

Archaeology and Society at the Beginning of the 21st Century

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The beginning of archaeology in the 18th century is related to the rediscovery and systematic study of the classical Greco-Roman culture. In the particular field of prehistory and protohistory, archaeology reached the status of an autonomous discipline not earlier than the second half of the 19th century, coinciding with the birth of modern European nations and the growth of an interest in their origins. In order to identify the „ancestors“ and to reconstitute their ancient history it was necessary to appeal to prehistoric and protohistoric archaeology. The noble origin and all the other qualities of these ancestors had to be convincingly emphasised by archaeological findings. In various European countries, archaeology was contaminated by this disease at different times: in France during the reign of Napoleon III, in neighbouring Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm I, in Romania in the early 20th century. Vasile Pârvan (1882-1927) was by no means a nationalist. However in his major work, *Getica. O protoistorie a Daciei* (1926), we encounter occasionally an idealised description

of the ancestors – Getae and Dacians. At the same time, „dacism“ - a theory which reduces the origin of the Romanian people to the Daco-Getic element exclusively, was spreading among the dilettantes. Surprisingly, this theory was promoted under the national-communistic regime of Nicolae Ceauşescu, and was reborn more recently once again in the transitional period we are currently going through. Unfortunately, the political power and the society as a whole are still sending out signals which show that nationalism has survived and that it continues to rely on history and archaeology for its survival. In Western Europe historical arguments are also used in current political debates. Recently these debates are not related to national traditions but to European traditions and integration issues. The titles of such archaeological exhibitions as „*I Celti, prima Europa*“ (Venice 1991) or „*Die Franken – Wegbereiter Europas*“ (Mannheim, Berlin, Paris 1996-97) reflect a political abuse of archaeology, which is unacceptable even if „politically correct“.