

BOOK REVIEW

Koranyi, James, and Emily Hanscam, eds. *Digging Politics: The Ancient Past and Contested Present in East-Central Europe*

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Nora Berend

University of Cambridge
nb213@cam.ac.uk

This volume of collected articles treating diverse specific case studies offers insights into the political uses of archeology from the interwar period until the present. Emily Hanscam and James Koranyi's introduction describes the main aims of the collection: to investigate how the ancient past is used to make nationalist claims in the present. The volume clearly demonstrates how archeology has supplied material "evidence" for national myths and claims to territory. This includes the alleged "primacy" of one population over another and the various myths of a population's origins. The book focuses on two central questions: Why then and why there did the ancient past become important? It demonstrates that crises in the present, particularly those involving conflicts of identity, are fertile breeding grounds for (re)interpreting the past. The editors emphasize that the geographical area in the focus of the articles "is not any more obsessed with memory politics and the ancient past than comparable regions" (4). Political history, rather than the essential characteristic of a supposed "historical region," explains the significance given to the past.

Articles range from the uses of Thracian archeology in museum exhibits in communist Bulgaria (Florian-Jan Ostrowski) to the impact of the *Game of Thrones* on touristic reimaginings of Dubrovnik (Christoph Doppelhofer). Some of the contributions also show the transnational nature of using the deep mythical past for identity politics that can even unite old foes, such as homophobic political discourse in both Hungary and Romania (Radu Cinpoș) or the insistence on Balkan antiquities toward UNESCO (Bogdan C. Iacob). Changing ideological frameworks, such as Polish-German antagonism before 1945 replaced by the socialist brotherhood of Poland and East Germany after the war, did not necessarily put an end to all continuities in research, as shown, for example, by "Slavic studies" in the two countries (Anne Kluger), as well as the "Slavic idea" among Polish intellectuals during the communist period (Matthias E. Cichon).

The ongoing production of unscientific myths under the guise of research, fostered by the Hungarian government through the institutions it funds, that by now constitute a parallel "research" framework, is perceptively criticized by Katrin Kremmler, focusing on the bogus Hun-Hungarian continuity. Ironically, the ancient past, even if appealing archeological vestiges of it remain, can also be ignored in nationalist renderings of the past when it does not serve the presentist aims of such constructs, as is the case of the Roman Mithraeum at Fertőrákos, which, despite its inclusion in the list of UNESCO world heritage sites, remained sidelined both in the communist and post-communist eras (Melinda Harlov-Csörtány).

Four articles concentrate on Romania, encompassing different chronological periods. The interwar development of a discourse on Dacian autochthonous ancestors, which had a long afterlife, is explained in the context of connections to the German philosophy of Hegel, Heidegger, and Nietzsche and Orthodox spirituality, as part of a Romanian "way of being" that its propagators had believed was essential for a small nation in Europe (Alexander Rubel). Claudia Spiridon-Șerbu reveals how history textbooks in the Nicolae Ceaușescu era used the history of the Transylvanian Saxons to build Romanian national identity. Gheorghe Alexandru Niculescu queries why nationalism survives

in Romanian archeology, highlighting the weight of research traditions. Finally, Emily Hanscam investigates the uses made of the “Age of Migrations,” defined as c. 300–1000 CE, in nationalist narratives that are still current. In nationalist writings, the autochthonous “Daco-Romans” managed to hide and preserve their ethnic and cultural identity from the invading barbarians; Hanscam challenges this view using archeological evidence. She also proposes how “deep” belonging could be fostered without recourse to mythical continuity.

What is at stake when it comes to uses of the past is not merely academic. Even when scholarship has moved on from nationalist myth, public opinion can remain stubbornly attached to it. Today’s scholars are not merely involved in debating theses for the sake of the advancement of knowledge; they must also counter prevalent untruths that claim a scientific origin. This is exemplified in this volume through the brief foray by Alexander Rubel from being a dispassionate scholar into writing as an engaged citizen: “While studying the issues presented here, I became increasingly worried and disgusted by the incredible amount of nationalist and racist rubbish in Romanian pages on the internet. Unfortunately, most of the racist and nationalist bloggers, who go beyond any limits of common sense and decency, refer exactly to those intellectual titans of the Interwar Period whom I have presented While I have tried in this paper to be relatively neutral and descriptive in presenting the effects of a difficult legacy, it still needs to be evaluated in a more critical manner, perhaps *cum ira et studio*” (282).