

Toward a social archaeological approach of Transylvanian prehistory

(Habilitation Thesis Abstract)

The aim of present thesis is to advocate the necessity of socio-archaeological approach in the future study of Transylvanian prehistory. The proposed thesis contains 185 pages and it is structured in 13 chapters and bibliographic references: an introduction, 11 chapters and a short concluding text.

The *Introduction* is followed by a second chapter called *Carrier Plan, Achievements and Development perspectives*. In this part of the habilitation thesis I frame my scholarly achievement and present some of my main findings resulted from my research activity between 2005 and 2014, after I finished my PhD. I have to point out the majority of scientific results and the future research plan included in the chapter is centered on the topic of social archaeology.

In the third chapter of the thesis called *Processualism and Post-processualism: the Theoretical Framework of Prehistorical Archaeology* I debate two major theoretical frameworks of prehistorical archaeology. The two fundamental archaeological directions of the last century (New Archaeology/processualism and post-processualism) managed to adapt and merge the theoretical framework borrowed from social sciences and the exploratory methods employed in natural sciences, according to the needs of archaeology. The necessity of the theoretical grounding of the archaeological researches nowadays is a necessity. The theoretical framework of our thinking determines the boundaries of our knowledge.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the complex problematic of social-archaeology. In my opinion, the key of understanding the problematic of prehistoric society is represented by the proper knowledge of the archaeological theory, the social models and material culture. All together help a better understanding and reconstruction of socio-economic realities in different epochs.

The fifth chapter is a debate of the notion of archaeological culture, a useful tool of historical research. I focus on the issue, how the commonly used term culture since its conception has constantly evolved and transformed. Thinkers from different periods have employed the concept for the better understanding of their own domains, continually altering its meaning in the process. The archaeological usage of culture stretches back to emergence of the domain in the 19th century. Colin Renfrew identified a different set of subsystems which make up culture: society,

subsistence, faith and thought, trade and technology. He also pointed out the fact that the outlined territorial units of cultures are mostly arbitrary. In today's modern archaeological sense, the concept of culture incorporates the word's anthropological meaning as well.

The sixth chapter is dedicated to the study of two main social structures of the prehistoric society: tribes and chiefdoms. In the last few decades thorough important reviews were published on the emergence of chiefdom and middle range society concepts and their interpretations. A social structure can be defined as a system, which relies on a social contract of norms and concepts that give aim and direction to its creator. The toolbar for the study of prehistoric society equally contains the social theoretic models of archaeology and modern comparative anthropology.

The seventh chapter entitled *the analysis of settlement systems and settlements as research problem* deal with the complex problematic of the habitat-systems. The interpretation of major social and structural changes that occurred in different phases of Prehistory is a serious scientific challenge. Social archaeological research, both from the point of view of questioning and interpretation should go beyond the answers received from descriptive and sorting investigation-type methods applied for settlements and objects. Special attention must be paid to the time-varying, changing relationships of human communities and their environment, and to the way settlements fit into the region's settlement network, how large are the central settlements' agglomerations, what kind of dependencies developed on the level of settlements as well as on the level of larger territorial units.

The eighth chapter analysis the core-periphery theory one of the most popular socio-economic models used in the archaeological research. Irrespective of one being enthusiastic fan or fierce critic of the "world system theory" one must admit it is an extremely intriguing model. We are convinced that using the possibilities for interpreting offered by the "core-periphery" model would benefit Romanian archaeology.

The ninth chapter divided in four subchapters (IX.1-4) are dedicated to the analysis of tells regarded as primer settlements, centers of micro-regional settlement networks. The theoretical and methodological assertions are exemplified through field analysis focused on a tell settlements from northwestern Romania, the Carei-Bobald site. In the case study I analyzed the material culture as well.

The chapter ends with a case study regarding the habitat models and social-system in Middle Bronze Age Central–North-western Transylvania, my field of expertise. The majority of the developed Bronze Age social models are dominated by a top-down approach and involves an extrapolation from the strict archaeological record accepting a series of related anthropological concepts. In our point of view a top-down approaches model not necessary mean a political and economic heavily centralized society. In the research of the Transylvanian Bronze Age the hierarchical organization of the society and extend of socio-economic control is a still open questions. The used socio-archaeological models are based on the theoretical background of the *peer polity interaction* theory. The *peer polity interaction* concept includes an area's overall economic and social relations system of the independent, politically equivalent territorial units (including imitation and competition, the exchange of goods and information, or war). Structural changes and uniformity process of the socio-political units within the region are the result of long-term interactivity. In an ecological sense, some of the common features could have evolved independently in the adaptation process of the region. The study of the settlements and the settlement network of interacting polities is a window on the historical development of social complexity and hierarchy. We must focus to the internal logic of these groups for an understanding of their settlement, or their construction of social space. The research requires a study with interdisciplinary character. In our approach to investigate the social transformations and the dynamics of the settlements besides the results of the archaeological excavations and surveys we used information's regarding the landscape and paleo-environment of the study area (satellite images, aerial photographs and geophysical measurements) stored in a GIS database. Based on this information we can and need to differentiate settlement categories (regional centres, local centres, settlements, and households) which help us modelling of territories and to reconstruct the political landscape; to define and delimit the territory of fortifications and possible routes of communication; to provide data on the perception of prehistoric space and to reconstruct the possible role of fortifications using *cost surface* and *visibility analyses*. Thus the undertaken analysis could provide a starting-point to frame the evolution of the different tribal societies or chiefdoms from Transylvania perhaps for a careful analysis of their social-political system.