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Marginal Elites. Some Observations in Modern Romania and their Relevance to Prehistoric Hoards and Status Expression

Summary

A brief overview of Romani history in Romania is followed by some modern observations, especially as regards the accumulation of wealth and its conspicuous display in specific forms and on certain occasions. A consideration of the modern situation from an archaeological point of view asserts that what we as archaeologists would view as an elite is indeed an elite (within the Romani population), but on the whole is a marginalized minority facing discrimination. The article asks what we actually recognize as elite when we speak archaeologically of ‘royal’ graves, and invokes the possibility of increased attention to multi-ethnic or multicultural communities in prehistoric times.

Keywords: Romania; Romani; social anthropology; wealth destruction; elites.

Nach einem kurzen Überblick zur Romani-Geschichte in Rumänien werden einige moderne Beobachtungen beschrieben, insbesondere zur Ansammlung von Reichtum und dessen auffälliger Zurschaustellung in spezifischen Formen und bei bestimmten Gelegenheiten. Unter Betrachtung der modernen Situation von einem archäologischen Standpunkt wird festgestellt, dass die Elite, die wir ‚archäologisch‘ sehen würden, tatsächlich eine Elite ist (der Romani Bevölkerung), diese aber insgesamt eine marginalisierte und diskriminierte Minderheit sind. Die Frage wird gestellt, welche Elite wir eigentlich erkennen, wenn wir archäologisch von ‚fürstlichen‘ Gräbern sprechen, und es wird dazu aufgerufen die Möglichkeit multiethnischer/multikultureller Gemeinschaften in der Urgeschichte stärker in Betracht zu ziehen.

Keywords: Rumänien; Romani; Ethnologie; Reichtumsvernichtung; Eliten.

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The ethnic group generally known in English as ‘gypsy’ names itself Romani, Roma, Sinti with several variants. Here, since mainly modern Romania will be discussed, the main local term and spelling, *Rrom*, will be used in the following.

Generally it must be stressed from the beginning, as has been remarked by many others,¹ that the discussion of *Rrom* history and habits is made rather difficult by the fact that, as a highly mobile people not permanently linked to any given place, they did not need and do not have a written history or written traditions of their own. Historical and anthropological or ethnographic accounts were generally published by scientists of other populations. This uncertainty even includes such simple things as establishing who belongs to any given Romani group. Such basic information as the population size thus remains uncertain, with a large variation in estimates. Self-declaration of ethnic belonging is distorted by several factors, including fear of discrimination or simple misunderstanding of the question. These are major error sources, which need to be kept in mind, for government statistics, as well as for scientific discussions.²

After many varied theories on their origin and migration, European Romani have, in more recent studies, been identified as a genetically coherent group (founder population).³ They are closest to people living in northern/north-western India/Pakistan, from where they probably departed around the middle of the first millennium AD. This had previously also been proposed linguistically.⁴ The migratory route, according to the newer research, was probably one through Persia, the Caucasus and Anatolia along the southern Black Sea, and probably not a northern one across the Eurasian Steppes.⁵ Similarly, a number of older presumptions, such as their coming with Tatar invasions, or their origin from high class Indian warrior castes (launched with view to a more glorious social standing), can be refuted. For Europe, the earliest attestation is in the Byzantine Empire around AD 1050⁶ and their further spread throughout Europe from the Balkan area probably began very soon afterwards, during the 11th century AD. However, they are often attested in documents later, in Romania only since 1385, when the ruler, Dan I., transferred to the Monastery Tismana possessions from the Monastery Vodița near Turnu Severin, which he had received from his uncle, Vladislav I., among which there were also 40 “camps/settlements” (sălașe) of “ațigani”.⁷

If they appear at all in documents during the medieval period and well into early modern history, it is mainly as serfs, who could be sold just like objects. Serfdom was,

1 Ioviță and Schurr 2004, 267.

2 Ioviță and Schurr 2004, 268.

3 Early research connected to the National Socialist regime in Germany, and supported by such renowned people and institutions as Ferdinand Sauerbruch and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, has been discussed by Fings, Heuss, and Sparing 1997. For some of the more recent genetic

studies see Kalaydjieva, Gresham, and Calafell 2001; Ioviță and Schurr 2004; Mendizabal et al. 2012. On the political, ethical, discriminatory and commercial risks of genetic research see e.g. Greely 2001.

4 Achim 2004.

5 Ioviță and Schurr 2004, 275.

6 Soulis 1961, 145.

7 Achim 2004.

however, not always forced on either *Rrom* or other peasants, as has been briefly mentioned for Transylvania, where free peasants and gypsies would enter serfdom for money and food.⁸ In Romania laws of 1843, 1844, and 1847 freed the serfs in public property, including the Orthodox Church (Bishops, Monasteries etc.), and in 1855–1856 slavery was generally abolished.⁹

However, this did not mean the end of their marginalization, either in Romania or elsewhere in Europe. *Rrom* were officially persecuted under the government of Marshall Antonescu, being considered ‘dangerous’ and ‘undesirable’ and were deported to Transnistria from 1942 onwards. Post-war Communist governments aimed to “create a homogenous nation from the ethnic point of view,” and the *Rrom* were considered “not integrated socially, with backward mentality and a negative attitude to work and social life.”¹⁰ Finally, today discrimination continues, although they are officially recognized as an ethnic minority, with one guaranteed representative in parliament.¹¹

The stigmatization is, besides inhibiting the self-declaration as *Rrom*, also visible generally in historical statistics. In spite of a remarkable patchwork of many ethnic groups in documentation showing the situation around 1910/1912 the *Rrom* do not figure at all, and were thus officially and statistically ‘invisible.’ When they first do appear, in the census for 1930, they officially represent 1.5% of the population. In the most recent census in 2011 around 3.2% (619 000) of the total population from Romania (19 000 000)¹² declared themselves as ‘Roma/Gypsies,’ but estimates range from 1.5 to 2.5 million (possibly more than 13%).¹³ According to census and self-declarations, most *Rromi* are Romanian Orthodox Christians.

Described mainly by ‘outsiders,’ *Rromi* are mostly organized in family clans/tribes or occupational groups, each headed by a ‘bulibaşa.’ At present in Romania there are several self-instated people competing as overall ‘rulers’ of the *Rrom*, either just in Romania, or even worldwide: King Florin Cioabă (since 1997, inheriting the position from his father King Ioan Cioabă, who had assumed the title in 1992) and Emperor Iulian Rădulescu (since 1993), the two of which have family ties, and since 2007 King Dan Stănescu, son of King Ilie Badea Stănescu, who had been crowned as King in 2003 in the old episcopal church of Curtea de Argeş, taking up the old Romanian royal tradition.

8 Verdery 1983, 168: “6 May 1755. Free gypsy Ion Lukács ties himself in perpetual servitude to General Farkas Macskásy for fifteen florins, a horse, three-and-a-half bushels of wheat, and four cups of wine.”

9 Achim 2004.

10 Achim 2004.

11 Pfeifer 2007a; Pfeifer 2007b; Greenberg 2009, 1–2; 9; Totok 2014.

12 Data from the National Institute of Statistics: <http://www.insse.ro/cms/files%5Cstatistici%5Ccomunicate%5Calte%5C2012%5CComunicat%20DATE%20PROVIZORII%20RPL%202011e.pdf> (visited on 01/02/2013). Several of the internet-resources referred to in this paper are no longer accessible, having been either removed by the original providers, outdated as newsreports or blocked in anti-discrimination measures.

13 Ioviță and Schurr 2004, 268.

Generally speaking, two main categories of *Rrom* may be recognized: permanently sedentary and highly mobile:¹⁴

The sedentary groups (*vătrași*) live(d) in villages, often connected to nobles or monasteries (e.g. ‘*cărămidari*’ – those making bricks). Some have integrated completely and do not even use the Romani language any more.

The more mobile groups (*lăieți*) are usually grouped according to their crafts, e.g. *ursari* (from dancing bears), *căldărari* or *căldărași* (from making cauldrons, kettles), *fierari* (blacksmithing – mostly in cities and villages), *costorari* or *spoitori* (from coating cooking vessels with tin), *aurari*/*zlătari*/*giuvaergii* (from gold working, sometimes also placer washing),¹⁵ *rudari*, *blidari* and *lingurari* (woodworkers – producing agricultural forks, spinning instruments, spoons), *potcovari* (horseshoe makers – mainly in cities and villages), *meșteri-lăcătuși* (iron fences, locks, keys), *lăutari* (musicians), *ciurari* (sieves, combs, brushes), as well as many others such as flower-sellers, fortune-tellers, spellbinders, shoeshiners, unqualified construction workers, and so on, may be mentioned.

Today however, most *Rrom* live in cities and towns and although many of the names derived from occupations mentioned above are still used, most of the occupations themselves have practically disappeared. This aspect of group identities, originally derived from specialized activities, is now losing its economic basis. Besides this, some *Rrom* now also practice agriculture, since during the redistribution of land in the post-Communist period, mainly by the Iliescu government of the 1990s, all inhabitants of villages received shares of the terrain, including the *Rrom*. Of the latter not all sold or rented out their plots later. How these interactions between economic and cultural identity function and how they are adapted or changed has practically not been studied yet.

The highly mobile way of life, as well as several customs often conflict with the majority society. Thus the marriage of Florin Cioabă’s (himself married at 14) daughter Ana-Maria (then 12 years old) to Mihai Birita (15 or 16) in 2003 stirred international protests, some reports even asking if the “Gypsy child bride [was] a rape victim?”.¹⁶ In a

14 The term ‘nomadic’ is not at all suited here, as usually a part, even if sometimes only a small one, of the community stays in a fixed settlement while another travels the country in pursuit of an income.

15 Mentioned for Moldavia already in 1714 by Cantemir 1872, 26: “Haec *Cingari* [emphasis added] colligunt, sordibus purgant, tantumque inde auri sibi comparant, ut et quatuor auri occas, quae 1600 drachmas faciunt, singulis annis principis coniugi tributis nomine possint solvere.”; and a little later for Transylvania by Büsching 1785, 244: “Alle

siebenbürgische Flüsse und alle Bäche, ja selbst die Gewässer, welche durch Regengüsse entstehen, führen Gold, der Aranyos [Hungarian name, meaning ‘golden’, in Romanian the river Arieș] aber übertrifft in Ansehung desselben alle andere. Die Goldwäscher sind, außer den Wlachen, welche an den Flüssen wohnen, meistens *Zigeuner* [emphasis added].”

16 <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/09/30/world/main575953.shtml> (visited on 05/05/2016).

2006 interview Cioabă commented on the early marriage age, that the *Rrom* community “counters the ageing of society by such early marriages.”¹⁷

Generally the *Rrom* are still discriminated in Romania and some of their newer behaviour reinforces envy and hatred.¹⁸

I Hoarding and the display of wealth

After this very brief sketch on *Rrom* history and society, I shall now turn to the question of hoarding and the display of wealth.

The post-war Communist governments in Romania confiscated precious metals, in whatever form it existed (coins, jewelry, tableware),¹⁹ attempting to monopolize control of gold and silver. After the war and at the beginning of the Communist period, everyone who could, attempted to treasure values, either in gold coins or in jewelry, and the government measures were not directed mainly against *Rrom*, but perhaps affecting them especially due to their specific traditions.²⁰ Documentation of the ‘nationalization’ process has hardly been published, although registration of the confiscations was done, as becomes evident by the return of gold now. The quantity of gold in dispute is quite considerable:²¹ between 1990 and 2007 the National Bank of Romania had returned 2.8 tons of gold, 29.6% of the total, the rest being repaid in money. Of the returned gold 200 kg were coins, half a ton of jewelry and 115 kg of tooth-gold. At present the largest quantity any single person received is 12 kg of gold (to a Romanian living outside the country at the time), with the highest compensation being for 18 kg of gold, also to an expatriate.²² Only around 20 000 persons, out of 150 000 registered confiscations, had received compensation in 2007, most of the others purportedly not having filed claims, for various possible reasons (lacking information, deaths, no heirs etc.). In fact the entire amount may be much larger, as just the *Rrom* of Botoșani County reclaim 400 kg of gold.²³

17 Interview published in the daily journal „Maxim”, 23rd October 2006: http://www.maxim.ro/circus/feature/841/regale_cioaba_vs_iulian_imparatul.html (visited on 01/11/2011).

18 Recently see Lari 2010.

19 Law of 14th August 1947 “Se va ceda aurul sub orice forma” (gold in any form will be ceded [to the government]): <http://ponturifierbinti.com/aurul-tiganilor> (visited on 01/09/2011).

20 See <http://ponturifierbinti.com/aurul-tiganilor> (visited on 01/09/2011).

21 The data given here is mostly from newspaper articles and news broadcasts, since there is not offi-

cial data openly accessible. Therefore the numbers and quantities stated need to be viewed with reservations. However, it is clear that very considerable wealth is being re-distributed.

22 9 AM News, 4th January 2008: “Goana după aur. Țiganii – coșmarul BNR” – <http://www.9am.ro/stiri-revista-presei/2008-01-04/goana-dupa-aur-tiganii-cosmarul-bnr.html> (visited on 05/05/2016).

23 Ziarul de Iași, 20th September 2000: <http://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/local/botosani/sute-de-kilograme-de-aur-tiganesc-confiscate-niih8q> (visited on 01/03/2013).

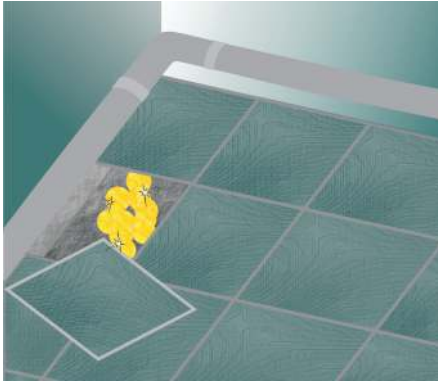


Fig. 1 Potcoava, Olt county. Situation where gold coins had been hoarded under the tiled floor at the home of the bulibaşa of the cǎldăraşi. Robbed in April 2010.

A bulibaşa from Botoşani county, Mihai Preda, stated that

[...] more than a thousand gold *napoleons* and *cocks* had been confiscated from his own grandfather and father, which were the inheritance passed from generation to generation and which could only be used in the worst of cases. The only thing that was left, was a chain with a golden cross, weighing over 200 g, which was worn around the neck.

He further mentioned, that the more such money a gypsy had, the more powerful and respected was the family.²⁴ The hoarding of gold coins still continues today among *Rrom*, even though this fact becomes public only on rare occasions.

The coins, as Mihai Preda mentioned, are mostly called ‘cocoşei’ (cocks – for the image depicted on the french coins) or ‘mahmudea’ (Mohammeds – named after Turkish gold coins), and were collected in weights of 7 and 14 g (i.e. the standard weights of the issues). The names themselves have to a large degree become generalized for gold coins, also being applied to Austrian Franz Joseph ducats (1 or 4) which may sometimes also be called ‘mahmudea’.

Documentation for the hoarding of gold coins (silver is circulated freely) is mostly lacking – I know this directly from *Rromi* and it is illustrated indirectly in rare cases, such as a news-report about the *bulibaşa* of the *cǎldăraşi* (kettle-makers) of Potcoava (Olt County), who was robbed by his own son. In the Potcoava case the coins had been buried (inside a jar) underneath the flooring, closed by tiles embedded in cement (which could correspond to some prehistoric find situations) (Fig. 1). The son, in love with a different girl from the one selected by his family, allegedly stole 600 ‘mahmudele’ (according to



Fig. 2 Gold coins ('mahmudele') hung up on textile strips on stage beside the musicians at the engagement of Steluța Mihai and Nasie Mihai in 2010.

the images more probably Austrian ducats), which corresponded to a value of roughly 500 000 US \$ at the time, leaving another 300 'mahmudele' in place.²⁵

Such hoards are clearly not 'lost' and not 'gifts to the gods' or to other supernatural powers, as is recently generally understood for the Bronze Age hoards,²⁶ but rather represent (hidden) wealth, and may be publicly displayed on certain occasions. On some such occasions this 'wealth' is not only displayed, but may also be 'given' and otherwise passed on to others. This wealth is, as mentioned above, also part of the basis for power and social status among the *Rrom*.

Occasions for displaying and passing on wealth today may be engagements or weddings, for which here the engagement, in 2010, of Steluța Mihai (13 years), daughter of a *Rrom* leader, from Strehaia, Mehedinți County, to Nasie Mihai (14 years) may stand

24 "De la bunicul și tatăl meu milițienii au confiscat peste o mie de napoleoni și cocoșei de aur. Aceștia reprezentau moștenirea pe care țiganiilor o lasă din generație în generație și de care te puteai atinge numai în cazul în care era neapărat necesar, adică dacă aveai vreun necaz mare. Singurul lucru care mi-a rămas amintire de la ei este un lanț de aur cu crucifix care are peste 200 de grame. Acesta a fost purtat la gât de toți bulibașii țiganilor din Botoșani până la mine", s-a destăinuit Mihai Preda, bulibașa țiganilor din Botoșani. După spusele țiganilor, napoleonii și cocoșei de aur erau monede care aveau o greutate de 14 și respectiv 7 grame. Cu cât aveai mai multe astfel de monede cu atât erai mai puternic și mai respectat între familiile de țigani. Ziarul de Iași, 20th September 2000: <http://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/lo->

cal/botosani/sute-de-kilograme-de-aur-tiganesc-confiscate-ni1h8q (visited on 01/03/2013).

25 "Jaf în familie" 17:00 news broadcast on ProTV 19th April 2010: <http://stirileprotv.ro/programe-inregistrate/83/stirile-protv-de-la-ora-17-00-cu-monica-dascalu-19-04-2010.html> (visited on 05/05/2016), shown in a different (extended) version of 20th April 2010 on "acasa direct, Povești adevărate: A furat mahmudelele din iubire": <http://www.acasatv.ro/emisiuni/bulibasa-din-potcoava-a-ramas-mai-sarac-cu-600-de-mahmudele-si-ilbanuieste-de-jaf-pe-fiul-sau-video.html> (visited on 01/09/2011).

26 E.g. B. Hänsel and A. Hänsel 1997; Hansen 2008, each with further bibliography.



Fig. 3 Bride provided with gold coins on red textile backing at a Rrom wedding in Costești, 2009.



Fig. 4 Daughter of F. Stănescu at her wedding in 2011 in Grajduri. Note also the € symbols on the house in the background.

as an example.²⁷ Altogether the two engaged youngsters received more than 20 kg of gold, of which 10 kg were displayed in the form of 700 ‘mahmudele’ hung up on red textile strips on stage beside the musicians (Fig. 2); besides this the grandmothers jewels were worn by the future bride and a necktie of gold plates by the hopeful groom. At a high status *Rrom* wedding in Costești, in 2009, the bride had practically been dressed in gold coins (Fig. 3), similarly to the daughter of Ferdinand Stănescu at her wedding in 2011 (Fig. 4),²⁸ so that we regularly observe large sums being passed on in this way.²⁹ The bride from Costești could, had they ever met, easily have competed with the noblewoman buried in the Royal Scythian-Saka kurgan of Arzhan 2,³⁰ who, together with her consort, had been provided with around 20 kg of gold,³¹ partly covering the costumes.



Fig. 5 Conspicuous villa in Turda.



Fig. 6 Presumed status symbols (Mercedes-stars, but upside down) and reference to the owner, named after a well known film figure.

Another way of lavish display, practiced more recently by *Rrom*, is the building of villas, with expensive and very rich decorations, materials and very spacious (Fig. 5). Often

- 27 See *Adevărul* on 1st May 2010 “Prințesa Steluța, logodnă cu sute de salbe de aur și zestre din Dubai”: http://www.adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/video-galerie-foto-printesa-steluta-logodna-sute-salbe-aur-zestre-dubai-1_50bd3fe67c42d5a663c919ed/index.html (visited on 01/03/2013) and on 2nd May 2010 “Logodnă cu zece kilograme de aur”: [adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/logodna-zece-kilograme-aur-1_50ad40a27c42d5a66391990e/index.html](http://www.adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/logodna-zece-kilograme-aur-1_50ad40a27c42d5a66391990e/index.html) (visited on 01/03/2013).
- 28 See *Adevărul* on 8th October 2011 “Nuntă țigănească lângă Iași. Bulibașa Ferdinand Stănescu își mărită fata”: http://adevarul.ro/locale/iasi/update-nunta-tiganeasca-iasi-bulibasa-ferdinand-stanescu-isi-marita-fata-foto-1_50ad89f67c42d5a66396fb43/index.html (visited on 05/05/2016).
- 29 The 2009 wedding of Costești was shown on 20th April 2010 on “acasa direct, Povești adevărate: A furat mahmudelele din iubire”: <http://www.acasatv.ro/emisiuni/bulibasa-din-potcoava-a-ramas-mai-sarac-cu-600-de-mahmudele-si-ilbanuieste-de-jaf-pe-fiul-sau-video.html> (visited on 01/09/2011). On the bride-price among (Bulgarian) *Rrom*, including the correction of much misunderstanding: Pamporov 2007.
- 30 Čugunov, Parzinger, and Nagler 2010.
- 31 Čugunov, Parzinger, and Nagler 2010.



Fig. 7 Outstanding funerary monuments of *Rrom* in Timișoara. In the background smaller ‘usual’ graves are visible, as well as the funerary chapel.

enough certain (presumed) high status symbols are integrated, such as € symbols (Fig. 4), Mercedes-stars (even if they may be upside-down Fig. 6) or references to well known personalities. These buildings clearly stand out amongst the ‘usual’ houses of most of the population and are already often being described as ‘palaces’:

2 ‘Rites of passage’

While lavish houses may be part of everyday life, it is during ‘rites of passage’ that wealth is more ostentatiously displayed, as already briefly indicated above. Another such event, besides weddings, is the burial. In connection with this *Rrom* in modern Romania and Moldova express wealth by the monument above ground (mausoleum), but also during the funeral itself. Thus the above-ground structures with columns, cupolas, expensive building materials (e.g. marble, thermo-isolated windows and golden or gilded ornaments) remain permanently visible and keep the memory of the deceased alive (Fig. 7).³² In recent *Rrom* burials, however, there are also very expensive processions including thousands of exotic flowers, often on overloaded trucks,³³ and tables stacked with food and drink may be maintained for the mourners over several days or can be distributed to poor people.³⁴ The underground burial chambers themselves may be equipped like houses with all necessary furniture, gilded statues, fire-places, lamps, computers, as well as telephone and fax connections, which at least partly do function and are not fake symbols (Fig. 8).³⁵

32 See, for example, Adevărul of 29th June 2011: “Țigăniile din Timișoara au ridicat palate cu turnulețe pentru morți. Un loc de veci cu termopane și marmură costă 10.000 de euro”: [http://www.adevarul.ro/news/societate/Tiganiile-](http://www.adevarul.ro/news/societate/Tiganiile-timisoara-ridicat-palate-turnulete-morti-loc-veci-termopane-marmura-costa-10000-euro-galerie-foto-1_50ada2ec7c42d5a663987cb5/index.html)

[timisoara-ridicat-palate-turnulete-morti-loc-veci-termopane-marmura-costa-10000-euro-galerie-foto-1_50ada2ec7c42d5a663987cb5/index.html](http://www.adevarul.ro/news/societate/Tiganiile-timisoara-ridicat-palate-turnulete-morti-loc-veci-termopane-marmura-costa-10000-euro-galerie-foto-1_50ada2ec7c42d5a663987cb5/index.html) (visited on 05/05/2016). These funerary monuments are seen with envy and distaste by some



Fig. 8 Furnished burial chamber of a high status *Rrom* burial.

The comment, by *Rrom* relatives of the bulibasha Preda of Otaci, on the remark that he was “surprisingly” buried without weapon: “... this tradition is not respected *any more*” (emphasis added),³⁶ could indicate that this was previously practiced. However, details are lacking in this case and there are otherwise no indications or mentions whatsoever of weapons connected to *Rrom* funerary practices. All these features, while demonstrating the high status of the deceased, do not remain visible but are preserved only in the memory of the participants and onlookers.

groups: “Cavourile țigănești cât palatele cu turnulețe sufocă cimitirele”, posted 03 May 2010. <http://blog.nouadreapta.org/2010/05/cavourile-tiganesti-cat-palatele-cu-turnulete-sufoca-cimitirele/> (visited on 01/03/2013) or “Timișoara, pământ țigănesc. După ce și-au făcut palate ilegal, țiganii au trecut la cavouri”: <http://www.tracologie.info/minoritari/timisoara-pamant-tiganesc-dupa-ce-si-au-facut-palate-ilegal-tiganii-au-trecut-la-cavouri-2053.html> (posted 6th March 2010, visited on 01/09/2011) – the website “Thracia. Identitarian Press Agency” has since been closed down.

- 33 E.g. “Mega înmormantare la țigani”: <http://www.220.ro/animale/Mega-Inmormantare-La-Tzigani/BKNuP46Fid/> (visited on 01/03/2013); “Înmormantare la țigani în Roman”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ljd-huKzuOzY> (posted in 2012, visited on 01/03/2013); “A murit Vladimir Cârpați”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYldoyyV5eY> (posted 25. February 2013, visited on 05/05/2016), and several more.
- 34 News of 29th April 2010 on “Știrile ProTV Chișinău: Bulibasa țiganilor din Otaci a fost înmormantat într-un cavou de 50 mii euro”:

<http://www.protv.md/sport/social/bulibasa-tiganilor-din-otaci-a-fost-inmormantat-intr-un-cavou.html#> (visited on 01/03/2013). For similar habits elsewhere see McFarlane 1943.

- 35 See “Tradiții la rromi - aur, acordeon, fax și veioză în cavou!” published on “acasatv.ro” 13th April 2009: <http://www.acasatv.ro/emisiuni/la-povestiri-adevarate-traditii-la-rromi-aur-acordeon-fax-si-veioza.html> (visited on 01/09/2011), and the news of 29th April 2010 on “Știrile ProTV Chișinău: Bulibasa țiganilor din Otaci a fost înmormantat într-un cavou de 50 mii euro”: <http://www.protv.md/sport/social/bulibasa-tiganilor-din-otaci-a-fost-inmormantat-intr-un-cavou.html#> (visited on 01/03/2013).
- 36 News of 29th April 2010 on “Știrile ProTV Chișinău: Bulibasa țiganilor din Otaci a fost înmormantat într-un cavou de 50 mii euro”: <http://www.protv.md/sport/social/bulibasa-tiganilor-din-otaci-a-fost-inmormantat-intr-un-cavou.html#> (visited on 01/03/2013) – the precise citation is: “Surprinzător, însă, bulibașa a fost înmormântat fără armă, iar rudele spun că nu se mai respectă această tradiție”.

As becomes clear from the above, the *Rrom* population has been documented in Romania for at least 600 years, but was probably present even before that date. However, in most statistics they remain ‘invisible’ until the 20th century (albeit mentioned in legal documents!). This is even more so from an archaeological point of view, neither *Rrom* (or gypsy) graves, nor settlements having been identified as such so far.³⁷ Even in other regions, where some (but still very few) burials have been ascribed to this population,³⁸ this is usually for late medieval to modern graves, if they can be dated at all. A possible explanation for the general lack of archaeological traces for older gypsy burials may appear to be the habit of destroying and burning the wagon/caravan and possessions of deceased gypsies.³⁹ However, in spite of several descriptions of such events, this was not universally practiced either spatially or temporally. Among the burials of the surrounding majority population the *Rrom* remained ‘invisible’.⁴⁰

Quite contrary to this, ‘archaeologically’ the *Rrom* now suddenly become highly visible, indeed conspicuous, after the political changes of the 1990s, although perhaps not immediately. Hoarding was and still is practiced (whatever the motives may be), and lavish display of wealth in architecture, jewelry and burials is evident.

The reasons for this sudden ‘appearance’ and, indeed extraordinarily high ‘visibility’ have, to my knowledge, not been studied so far. The apparently obvious assumption, that such open display of wealth and status has become possible only after the Communist Period is, of course, a possibility. The ‘freedom’ offered by modern democratic Romania certainly allows for more display and it may have taken some time to recover or accumulate such wealth, which could explain why this did not occur immediately. However, I think this may be rather too simplistic an explanation. Instead, or rather in addition, I wish to remark that the entire situation somewhat reminds me of the processes observed among nobles in Hungary and Transylvania during the 18th century:

[...] eighteenth-century Hungary and Transylvania were not far from being feudal. The basic feudal institution of armed noble levy was abolished there only when a standing army came into being in 1715, and even then it was reinstated and called up four times between 1790 and 1807, during the Napoleonic wars. As the state gradually acquired institutional independence and usurped the military functions of the nobility, *these nobles changed from a warrior caste*

37 For the same situation in Hungary recently see Bánffy 2013. I am grateful to S. Hansen for drawing my attention to this study.

38 Völling 1989–1990, who gives some examples, mainly from Germany (with older literature). Contrary to his conclusion, I do see an expression of status in the especially lavish burials today.

39 Crooke 1909; Sanderson 1969.

40 On the ‘invisibility’ or ‘visibility’ of gypsies in general see Bastos 2009. The question as to how far negation of specific population groups was intended by state administration or other social media is less discussed here, but may have played a role even in prehistory.

into a status group concerned with display and conspicuous consumption [emphasis added].⁴¹

A similar situation could also be mentioned for Antiquity, if we look at the changes in Greek culture at the time the society adoring warriors and heroes changed to an elitist urban one in which education and indulgence played a more important role as status markers.⁴²

Taking into account the changes in *Rrom* life, from a highly mobile one, to a more settled one in cities and towns, and the loss of many of their traditional occupations, originally defining groups and now often only preserved as group identity, the use of lavish and conspicuous display of wealth may be used, perhaps not consciously, to reinforce or create (new) identity.

Are these observations on a modern situation relevant for archaeology?

Presuming that we could excavate the present situation, both the *Rrom* houses and their burials would archaeologically be considered as 'princely' or 'royal'; even if we may not see them wearing and exchanging the rich jewelry presented at betrothals or weddings. But are these houses and burials really princely and royal?

They do indeed belong to an elite and we can certainly accept that it is an elite which considers itself 'royal'. So inside their social group we would archaeologically correctly identify the high status (royal) class.

However, placed in the just slightly wider context of all the inhabitants of the region, they are by no means the elite, but rather the leaders of quite a small section (even given the higher percentage estimates) of a socially very much marginalized part of the population of Romania!

Archaeologically we would thus mistakenly take the highly expressive elite of a marginal and discriminated ethnic minority as that of a much larger and very mixed group of populations (Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, etc.). The overall elite(s), if there is/are any, might look rather pale against that of the *Rrom*, at least as far as the more permanently preserved (archaeological) traces are concerned. Furthermore this phenomenon has surfaced only after the *Rrom* have been living in the region for at least 600 years, without any archaeological visibility! Clearly they did not cause the political changes themselves and not only socio-political circumstances or 'fashions',⁴³ but especially time and place are decisive in determining who can, wants or needs to express status, in which way and when, and obviously also what we would see of the traces archaeologically at any given time later on.

41 Verdery 1983, 134–135, with evidence for such conspicuous and lavish consumption by the nobles given on pp. 156–159.

42 Sherratt 1995, 39 note 51; Joffe 1998, 307; N. Boroffka and R. Boroffka 2012–2013.

43 For an interesting study about changes in the structure and ideological background of some historical cemeteries in America, without major political shifts, see McGuire 1988.

3 Conclusion

I would therefore like to close with the questions: Which elite do we actually see in our archaeological ‘royal’ burials, and who is really depositing the hoards, for whatever reason that may have been done?

Certainly for Romania, where mostly ‘monolithic’ cultures, usually poorly or not at all defined, have been discussed for most of Prehistory,⁴⁴ the old models need to be revised. Often and especially, but by no means only, in south-eastern Europe ‘foreign’ materials have been discussed for establishing chronological connections or cultural contacts of exchange/trade.⁴⁵ However, they could also be taken as indications for multiple ‘cultures’ cohabitating in certain regions and periods.

I shall mention just two examples from Romania:

In the Early Bronze Age, or more precisely around 2500 BC, in south-eastern Transylvania (and of course beyond) we find burials of the Globular Amphora culture, the Schneckenberg culture and the Monteoru culture within the same microregion, in addition to finds in settlements, where we further encounter influences from other cultures quite far away, such as Corded Ware/Bell Beakers, Nagyrév/Hatvan and Aunjetitz/Únětice. There are thus at least three ‘local cultures’ burying their deceased in one and the same area simultaneously and strong influences (if we do not directly want to consider these as other people) of three more distant ones in the settlements, perhaps indicating high mobility.⁴⁶ A similar situation appears to have existed elsewhere at the same time, as has recently been reinforced for a slightly later period in Poland.⁴⁷

For the Late Bronze Age the idea of more than just one group occupying a given area at a specific time had already been put forward by Hänsel for the Noua culture in Romania.⁴⁸ This idea was extended by Popa and Boroffka based on the Noua culture settlement of Țichindeal, where participation of the Wietenberg, Monteoru, Bistreț-Ișalnița and channeled Hallstatt pottery cultures is documented.⁴⁹ In this case the people of the Noua settlement, who are traditionally presumed to have been highly mobile (!), may have included some others, or at least have had intense contacts, demonstrating once more several groups living contemporaneously in the same space.

A Neolithic example of recently identified different population groups living together is Arbon Bleiche 3 in Switzerland, dated to 3384–3370 BC. Although architecture and plant uses appear to be the same throughout the settlement there are elements of pottery which appear ‘foreign’. Originally these were interpreted as representing outside

44 For a critical discussion of the ‘concepts’ of culture, cultural aspect, group etc. in Romania see Motzoi-Chicideanu 2011, 673–682.

45 Motzoi-Chicideanu 1995, with older literature.

46 Motzoi-Chicideanu 2011, under the respective cultures, each with further literature.

47 Pokutta 2013, 185–186, 195–200, with further literature.

48 B. Hänsel 1976, 67–68.

49 Popa and N. Boroffka 1996.

cultural influences or varying technological traditions. Especially the detailed analysis of the osteological remains from stockbreeding and fishing, as well as dietary preferences, very convincingly demonstrate two different population groups within the same time period and site. The situation is now interpreted as illustrating a local group on the one hand and newcomers from the east on the other, both living in two spatially separate parts of one and the same settlement and (partly) practicing different resource management. Although the differences are observable, the co-habitation was apparently peaceful and eventually led to technology exchange between the two groups.⁵⁰ Bronze Age migrations or the presence of ‘foreigners’ have indeed repeatedly been discussed by archaeologists, including the question of interactions between the south-east European zone and Greece.⁵¹ Especially in the Iron Age the apparent presence of foreigners becomes much more frequently remarked and covers larger distances. The Noric-Pannonian influence during the early Roman Iron Age in Germany,⁵² ‘alien’ women ‘given’, even across the sea, in order to establish or reinforce high status contacts (which elites do we see?!) in the Adriatic region,⁵³ or other ‘alien’ women in the late Iron Age (Xiongnu) cemetery of Ivolga in Transbaikaliya⁵⁴ may serve as a few examples. Motzenbäcker has discussed similar situations for the Caucasus, a region today very heterogeneous ethnically, warning against too hasty interpretations of ‘foreigners’ and ‘invasive migrations’.⁵⁵ For Antiquity we may remember the *μέτοικος* from Greece, a term which denoted a foreigner, usually also Greek, established permanently in the city (especially Athens), but without citizens’ rights and thus without political say, who paid a special tax (*μετοίκιον*) for some degree of state protection. The *μέτοικος* could not buy land and was therefore mostly active in commerce and crafts. Foreigners of the Middle Ages have been extensively studied by Brather, who gives a wide range of examples of ethnically heterogeneous populations, much helped by textual sources.⁵⁶ Thus we see *foreigners* in many various parts of the Old World and probably could identify such cases for all time periods.

A somewhat lateral question here, as already remarked by Brather, is that mostly women are considered as *foreign*. This may well be a specifically western point of view, although there are a few examples where the man is taken to be the *alien*.⁵⁷

50 Capitani and Leuzinger 1998; Jacomet, Leuzinger, and Schibler 2004; Doppler et al. 2011.

51 Hüttel 1980; B. Hänsel 1981, each with older literature.

52 Bemmann 1999.

53 Teržan 1995, especially 95–100.

54 Brosseder 2007.

55 Motzenbäcker 1997.

56 Brather 2004, for the question posed here especially section 13, on foreigners, ‘minorities’ and ethnically heterogeneous populations, pp. 276–322.

57 E. g. in a brief note by Wels-Weyrauch 1989. – Hüttel 1980, although not directly stated, appears to consider a male foreigner as owner of the unusual harness from Tiryns. Pokutta 2013, 183 also identified one of the immigrant groups in the Únětice culture of Silesia as men, remarkably mostly of (presumed) high status!

In most of the cases treated by archaeologists mentioned above the 'foreigners' are either taken as isolated presences (albeit in the case of some 'given' women regular), indications of commercial or exchange contacts, or even as proof of (invasive) migrations, which soon led to the replacement or restructuring of the preceding 'cultures'. There is, especially for the prehistoric periods, not much consideration of the possible existence of several 'cultures' together at the same time and in the same space.

A multicultural and/or multiethnic background in Prehistory, in my opinion, needs to be considered much more acutely than is being done at present.

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