

THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH IN CARANSEBES AND THE OBSERVANCE OF THE “HISTORICAL TRUTH” IN THE DOCUMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE SECURITY¹

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Abstract

The research hereafter intends to establish how complex the Department of State Security (also known as *Securitatea* (DSS)) was involved with the archaeological research in Romania during the eighties; this topic has been rather absent within recent historiographic studies. Having made this statement, it should be considered that some approaches have tackled the interferences of the official ideology in the interpretation of the archaeological data.

The orthodoxy of some archaeologists can be justified by the continuous pressure from the DSS, or because of their status as collaborators of this institution of repression. The archaeological research from Caransebeș provides a relevant tool for understanding the mechanisms used by DSS to intervene in the middle of scientific debates, as a neutral judge; on the other hand, a series of documents from *Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* (ACNSAS) reveals further details that had been somewhat predicted by those archaeologists living within the respective period. The outcome of our research nevertheless overcomes all predictions the contemporary historians.

The actual controversy regarding chronological and confessional ascriptions of Caransebeș disclosures was brutally altered by DSS, following its empirical principles of so-called historical truth. Those archaeologists refusing to obey and follow the principles established by DSS and of the official ideological framework had to face certain repercussions, from interdiction to proceed further archaeological prospecting to secret police surveillance, refusals to travel abroad, and close censorship for every study intended to be published in international magazines and other publications.

Keywords: archaeology, Orthodox Church, Caransebeș, Department of State Security

Introduction

The interference of DSS in archaeological research during the communist period is unexpectedly neglected by the present-day historiography in Romania.

¹ This paper is based on early published Romanian version: Marian Cosac, ”De la cercetarea arheologică la interpretare istorică – biserica medievală din Caransebeș și respectarea „adevărului istoric” în documentele fostei Securități”, *ARHEOVEST. Interdisciplinaritate în Arheologie și Istorie*, X₂ (2022): 537-561.

Instead, the scrutiny has been focused on the ideological interposition applied to the interpretation of archaeological data² and on repercussions suffered by archaeologists during the initial stages of the communist instalment in Romania³. As an example, the known archaeologists Ion Nestor (1905-1974), Vladimir Dumitrescu (1902-1991), C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor (1900-1968), Grigore Florescu (1892-1960) and Radu Vulpe (1899-1982) were among the ones directly affected by the purging of the superior education and museum institutions in Romania. The new regime established purging committees within the Direction of Superior Education of the Ministry of Education⁴. For example, the Purging Committee established in 1945 at the „CuzaVodă” University of Iași decided to remove 30 faculty members from the institution, including archaeologist Radu Vulpe⁵. At the „Ferdinand I,” University of Cluj, the committee took full advantage of the rivalries between faculty members as some of them did not hesitate to nominate colleagues as suitable for purging⁶. The accusations formulated against them did not refer to the results of their research, to the ideological or non-ideological interpretation of archaeological data according to the vision of the Soviet regime, but referred to their involvement in the social and political life of the interwar period. The collaboration of some – such as Vladimir Dumitrescu or Radu Vulpe, with the Legionnaire Movement or with Antonescu’s regime was regarded as a capital sin, as well.

There were exceptions, nonetheless, such as Constantin Daicoviciu (1898-1973), who was extremely active both scientifically and socially during the interwar period but fully adhered to the new regime, maintaining the status of a dignitary for the rest of his life, a position which later allowed him to intervene and protect archaeologists such as C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor or MartonRoska when facing various political accusations⁷.

² Mircea Anghelinu, *Evoluția gândirii teoretice în arheologia românească. Concepte și modele aplicate în preistorie*, (Cetea de Scaun: Târgoviște, 2004); Radu-Alexandru Dragoman, Sorin Oanță-Marghitu, *Arheologie și politică în România* (Eurothip: Baia Mare, 2013); Florin Curta, „Marxism în opera Mariei Comșa”, *Arheologia Moldovei*, XLIII (2020): 285-296.

³ Ioan Opreș, *Istoricii și Securitatea* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004); Ioan Opreș, *Istoricii și Securitatea*, vol. II, (Editura Enciclopedică: București, 2006); Mădălin-Cornel Văleanu, „Urmărirea de către Securitate a arheologului Neculai Zaharia”, *Archiva Moldaviae IX* (2017): 339-372.

⁴ Liviu Pleșa, *Istoriografia clujeană sub supravegherea Securității 1945-1965*, (Cetea de Scaun: Târgoviște, 2017): 52.

⁵ Dănuț Doboș, „Dosarul epurărilor de la Universitatea „Cuza Vodă” din Iași: cazul Radu Vulpe (1945)”, *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie* (SCIVA), tom 45, nr. 4 (1994): 357.

⁶ Pleșa, *Istoriografia clujeană sub supravegherea Securității...*, 51

⁷ Opreș, *Istoricii și Securitatea...*, 229-288; Ioan Opreș, „Constantin Daicoviciu – omul datoriei”, *Acta Musei Napocensis*, 41-44-II (2004-2007): 212



This actual exile from the academic and scientific life to which some archaeologists were subjected began to fade after 1955 when Mihail Roller (1908-1958) was removed from his position as controller of the historical research in Communist Romania and various other well-established archaeologists from the interwar period were re-evaluated by the new regime and appointed in the Romanian Academy. It was the case with Constantin Daicoviciu, for example, who became a full member of the Academy, or Ion Nestor, who became a corresponding member⁸. In this context, the role of archaeological research gained a new purpose for the regime, namely that of providing scientific arguments to demonstrate the millennial continuity of the autochthonous populations and to mitigate the role of the allogenic populations or migrators in the formation of the Romanian people.

During the initial phases of the regime, research related to the Slavs had become the primary focus of archaeological research in Romania, but later, after 1955 especially, their importance was minimized. Archaeologists whose research focused on allogenic populations were closely monitored by the Securitate, such as Ion Nestor, but also archaeologists who benefited from Humboldt scholarships in West Germany⁹. The Securitate was interested in why such archaeologists from the „Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest had gone to West Germany to study the „formation of the Romanian people” and later demonstrated preoccupations with the study of various Germanic tribes¹⁰.

The 1970s were generally characterized by a large process of ideological imposition of historical research. The Communist Party Program, adopted by the 11th Congress of 1974, institutionalized the ideological backlash towards nationalism in a sense directly related to various approaches from interwar historical research. As Florin Constantiniu noticed, there was a mixture between the Soviet model of socialism and the principles of Romania’s policy of independence in the Communist bloc¹¹. This reorientation affected the museums’ activity directly since these institutions were required to consider the presentation and popularization of „the great conquests” of the Romanian people in their exhibitions. Also, archaeological research was once again called upon to focus almost exclusively on demonstrating the continuity and persistence of the autochthonous population over centuries.¹² During this period, archaeologists

⁸ Opreș, *Istoricii și Securitatea...*, 27.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 21-149.

¹⁰ *Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (ACNSAS), Referitor la Învățământul Superior, Institutul de Arheologie*, Dosar nr. 10948, Vol. 13, f. 19.

¹¹ Florin Constantiniu, *De la Răutu și Roller la Mușat și Ardeleanu* (Editura Enciclopedică: București, 2007): 339.

¹² Marian Cosac, „Obiective ale supravegherii Securității în cercetarea arheologică din România comunistă în anii ‚80 ai secolului trecut”, *Oltenia. Studii și comunicări, Arheologie – Istorie*, vol. XXIX (2022): 310-323

specialized in research related to the Slavic populations were marginalized and carefully monitored. A relevant example is Maria Comșa (1928-2002) who, after a study trip to Bulgaria at the end of 1988¹³, was accused by an informant of the *Securitate* of having „convincingly defended the Slavic orientation of our historiography” in the past¹⁴. Such accusations and the surveillance to which archaeologists were subjected help explain the professional environment within the „Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology and the disreputability and isolation that dominated the later part of her life¹⁵.

The reluctance manifested by Romanian archaeologists in working with archaeologists from Western countries has a plausible explanation when considering the surveillance to which their work was subjected. For example, archaeologist Florea Mogoșanu (1929-1986), who specialized in Palaeolithic archaeology, used to constantly refuse to travel abroad and was probed by the *Securitate* repeatedly in 1971, 1976, 1978, and 1983. When he was in high school, Mogoșanu was a member of a Legionnaire organization exactly when the Communist regime was assuming power¹⁶.

Some archaeologists chose to accept collaboration with the DSS and benefited substantially both scientifically and materially. A relevant example in this sense is that the main source of the information obtained by the political police regarding the activity of archaeologist Ion Nestor was a certain *Ion Drăgan*. His informative notes are loaded with details that reveal Nestor’s reluctance to publish the results of his archaeological research at the Slavic necropolis of Sărata Monteoru, but also percolate in his private life as well. As Ioan Opriș noted, *Ion Drăgan* was a very hubristic person who received numerous official duties and responsibilities, but a professional nonetheless¹⁷. His dossier of collaboration contained notes referring to most of the archaeologists active during this period¹⁸. Among others, he also paid special attention to C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, the founder of the Romanian school of Palaeolithic research, and accused him of dilettantism and incorrect management of the Palaeolithic archaeological material.

DSS and archaeological research

The entire archaeological research activity in Communist Romania was under direct supervision and coordination of the Council for Culture and

¹³ ACNSAS, *Referitor la Învățământul Superior, Institutul de Arheologie*, Dosar nr. 10948, vol. 13, f. 166-168

¹⁴ ACNSAS, vol. 13, f. 171.

¹⁵ Curta, „Marxism în opera Mariei Comșa”..., 292.

¹⁶ Marian Cosac, „Un aspect puțin cunoscut din viața arheologului Florea Mogoșanu”, *Permanențele istoriei Profesorul Corneliu Mihai Lungu la 70 de ani*, (Cetatea de Scaun: Târgoviște, 2013): 655.

¹⁷ Opriș, *Istoricii și Securitatea...*, 34.

¹⁸ ACNSAS, *Fond Rețea, Berciu Dumitru*, Dosar nr. 297820, vol. 1, 2.



Socialist Education (*Consiliul Culturii și Educației Socialiste*), established in 1971; commencing 1977, this institution got supplementary responsibilities, such as the coordination of the entire cultural and educational enterprises that were organized in the Socialist Republic of Romania¹⁹.

Beyond this oversight, further surveillance actions were performed by intelligence officers belonging to regional DSS structures²⁰, and by unofficial intelligence networks that had been active within history museums; this situation became known now due to disclosing documents of the ACNSAS, and other reports regarding surveyance of patrimony and museums sectors²¹.

These documents confirm previous assumptions that had been made by archaeologists of the respective period, which is the effective interference of the DSS structures in the formation of archaeological research teams, particularly when the respective research dealt with a demonstration of Romanian people's continuity and exclusion from the teams of those archaeologists who refused to obey the principles of *historic truth* in conformity with the ideological line.

Unfortunately, most of the informative reports regarding those dissident archaeologists were operated by other archaeologists who had been recruited by *Securitate*. Therefore, DSS became an adjudicator of initially scientific debates which gradually would be brought to basic ideological issues. The case of Florin Medeleț, a well-known Banat-born archaeologist whose story has recently been studied²² provides a relevant example of how deep and complex the *Securitate* officers could perturb the specific archaeological activity.

The case of the medieval church from Caransebeș²³

A relevant example, to emphasize the intervention of the DSS in archaeological research, is represented by a discovery made at the beginning of 1988, on 30th December Street, in Caransebeș, in the nearby of the Roman Catholic church, during the excavations established the systematization plan of the city when they noticed the presence of a foundation belonging to a place of worship. The discovery would come to the attention of the DSS of Caraș Severin County, due to its important contribution to demonstrating the continuity of Romanians in this

¹⁹ Ilie Constantin, *Regimul comunist și muzeele de istorie din România*, (Editura Dobrogea: Constanța, 2013).

²⁰ Marian Cosac, „O radiografie asupra prezenței Securității în muzeele de istorie din România anilor ,80 ai secolului trecut”, *Musaios*, XXIV (2021): 173-193.

²¹ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar, Referitor la Muzeu, Corespondență județe*, Dosar nr. 13367, Vol. 6, f. 399.

²² Marian Cosac, „Despre arheologi și orientarea în cercetarea arheologică în cadrul Muzeului Banatului în anii 70 - 80 ai secolului trecut”, *Arheovest*, VXi2 (2021): 829-846.

²³ The document was published in the following paper: Cosac, „De la cercetarea arheologică la interpretare istorică..., 537-561.

place, but also as a result of the involvement of an extensive team of archaeologists, from various institutions in the country.

In 1988, the DSS had an active information network in the network of museums in Caraș Severin County, *"composed of three sources of information, respectively one source in Reșita, one informant in Caransebeș, and one collaborator in Anina"*²⁴. The situation of the network was known to us on the 30th of December 1987, as a result of the transmission of an address from the Caraș-Severin County Inspectorate, to the First Department - Bucharest. The informant *Petreanu* offered information regarding *"the preservation and storage of material values from the Reșita museum, as well as the improper way in which the new headquarters of the county museum was built"*²⁵.

At the beginning of 1988, two sources, *Mirela*²⁶ and *Viorel*²⁷, drew attention to an unprecedented archaeological discovery *"from the historical area of the city of Caransebeș - vestiges from the 13th-14th centuries, the testimony of the town's urban beginnings"*.²⁸ As a result, Tamara Dobrin, in her authority as vice-president of the Socialist Culture and Education Council, addressed, on 2nd of March 1988, the People's Council of Caraș-Severin County to ensure *"the conditions for carrying out the integral and complex archaeological research of the vestiges in the mentioned area until 1st of May 1988, by a specialized team, formed by Ph.D. Petru Bona (lead researcher), the director of the local museum, Petru Rogozea - from the local museum, Dumitru Țeicu - the Reșita County Museum of History, and teacher Zeno Pinter from The Pioneer's House from Oțelul Roșu with the participation of Ph.D. Radu Popa from the Institute of Archaeology Bucharest, depending on the needs: the provision of labor, equipment, security, as well as the delimitation of the perimeter of the archaeological site, is considered"*²⁹. Shortly after, on the 26th of March 1988, the informant *Traian Bocșanu* sent a Note, to *Irina's* house, regarding the controversies caused by the archaeological discoveries: *"Following the excavations carried out in Caransebeș, 30th of December street, for the realization of the systematization plan of the city, across the Romanian-Catholic church, the walls of a place of worship (church) were discovered, which is otherwise known to all the people in the locality. I don't know exactly what the truth is, but from what I've heard it seems that the discovered walls belong to an Orthodox place of worship, dating back to the 13th century or maybe even earlier. In my opinion, if it were so, it would be good for us and the Romanians. For this purpose,*

²⁴ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 299.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 300.

²⁷ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 301.

²⁸ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 302.

²⁹ Ibidem.



specialists were also consulted, Radu Popa - an archaeologist, from Bucharest, to give his opinion, who apparently, being of the Greek-Catholic denomination (formerly uniate) tilted the scale towards the Roman Catholic, saying that the discovered church wasn't Orthodox, although, according to the specifics, it was found that the altar is oriented towards the East"³⁰. And the informant Irina offers, in her Note³¹, dated from 29th of March 1988, similar information: "A lot of people wonder about this church, since when it has been and to which cult - religious denomination it belongs. The problem received more special emphasis because the Roman Catholic priest affirms that she belonged to his denomination, and the reformed priest, who claims to be a historian, puts the embers on his pie, especially since he is also Hungarian. Archaeologist Radu Popa was also there and at first, he expressed that it was an Orthodox church, then he changed his position, saying that it was Franciscan. Liviu Groza, who is a historian-colonel, is doing assiduous research to prove that it is a Romanian church"³².

On this topic, the information note of the informant Dana-Maria is more detailed, given on the 6th of July 1988. It stated that: "Dr RADU POPA, who is a specialist in early feudalism from the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest (a basic researcher, well-rated in Romania in this field), was sent to dig." He showed that it is a Romanesque (cathedral) building, around the mid of 14th century, being an architectural monument, unique in Banat. He supported this based on the archaeological inventory (ornaments), the remaining architecture, and the documents that exist about Caransebeș. This theory contradicts those supported by P. BONA, who said that it is a construction of the Orthodox rite. Due to the dissensions created between P. BONA and R. POPA, the latter did not dig anymore"³³.

As a result, the Caraș-Severin County Inspectorate addressed, on 18th of June 1988, the State Security Department, with a report "comprising the conclusions drawn from an analysis carried out in the case of the archaeological discovery in the historical area of Caransebeș"³⁴. It is stated that the researcher Radu Popa, "at the first intervention made ... immediately after his arrival, emphasized the historical importance of the discovery, mentioning at the same time that the foundations of the medieval construction belong to an Orthodox church. After he consulted with ZENO PINTER (a history teacher at the Casa Pionierilor in Oțelu Roșu), he returned to the previously given decision, mentioning that the remains belong to the Catholic rite, being a Franciscan church"³⁵, and "From the study and verifications undertaken in this case,

³⁰ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 303.

³¹ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 304.

³² Ibidem.

³³ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 305.

³⁴ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 306.

³⁵ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 307.

*it emerges that there are some people who polarize ideas from which the thesis can be derived that this archaeological discovery is of the Catholic rite and in no case of the Orthodox rite. Exemplary in this sense: teacher ROGOZEA PETRU - museographer at the Caransebeș Museum; teacher ZENO PINTER from the House of Pioneers from Oțelu Roșu, Catholic priest LOWASZ REINHOLD from Caransebeș, Reformed priest HALASZ ALEXANDRU*³⁶.

Source Potoceanu informed, on 22nd of June 1988, that "(Romanian) intellectuals from the city of Caransebeș are interested in the archaeological discovery, with excavations, in the space in front of the Catholic church. On their side, the Orthodox Romanians claim that the monument is a Romanian church, and a few Germans and Hungarians, guided by their priests, claim that it was made by Catholics or Hungarians. The dispute is quite serious. It is about the continuity of the Romanians in these lands or their denial"³⁷.

The First Department, within the Caraș Severin County Inspectorate, drew attention to the fact that "teacher RADU POPA from Bucharest had an inappropriate position ... in discussions concerning the origin of some historical monuments in Transylvania ... on the occasion of some history symposia. Regarding the archaeological discoveries in Caransebeș, Ph.D. RADU POPA made a written summary, specifying his position, which he personally presented to the vice-president of culture [Tamara Dorin, vice-president of the Council of Culture and Socialist Education]. Immediately after that, he verbally informed the same person of his position regarding the monument in Caransebeș, namely the fact that it is of Franciscan origin"³⁸. The mentioned note is accompanied by an archaeological excavation report on the Caransebeș research, prepared by the excavation coordinator, Petru Bona³⁹. He concludes that it is "a Romanian church - at the current stage of research"⁴⁰, and "the Caransebeș Church is one of the oldest examples of a Romanian wall church built in the urban environment, contemporary or perhaps even older than the princely foundations from Moldova and Wallachia".⁴¹

Two other informative notes⁴², provided by informants Vinătoru and Viorel, dated the 30th of June and 12th of July 1988, address the situation of the interpretation of the archaeological data from Caransebeș. Vinătoru states that "although the discovery is on Romanian soil, there are so-called specialists who have

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 309.

³⁸ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 310.

³⁹ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 311-313.

⁴⁰ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 312.

⁴¹ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 313.

⁴² ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 314.



a certification and are Romanian and say about her that it could be “Franciscan”, as that teacher Radu Popa from the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest, who has been to Caransebeș twice, here constantly claimed that it is Orthodox-Romanian and finally made information to Bucharest that he is not sure that it is Romanian, but may be Franciscan. Why would this Radu Popa have changed his mind? Wasn’t he tempted by the Catholics? Maybe yes, but in addition, he comes from a Greek-Catholic father and a Jewish mother... More recently, he would have given a presentation in front of students from the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest that the discovery from Caransebeș was Franciscan and not Romanian and that Ph.D. Răzvan Teodorescu would have the same opinion”⁴³.

The informant Viorel reports a discussion with an active participant in the archaeological research, Liviu Groza, who states that “the Romanians are not united enough in the research carried out, and the statements advanced are downright unpatriotic. Among others, he complains about the archaeologist Radu Popa that he once again stated, in a wider circle, that this church would be Franciscan (Roman Catholic) and that what is serious - he makes these statements being paid by interested foreigners to cultivate Austro-Hungarian chauvinism in our homeland”⁴⁴. The colonel Mihalcea Alexandru noted, at the end of the text, that Radu Popa “acted against the interest of proving the continuity of the Romanian people”⁴⁵.

A series of informative notes sent by the informant Almajan gives us a more complete picture of the concerns of the DSS officers, from Caraș Severin County, in the field of archaeological research. In his first note, dated 19th of October 1988, he states: “Regarding teacher PINTER ZENO, I inform you that I have known him for several years and he has friendly relations with the archaeologist RADU POPA from Bucharest and with ROGOZEA PETRU - museographer at the museum from Caransebeș. He supports the hypothesis issued by ROGOZEA PETRU regarding the antiquity of the monument from Caransebeș for subjective reasons, being influenced by ROGOZEA PETRU. And PINTER was included in the research team by RADU POPA, he participated in the excavations, discovering 2 graves crossed and embedded in the walls of the monument, and when RADU POPA arrived, he no longer recognized that the skeletons were in the walls and RADU POPA after made clear that they were built (they were already prepared for conservation) he tore them all and stated that he had never seen anything like this before and that parts of the tombs were built by the builders of the monument. This fact upset the director of the museum, who took a stand and claimed that these are old graves, even older than the monument, and represent elements of continuity, which RADU POPA and PINTER tried to destroy as

⁴³ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 315.

⁴⁴ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 317.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

evidence of the continuity of the Romanian element in the area... RADU POPA aims to find Franciscan churches, under the guise of studying Romanian churches"⁴⁶. About the archaeologist, Rogozea Petru, a member of the archaeological research team, claims that "From the beginning, he hypothesized that it is a Catholic church and that it dates back to the century. XVII [we consider that it is a mistake in the drafting of the text, it is about the XIV century], being highlighted inside the Caransebeș citadel. Along the way, after consulting with the archaeologist RADU POPA, he insisted on this hypothesis and continues to support it. Moreover, he states in certain circumstances that he will prove that he is right, and ... he says that we, the Hungarians, created the entire Romanian bibliography and history ... The irredentist manifestations appeared against the background of his conceptions regarding the superiority of Hungarian civilization and the multitude of Hungarian historical publications regarding the history of the Romanian people and the tendencies to falsify Romanian history"⁴⁷. The head of the First Service, Major Vasiluța Porfir, notes at the end: "The source was instructed to counter the actions of ROGOZEA PETRU and PINTER ZENO in order to prevent the creation of false assumptions about the antiquity of the monument in Caransebeș"⁴⁸, and the Head of Security Caraș Severin, Colonel Mihalcea Aurel, notes: "director BONA was contacted and put in touch with the director of the State Archives in order to act organized, to collect documents and to be able to combat the false assumptions that the irredentist elements are trying to issue. Working as proposed does not mean not initiating offensive and operative measures to silence those who try to misdirect archaeological research against our national interests. For this purpose, the procurement of documents was undertaken, as you know, on the service line. And a trip abroad, etc."⁴⁹

At the end of the trip, on the 28th of November 1988, Almajan submitted an informative Note⁵⁰ regarding his activity and the results obtained. "The purpose of the trip was to find and elucidate some problems that arose during the excavations carried out at the church in the center of Caransebeș. Apart from the bibliographic list proposed (together with Colonel L. Groza) to consult, I found numerous other specialized books on specifically medieval church architecture from the West, based on which I sought to find some analogies. Regarding the plan of the church in Caransebeș, I can say with certainty that no monument I have seen dating from the 12th - 15th centuries has similar elements, neither in Austria nor in other countries (I consulted numerous church albums and I did not find anything identical to the discovery from Caransebeș. It

⁴⁶ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 319.

⁴⁷ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 320.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 321-322.



is certain that until the XV century (there is a bibliography in this sense) all the churches, regardless of whether they were Catholic or Orthodox, had the same construction plan... In conclusion, I state that this trip helped me a lot in clarifying some problems of medieval European architecture and strengthened my conviction that I had from the beginning — based on the study of the historical realities of the city of Caransebeș - that the church is from the 13th century and that it belonged to a Romanian Orthodox community in the city of Caransebeș”⁵¹. At the end, the Head of the First Service, Major Vasiliuță Porfir, noted at the end: “previously I have obtained verified information that the archaeologist RADU POPA from Bucharest, the museographer ROGOZEA PETRU from Caransebeș, worked in the verification map, the history teacher PINTER ZENO from Oțelu Roșu, worked in DUI and the Roman Catholic priest from Caransebeș, who worked in DUI, support by all means a false hypothesis regarding the church discovered in Caransebeș - that it is Franciscan and not Romanian Orthodox, at the level of the leadership of the Caraș-Severin County Inspectorate of M.I. action was taken to send the source to Vienna to study and bring to the country, with the support of the Romanian embassy, the materials and evidence necessary to counter the false hypothesis. In addition to the materials that constituted the purpose of the visit, the source also brought xeroxed historical documents from the 15th-18th centuries regarding the Banat, unresearched until now”.⁵²

The address of the Caraș Severin County Inspectorate, dated 12th of December 1988, to Directorate I - Bucharest, Service 5, informs us: “On the occasion of carrying out some demolition works in order to build the civic center, in January 1988, a historical monument was discovered, which, in following research, it is concluded to be a Romanian Orthodox church from the 12th-13th centuries - eloquent proof of the continuity of the Romanian people in these lands. Since the beginning of the excavation and restoration works, we have obtained information that people with a hostile attitude such as the archaeologist RADU POPA from Bucharest, the museographer ROGOZEA PETRU from the County Museum in Caransebeș, who worked on the verification map [the stage before the opening an Informative Follow-up File and refers to the archiving of documents resulting from the surveillance action], PINTER ZENO from Oțelu Roșu, worked in DUI and the Roman Catholic priest from Caransebeș, also worked in DUI [Informative Follow-up File], all reported with Hungarian nationalist-irredentist manifestations, they launched and continue to support the false hypothesis that the church is Franciscan from the 14th-15th century. Considering the danger of this action, our bodies took control of the case for countermeasures and neutralization. Within the complex of measures, the people involved in the case and flagged for nationalist-irredentist manifestations were placed under surveillance, new

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 322.

sources with real information possibilities were recruited, and to obtain new data and evidence in support of the hypothesis issued by the museum management from Caransebeș, it was decided to send a competent person, with thorough knowledge of the subject, abroad. In this sense, the action was taken to be supported by the Embassy of the RSR from Austria, at the level of which steps were taken by the leadership of the county DSS so that during the trip to this country the source "Almăjan Ion" would be helped to achieve the proposed goal. Thus, it was possible for "Almăjan Ion" to xerox historical documents from the 15th to 18th centuries at the National Library of Vienna and the War Archives, which prove that the church in Caransebeș is not Franciscan, bringing to the country other unique documents of a special historical value, useful for studies and documentation on the origin and continuity of the Romanian people. We will continue the measures of knowledge and neutralization of nationalist-irredentist actions, to promote national interests"⁵³.

On 23rd of September 1989, the Caraș Severin County Inspectorate informed, on the "Art-culture" line, Directorate I - Bucharest, Service V, on the measures "to neutralize and counteract the irredentist actions of some elements in the sphere of competence that sought to distort the historical truth regarding the result of the archaeological research in the city of Caransebeș and thereby contesting the presence and continuity of the majority Romanian population in 12th-13th centuries in this area of the country. At the beginning of 1988, during the excavation works for the foundation of some blocks of flats in the center of Caransebeș, the county museum in the locality noticed traces of an old cult settlement, a fact that required careful archaeological research by specialists. In the course of the "Tibiscum" action, certain information was obtained regarding the intention of some elements - RADU POPA - archaeologist from Bucharest, ROGOZEA PETRU - museographer from Caransebeș, LOVASZ REINHOLD - a Catholic priest from Caransebeș and PINTER ZENO - history teacher from Otelu Roșu - from destroying a part of the archaeological evidence and launching false hypotheses about the age and origin of the discovered historical monument. In order to protect and support the interests of our state, the archaeologists RADU POPA, ROGOZEA PETRU, and PINTER ZENO were removed from the archaeological research by the competent bodies, all flagged for nationalist-irredentist manifestations. In order to limit the speculations that the monument was a Franciscan church, access to the perimeter of the archaeological site of the Roman Catholic priest LOVASZ REINHOLD, who had become a true "guide" in support of the above-mentioned hypothesis, was forbidden by the museum management... The result of the archaeological research in the first stage was completed with the recently published work: "Valorization of new research in the field of national history". In order to influence and

⁵³ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 323.



sensitize public opinion, several copies of the work, with rigorous approvals, through combinative measures, were taken by sources or relations operatives in Canada, R.P.G., Switzerland, and Austria, to write articles aimed at supporting the hypotheses and conclusions issued by the specialists of the Caransebeș county museum. The information obtained about the archaeologist RADU POPA was forwarded to Directorate I and S.M.B., and our prosecution office has taken actions, through D.U.I., against Roman Catholic priest LOVASZ REINHOLD and the teacher PINTER ZENO, and the museographer ROGOZEA PETRU during the informative verification”⁵⁴.

The “status notes” attached to this report inform us that the archaeologist Petru Rogozea “was included from the beginning of the archaeological excavations at the medieval monument in Caransebeș in the team formed to prove the origin of this discovery and under the influence of the archaeologist Radu Popa, he supported the position that it would be of Franciscan and not Orthodox origin. Continuing his relations with Radu Popa from Bucharest, he insisted on supporting his hypothesis, a fact that determined his isolation from museographers and archaeologists from the Caransebeș County Museum. In this situation, he requested and was approved for secondment to the County Museum in Resita. Informatively, it was established as a connection of Prof. PINTER ZENO - KARL from Oțelul Roșu, who reported the same concerns. The named ROGOZEA PETRU was also reported with nationalist-irredentist manifestations - against the background of his conceptions regarding the “superiority of Hungarian civilization” and the multitude of Hungarian historical publications (with the obvious tendency to falsify Romanian history). The named ROGOZEA PETRU will be put under surveillance through D.U.I. for neutralizing and counteracting his actions of distorting the historical truth regarding the origin of the historical monument in Caransebeș”⁵⁵. About Zeno Karl Pinter it is stated that “he is targeted under D.U.I. “Marinescu” bearing in mind the fact that he participated in the archaeological excavations at the Caransebeș monument”⁵⁶ and claims that “the church discovered in the area would be of Franciscan and not Orthodox origin”⁵⁷, but he is acting for “its positive influence through the information network”.⁵⁸

The archaeological file

The results of the archaeological research in Caransebeș were published by Petru Bona in the form of a monograph, *The medieval church in Caransebeș* (Caransebeș, 1993), but his text does not refer to the initial controversies within

⁵⁴ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 325.

⁵⁵ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 326.

⁵⁶ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 327.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

the group of researchers, regarding the attribution of the monument. The removal from the research team of the archaeologist Radu Popa (1933-1993), as a result of the informative notes drawn up by the *Almajan* source, based on accusations without scientific foundation, only of an ideological nature, does not allow us to reconstruct the archaeological file from the initial phase of the research, and the controversy of confessional attribution is also reflected in recent studies⁵⁹. In fact, it is about two discoveries: the place of worship and the related necropolis. The archaeologists' arguments include elements in favor of the use of this church and its erection by the order of minorities but also doubts⁶⁰. From our point of view, this fact has as its main cause the lack of professionalism of the coordinator of the archaeological excavation, Petru Bona, who had as his argument for the confessional placement the type of the altar, namely semi-circular, but also the presence of crypts to the west of the nave, as well as the existence of another entrance on the south side⁶¹. As Silviu Oța and Adrian Ardeț pointed out, all the burials and the cult monument were seen as a unitary whole, without taking into account that it is about two necropolises, one of which also had a church, and at this stage of information, the chronological distance between the oldest cemetery and the second is most likely at least 150 years, during which no burials have yet been reported in the researched space⁶².

Lovasz Reinhold, a Catholic priest in Caransebeș at the time of the discovery of the monument, who, to „*limit speculation that the monument was a Franciscan church, was forbidden by the management of the museum access to the perimeter of the archaeological site ... had become a real "guide" in support of the above-mentioned hypothesis*”⁶³, informed us that: „*I was then with Mr. Radu Popa in the tower of the current Roman Catholic church, the former Franciscan (now parish). Seeing the foundations from the tower, he took several pictures and expressed his clear conviction that this medieval church belonged to the Franciscan convent in Caransebeș*”. Having become an independent researcher, he supports in his studies the Franciscan affiliation of the church with sacristy, attested as a medieval Franciscan monastery in the documents of the era, revealed during excavations carried out between 1988/1989, in the current center of Caransebeș municipality⁶⁴.

The repercussions on the professional career of archaeologist Radu Popa were

⁵⁹ Silviu Oța, Ardeț Adrian, „Câteva observații privind necropola de la Caransebeș-Centru, faza timpurie (secolele XI-XII)”, *Cercetări Arheologice*, XXV (2018): 205-214.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 205-206.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 206.

⁶² Ibidem, 206.

⁶³ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 325.

⁶⁴ Lovasz Reinhold, „Conventul franciscan din Caransebeș în lumina unor documente inedite din secolul al XVIII (II)”, *Studii de istorie ecleziastică*, vol. II (2020): 72-73.



brutal and immediate. A document issued by Directorate I, DSS, from March 1989, addressed to the Security of the Municipality of Bucharest, informs us about the steps taken by Radu Popa to open an archaeological excavation in Peșteana, Hunedoara county⁶⁵, but „*the aforementioned participated in the excavations of rescue from Caransebeș and adopted an inappropriate, pro-Hungarian position in the dating of the monument, we consider it inappropriate to entrust the archaeological site to the one in question*”⁶⁶.

Courtesy of Dr. Karl-Zeno Pinter, a direct participant in the initial research of the Caransebeș monument, I came into possession of a document prepared by Petru Bona, sent to Adrian Pleșu, at that time Minister of Culture, at the end of 1990. Bona's position was parliamentary, elected in the first democratic legislature in Romania. The accusations against the archaeologists Radu Popa and Karl-Zeno Pinter are repeated, by referring to the initial speech from the informative notes addressed to DSS: „*From some recent information it appears the intention of certain people to erase the traces of history by launching false hypotheses about the origin of a monument discovered at beginning of 1988 in the center of Caransebeș, which is considered by specialists to be the oldest Orthodox church in Banat and Transylvania, built in the 12th-13th centuries. In this sense, the archaeologist Radu Popa, deputy director of the Historical Monuments Commission (whose mother is of Hungarian nationality), stated in issue 4/1989 of the magazine “Studies and Researches of History and Archaeology” that the cult monument in Caransebeș would be Catholic, therefore Hungarian, something supported in the same publication by the Hungarian teacher Pinter Zeno from Oțelu Roșu. Recently, Popa Radu ordered the suspension of the works on the restoration of the monument, reasoning that it would be more appropriate to build a dome above the walls and set up a museum in that place. Considering the age of the construction, there is a risk of the building being demolished and, implicitly, of erasing the traces that attest to its belonging to the Romanian Orthodox cult in this area*”⁶⁷.

Conclusions

The scientific dispute was arbitrated by the Department of State Security by *neutralizing and counteracting the irredentist actions of some elements within the sphere of competence that sought to distort the historical truth regarding the result of the archaeological research in the city of Caransebeș and thereby contesting the presence and continuity of the majority Romanian population*⁶⁸ measures was taken for the removal from the collective of the archaeological research and the subsequent

⁶⁵ ACNSAS, *Referitor la patrimoniul – muzeu*, Dosar nr. 13367, Vol. 3, f. 220.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ The document has a registration number 026662/21.X.1990.

⁶⁸ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 325.

informative surveillance of the researchers who disputed the Romanian belonging of the monument, along with *offensive and operative measures to silence those who try to lead the archaeological research in an erroneous direction contrary to our national interests*⁶⁹. But the situation in Caransebeș was not singular in the archaeological research of the 1980s but represents the apogee of DSS intervention in the interpretation of archaeological data. The informative network of the Securitate, active in the history museums from the beginning of the 1980s, consisted of 271⁷⁰ sources, collaborators, and other sources used with approval from competent party organs, from a total personnel number of „approximately 1600 people of which 1230 having superior education.”⁷¹ To these collaborators, „other 150 sources were added from different work compartments or Militia organs”⁷² but also from daily workers or volunteers present at archaeological research sites – as reported by the Report-Note of the County Inspectorate of Botoșani, forwarded to the Department of State Security on 25 February 1982⁷³.

The situation of archaeologist Florin Medeleț (1943-2005) from the Museum of Banat in Timișoara, as mentioned above, demonstrated how a scientific dispute with a DSS collaborator, historian Ioan Dimitrie Suciu (1917-1982), was mediated and settled by the DSS. Medeleț was accused of having stopped the publication of „certain studies, unanimously praised by specialists, which demonstrated the autochthonous continuity in the city limits of Timișoara, and also of writing and publishing, under various other signatures, of polemical articles denying Roman traces in the area and the origins of our city, therefore, assuming the position of some irredentist Hungarian historians, allowing for such positions to be exploited in a hostile manner by irredentist historical circles abroad.”⁷⁴ The entire matter was triggered by the coincidental discovery of three Roman bricks during the digging of an apartment block foundation, discoveries which Medeleț considered intrusive and lacking archaeological context.⁷⁵ Following this episode, Medeleț was removed from his position as director of the Museum and prevented from pursuing a doctoral degree while also being denied approval for publishing scientific studies or for coordinating archaeological research⁷⁶. Historian Mihai Fătu was appointed director in his place. A DSS source accused him of being „an ardent supporter of the Tracoman current within the Institute for the History of

⁶⁹ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 320.

⁷⁰ ACNSAS, Vol. 3, f. 260.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 277-279.

⁷⁴ ACNSAS, *Referitor la patrimoniul – muzeu*, Dosar nr. 13367, Vol. 4, f. 93.

⁷⁵ Cosac, *Despre arheologie și orientarea în cercetarea arheologică...*, 829-846.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.



the Communist Party - Puțuri, Zaharia, Deac, Copoiu⁷⁷ and that „he issued orders for the modification of the museum exhibit to reduce to a minimum everything about the Roman civilization and changed all the texts in the museum. Only those elements illustrating the cohabitation between Dacians and Romans were left but in a very limited form”⁷⁸. It remains a future direction of research to identify the measure in which supporters of such a current were deliberately appointed as heads of museums and the impact of such a policy on archaeological research and the organization of exhibitions.

Similar accusations to those raised against Florin Medeleț were also used by *Almăjan*, respectively historian Petru Bona, at that time director of the Museum of Caransebeș, against the archaeologists which attributed the foundation of a church they investigated to the Catholic confession. In Timișoara, at least, the idea of a Roman castrum on the city territory was not accepted by the specialists, the church in Caransebeș was attributed to the Orthodox cult following a monographic study previously mentioned.

In what concerns the archaeological sites, DSS officers had to consider the need „to be previously aware of the places where archaeological researches were going to take place and to recruit informants from the workers in the surrounding villages or from areas nearby”⁷⁹. The situation was also valid for all archaeological sites in Romania particularly those sites where foreign researchers participated as well.

The attention of the informants on archaeological sites was oriented „towards understating the forms in which the results of the researchers would be capitalized in scientific publications or museums” but also the measure in which the archaeological researches „were oriented towards data and documentation aimed to attest the continuity and multi-millennial permanence of the Romanian people”⁸⁰. The officers were also tasked with „controlling the process of archaeological research as well as the forms of correct scientific dissemination and their interpretation in the spirit of the historical truth”⁸¹.

A synthetic note of Direction I, registered on 10 August 1982, concerning „the informative-operative situation in museums nation-wide”⁸² mentions that archaeologists from museums „undertake archaeological researches... and activities which, incorrectly performed may cause grave prejudice to the politics

⁷⁷ ACNSAS, Vol. 4, f. 1.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 279.

⁸⁰ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 246.

⁸¹ ACNSAS, Vol. 6, f. 247.

⁸² ACNSAS, Vol. 3, f. 271.

of our party and state"⁸³. A synthetic presentation also reveals aspects of interest for the political police:

- allowing the access of foreign citizens, without approval from competent organs, to artefacts and documents from the deposits of the museums, to discoveries and other unpublished historical data (such cases occurred at the Museum of Unification in Alba Iulia, Museum of Banat in Timișoara and the Museum of Art in Craiova);
- performing incorrect or unauthorized archaeological research able to compromise historical remnants (three cases - CONSTANTIN SCORPAN from Constanța, BLAJAN MIHAI from Alba Iulia, and MARIS TIBERIU from Hunedoara);
- not registering and not capitalizing operatively the results of archaeological research or historical findings, including those referring to the formation and continuity of the Romanian people in some areas (suspicions of such nature exist regarding eight persons from the counties of Alba, Buzău, Caraș-Severin, Cluj, Maramureș, Timiș, and Satu-Mare);
- incorrectly approaching aspects from our historical past, in such a way as to prejudice Romania's interests, in publications that appeared under the aegis of museums or in exhibitions (there is data or suspicion of such kind involving persons from the counties of Bihor, Cluj, Hunedoara, Satu-Mare, and Timiș)⁸⁴.

A future direction in the research of DSS's involvement in the archaeological research of the late period of Communism in Romania is represented by the measure in which the archaeologists specialized in issues such as the formation of the Romanian people or continuity have benefited from their relation with the DSS in ways such as obtaining favorable financing or travels abroad. At this point, one can only notice the absence of such subjects from the preoccupations of contemporary archaeologists.

Rezumat

Prezentul studiu discută măsura în care Departamentul Securității Statului (DSS) era prezent în cercetarea arheologică din România anilor 80 ai secolului trecut, un subiect absent din preocupările istoriografice actuale. Doar interferențele ideologiei în interpretarea datelor arheologice a făcut subiectul unor abordări. Conformismul unor arheologi se poate datora și presiunilor venite din partea DSS, fie prin faptul că erau colaboratori ai sistemului represiv. Cercetarea arheologică de la Caransebeș este relevantă în înțelegerea mecanismelor prin care DSS reușea să intervină în disputele științifice

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ ACNSAS, Vol. 3, f. 273.



cu rol de arbitru, iar documentele din *Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* (ACNSAS) permit dezvăluire unor adevăruri intuite de arheologii perioadei. Măsura acestor intervenții depășește chiar presupunerile contemporanilor. Controversa plasării cronologice și atribuirii profesionale a descoperirilor de la Caransebeș a fost tranșată brutal de DSS, în conformitate cu principiul respectării „adevărului istoric”. Repercusiunile asupra arheologilor constau în interzicerea dreptului de a mai efectua săpături arheologice, supravegherea prin deschiderea de Dosare de urmărire informativă (DUI), interzicerea deplasărilor în străinătate și verificare studiilor transmise publicațiilor de specialitate.

Cuvinte cheie: arheologie, Biserică ortodoxă, Caransebeș, Departamentul Securității Statului

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