212.

⁵ BURMEISTER 2000, 539.

⁶ On nomadism see for example: KHAZANOV 1994; KRADIN 2016, 1–6.

⁷ KHAZANOV 2013, 17–22.

⁸ As regards Huns, migrations and the ethnic processes by that age see in general: POHL 2015, 247–263.

⁹ HAUSER 2006, 1–26.

not a welcomed comparison.¹⁰

The nomads have always been influential ‘mediators’ between various cultures throughout the history, and as ‘cultural agents’ played an important role not only in trade networks, but in the spread of technical innovations or religion over the centuries. The co-existence of different nomads and settled peoples and their culture can be traced in archaeology too.¹¹ Last, but not least, the nomads’ life is based on the necessity of their livestock. This means that geographical factors have always been important in their life and in past years, more studies started to focus on their environment and its connection to human life.¹² So, next to written sources or archaeology, there are still many possibilities to broaden our knowledge about nomads and their history.

Recently Nicola Di Cosmo mentioned how important it is to grab every information about the history of the nomads of the Eurasian Steppe.¹³ In conclusion, the scarcity of sources in relation to the nomadic peoples – and among them the Eurasian nomads’ – history will be an important research area in the future as well, hopefully with an active interdisciplinary dialogue considering the methodological issues that may arise.

We consider however that by placing the term ‘empire’ in quotation marks with reference to the Hun power structure does belittle the respective structure. Walter Pohl, professor based in Vienna, successfully argued that the nomadic power structures are in fact *steppe-states* with a specific structure differing from that of the settled-down political formations. As Pohl put it, both types of political structures effectively qualify as states as long as they comprise the following elements: power (elites), territory, and population.¹⁴

The vast areas covered by these structures as well as the heterogeneous nature of their population indicates that the Asian type nomadic state was a catalyst for the territories outside the Mediterranean region.

We believe that the conclusions drawn by V.A.L. in this chapter are only partially tenable first of all due to the employed terminology. The concept of ‘the end of the Sântana de Mureş-Cerneahov Culture’ is quite unclear, not having been previously defined. It is clear that the power structure led by Athanarik was brought down by the Asian nomadic state, therefore we are dealing with a case of political disruption (pages 105–145), still the issue is not taken up by the author. Even so, it is also clear that the Asian conquerors did not exterminate the conquered population in this vast region, therefore the catastrophe-approach of the researchers dealing with the late-4th century should be thoroughly revised.¹⁵

A fundamental section of the book is the part comprised at page 146, in which the author sets out to

¹⁰ TAPPER 1991, 48–73.

¹¹ See for example the archaeological finds from Tolebi castle: MORDOVIN/KISS 2012, 537–555.

¹² For example: FRACHETTI *et alii* 2017, 193–198.

¹³ Interview with Nicola Di Cosmo: Climate, Ecology, and Mobility of the Steppe Nomads <http://www.doaks.org/news-events/newsletter/news-archives/climate-ecology-and-mobility-of-the-steppe-nomads>. Last accessed on 10 January 2017.

¹⁴ FINER 1997, 2–3; POHL 2003, 571–596. For the intercontinental networks of the Hun steppe-state see: BROWN 2003, 54.

¹⁵ GÁLL *et alii* 2017.

clarify his take on the very important notions of *native* (‘autochthon’) and *migrator*. The implications of the two concepts are far-reaching, due to the fact that – as noted by the author – they defined both the neo-nationalist and national-communist archaeology as well as the archaeological agenda of the period following the political transformations enacted at the start of the 90s. V.A.L. makes the pertinent point that the potential of the two notions is markedly different from their employment in the Romanian archaeological literature.

Even so, we take issue with the definition put forward whereby the native population comprises the communities which remained in place after the withdrawal of the Roman administration. This argument is fallacious since it is useless to speak of the region in terms of ‘province’ after the Roman withdrawal. Furthermore, it is very improbable that the collapse of the political, military and economic structures was met with immobility, a fact asserted by the author himself. In our view, the series of events started in the wake of the abandonment of the province between 251 and 271 is determined by the large migration wave that took place in the 3rd–4th century. In light of this, the abovementioned dichotomy is unfeasible in the respective geographic context. In spite of this (in our view) incorrect concept, the author successfully demonstrates throughout the next pages that the material assemblages identified by István Bóna as reflecting the material culture of Central-Moldavian ‘Carps’ or ‘Goths’¹⁶ and linked by the majority of Romanian archaeologists with Romanized population groups,¹⁷ belongs in fact to the Dobrodzien-Guttentager population based in today’s southern Poland, as does the material of complex G27 from Ernei which was published a few years back by the author himself (pages 150–159). This issue is well completed by a distribution map (Fig. 97) which conveys a clear picture of the migration process described by the author.

Given the fact that the analysis comprised in the book is centred on Transylvania, the title and the subject of the last chapter constitutes an exception. In our view the territory designated as ‘North-western Romania’ (160–165) should rather be investigated together with the neighbouring regions of the Great Plain, otherwise a comprehensive picture might not be possible to achieve, given that we are dealing with parts of a population living in the same geographical and hydrographical realities.

Attila’s death in 453 AD resulted in a war of succession¹⁸ which brought down the Asian nomadic pyramidal structure effectively ending the Hun Empire and its catalyst role over two continents. The book by the young researcher is based on a comprehensive overview of international literature. Two annexes illustrate the numismatic finds of the period (*Anexa 1* [225–251]) as well as the distribution of the brooches with semicircular head-plates, typical for this time (*Anexa 2* [251–256]). As a conclusion, we can say that the book puts forward an innovative perspective on the subject rooted in international scholarship and based on a comprehensive approach and methodology. This in our view is essential, given that archaeology can only be local in terms

¹⁶ BÓNA 1988, 113.

¹⁷ On problem of Romanization, as 19th century concept, see: SANTA 2017.

¹⁸ Starting from the 19th century it was perceived as a war of liberation. The critique of this modern preconceived notion was carried out by Tibor Schaffer (SCHÄFFER 2001, 27–30).

of the documentation, with regard to its theoretical analysis it always needs to have a universal outlook and character.

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