Cultural studies

ATTITUDES TOWARDS PREHISTORIC OBJECTS IN ROMANIAN FOLK CULTURE (19TH-20TH CENTURY)

Alexandru OFRIM
Universitatea din București/ University of Bucharest

e-mail: ofrimalexandru@gmail.com

Abstract: *In the present study we intend to reconstruct the attitudes of Romanian peasants towards the vestiges of prehistoric material culture. They have been in contact with a diversity of prehistoric artefacts: polished and perforated stone axes, silex arrow tips, chisels, scrapers, spindle whorls, jewellery, etc. We try to find answers to the following questions: What people thought about the origin of prehistoric artefacts? What meanings were associated with such artefacts? What was their place in the collective imaginary? Which were the uses of these objects?*
Key words: archaeology; popular beliefs; collective imaginary; prehistoric artefacts; thunderstones; magical practices.

The historicity of the collective memory has long been a debated matter in the Romanian folkloristics, being admitted that some information about the past is preserved in folk narratives: historical legends, epic songs. (Simionescu 1983:113-114). According to the rules of collective memory, these historical memories are projected into a mythical time, thus becoming exemplary, archetypal. The reduction of the facts to a mythical pattern explains the ahistorical dimension of the representation of the past in traditional oral communities.

The imaginary of the past time is revealed in traditions and etiological legends, which intend to explain some particularities of the landscape and especially the presence of old dwelling traces: mounds, tumuli, roads, megaliths, mottes, citadel ruins, etc. When asked about their origin, Romanian peasants would answer without exception that these places date back to „Jews" time or to the „giants" time, which were supposed to live before the Flood, a widely spread mythical motif in Romanian area (see Șăineanu 2003: 123-138; Pamfile 2002: 195-211).

In the responses to the 1871 Alexandru Odobescu's archaeological questionnaire, the primary school teachers mentioned these mythical origins when referring to the vestiges in their areas. For example:

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> Digging a hole of a fathom at the foot of a hill, they found several small stone and big brick walls, as well as very big and two-finger thick potsherds. This means that this place was an ancient settlement or a place from the times of the Giants or the Jews. (Șăineanu 2003:127).

The current Romanian territory displays a great abundance and variety of archaeological materials, of artefacts belonging to past times. There are also prehistoric vestiges such as, weapons, microlithic tools, jewellery, Stone Age household effects, well represented all over the country (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic cultures: Boian, Cucuteni, Hamangia, Gumelnița, and many other). These were either accidentally dug out during agriculture works or found scattered on fields or in the gravel of rivers. Romanian peasants have been in contact with a diversity of prehistoric artefacts: polished and perforated stone axes, silex arrow tips, chisels, scrapers, spindle whorls, jewellery, etc. In the present study we intend to reconstruct the attitude of the past society towards these vestiges of prehistoric material culture. What people thought about their origin? What meanings were associated with such artefacts? What was their place in the collective imaginary? Were they abandoned right after their discovery, or, on the contrary, they were carefully kept? Which were the uses of these objects?

The information regarding the status of these prehistoric objects discovered by the Romanian peasants is few and scattered. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century some ethnographers and folklorists mention them, but they are barely present later on. This topic has never been systematically investigated, and has not been approached by ethnologists in their field work.

Gheorghe Șincai was the first writer who mentioned how Romanian peasants used these prehistoric artefacts. His book, *Învăţătură firească spre surparea superstiţiilor norodului*/*Reasonable Teaching to Sap People's Superstitions* is, in fact, Reverend Johann Helmuth's *Volks Naturlehre Zur Dämpfung des Aberglaubens* (1786), a volume written for German peasants, translated and adapted to the reality of the Romanian villages in Transylvania. The „thunderstones" are among the „false beliefs" of the Romanian peasants that Șincai mentioned and argued against. It was considered that lightning brought these stones down on the face of the earthby lightning:

> Therefore, all the amazing powers these [stones] are invested with, such as, the lightning will not strike the house where there are such stones, the cows which are under spell will get their milk back if

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> their udders are rubbed with a thunderstone or if they are milked through the hollow of this stone. (Șincai 1964:151).

Following the rationalist trend of his time, Șincai clarifies for the peasants' understanding that these thunderstones are nothing but „ancient tools" from the time when the iron ore was not yet processed The Enlightenment scholar directs his attention to the belief in the celestial origin of the ancient objects, as well as to their apotropaic (their presence protects the house against lightning) and magical use (the cows whose milk was dried up by the malefic rituals of witches, will get their milk back). This proves that such representations were deeply rooted in the Romanian village of the 18th century. In fact, similar beliefs in the apotropaic force of these objects, i.e. to protect the house against lightning were also present among the Saxons in Transylvania. (Wlislocki 1893:98, 114).

After almost a century, in an article published in 1870, the poet Cezar Bolliac, a keen collector of antiquities, whose name is linked to the beginning of the Romanian archaeology, creates a typology of the stone objects found in Romania. He mentions numerous spindle whorls (disc-like stones, with a hole in the middle fitted onto the lower part of the spindle), perforated stones used as weights for fishing nets or for the loom threads, and the stone arrow tips:

> In order not to mislead those who are searching among wide and perforated stones, I must distinguish the ones found in riverbeds, with the soft part naturally perforated by a spring or by a fast waterflow which in time penetrates it forming a hole, sometimes a very even one. The peasants who find these stones call them «stones used by the rainbow to drink water». (…) And it is highly likely that women of yore used for therequirements of their households even the stone perforated by water often foundon water beds. (…) Stone arrows can be found around here and the peasants' simplicity call them «thunder arrows». (Bolliac 1956: 271).

Elena Niculiță-Voronca was the first to mention in the ethnographic literature the use of the prehistoric artefacts. In her collection published in 1903, the author includes the belief found in province of Bucovina that the rainbow drinks water from rivers and ponds at its both ends through perforated stones.

> The rainbow drinks water through a pierced pebble. When people find the pebble through which the rainbow drank water, pick it up and cherish it and hand it down from father to son. It is good for milking the cow, three times crosswise, when there is blood in milk; it is good for charms against quinsy, against goiter – they blow over the

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> pebble and place it on the swelling. And when the cow calves, if the cow is milked through that pebble and the cow and the calf are washed with that milk and drink that milk, nothing will harm them. (Niculiță-Voronca 1998: 201).

We can identify here a few constitutive elements of the prehistoric objects perception (which will also appear later): they are precious goods, heirlooms; they belong to the magic therapeutic inventory (they are among the props used in charms); they have an apotropaic role, casting away malefic influences (it is worth noting that they have the same use as the spindle whorls in Șincai's description: a cow is milked through the hole in the stone).

In the summer of 1907, George Coșbuc sees an amulet around the neck of a girl in Gorj county: „a bit reddish flint tip of an arrow. The little girl knew from her parents that the "precious" thing worn wrapped in a fragrant Melittis leaf placed in a small red baize bag is the pebble which falls down from the sky when the thunder strikes and is a good luck charm." (Coșbuc 1907:15).

Then, the writer remembers that when he was a child, he was looking for the „thunder stone" together with other children in the village of Hordou (in Northern Transylvania) on a flat land on the hill close to his house.

> A neighbour, an old man had seen the lightning struck that flat land, and after the storm he went to look for the stone fallen from the sky. We, the children, flocking after him. And to seem busy, we were also searching, and to us any pebble looking somehow different seemed to be the real one. But the old man, I know, was familiar with this type of pebble, and with all our drive to get this huge job done, we didn't find anything that the old man liked and we left the things messed up. What exactly the thunderstone is, I never found out from the people in our village, as they didn't know it themselves. Some had only heard about it, others had also seen it, the most boastful ones had found it. But there was nobody in our village to have it. They were only saying that it falls down from the sky when lightning strikes. (…) Later on, when I was studying at those high schools, I found out that it's not only in our village that lightning brings pebbles from the sky, but all over the world, and that it was not only one old man like our neighbour that was trying to find it. (Coșbuc 1907: 16).

Coșbuc quotes Pliny the Elder in order to show that this belief was also present in the Greek-Roman world, and not only: "It is strange that this superstition, which intoxicated Europe until last century, is also found in China and Japan, and in Africa." (Coșbuc 1907:18). Following Gheorghe Șincai's example, Coșbuc addresses the peasants with a scientific explanation for the origin of these objects:

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> It is astonishing that this thunderstone always resembles a tool, an axe, a knife, an arrow; sometimes it is a hammer, or a file, or a chisel, and sometimes it is an awl and needle and some other things. It is as if somebody played up there in the clouds and imagined tools, all made of flint, some are rougher, while others are such a pleasant sight, all polished and nicely cut. And uneducated people search for them and wonder where these come from and what they are, and believe that only thunder could chisel flint so nicely. (Coșbuc 1907:18).

More comprehensive information could be found in Gheorghe F. Ciaușanu's *Superstițiile poporului roman în asemănare cu ale altor popoare vechi și noi/The Superstitions of the Romanian People in Comparison with Those of Other Old and New Peoples* (1914). In the chapter dedicated to lightning and thunder, Ciaușanu mentions a belief he had collected:

> In Vâlcea, people believe that those iron or bronze arrows having a certain form, which can be found in the dirt fell from the sky. Such an arrow should be washed three times in water, and its rust together with the water it was washed in is given to the person with back twinges. It is said that when they fall from the sky, they go 9 fathoms underground, and each year go up one fathom, so they reach the face of the earth after 9 years. (Ciaușanu 2007: 178).

The same belief in the thaumaturgic properties of the „thunderstones" and in their progressively upward movement in the soil can be found in France and Germany, as Ciaușanu mentions quoting different ethnographic sources. In Artur Gorovei's *Credințe și superstiții ale poporului roman/Beliefs and Superstitions of the Romanian People* (1915) there is a short note about identifying prehistoric objects with "thunder stones" in the village of Țepu, Tecuci: „While ploughing or weeding, farmers find arrow tips, a sort of black silex, which are nothing but remains of a thunderbolt." (Gorovei 1995:232).

In his turn, Tudor Pamfile, in his book on representations of the air, briefly mentions that in the south of Moldova, „the tongue of the thunder" is considered to be „an iron arrow found in the dirt by people working the land or digging, or in some other occasions. These arrows are used in the charm against „pangs" (stabbing headaches – A.O.'s note) and against other illnesses." (Pamfile 1917:74).

The rich material in Traian Gherman's *Meteorologie populară/Folk Meteorology* (1928) also mentions the beliefs about lightning, seen as a weapon, an arrow used by God or Saint Elijah to punish the devils. In Năsăud county, they believed that lightning was not only fire, but also a sharp stone

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shaped like a scythe honing stone, thrown by Saint Elijah at the devils. In Apuseni Mountains, God Himself is the one who punishes the sinners with this honing stone which „goes down underground for a few fathoms. It has magical power: if somebody takes it out, they will be healed by any illnesses, only by touching it." (Gherman 1928:88). This stone brings luck and is really sought-after:

> Those who have such a stone will be lucky all their life, they keep it as a precious thing and wear it as an amulet. It is not uncommon for those who see the lightning on a flat land or in a lake to go and search for this precious stone. (Gherman 1928:89).

In order to have the complete image of the attitude towards the „thunderstone" we will next mention Grig Teodosiu, the primary school teacher who signs the article *Săgeata trăsnetului/The Lightning Arrow* in „Izvorașul" magazine, in 1935. In the evening of June 22nd, 1934, lightning strikes the yard of his house in Bucharest and leaves visible traces in the soil. A few days after this event, he hires a peasant from Ialomița to chop the woods he had in the yard and shows him the place where lightning had struck. The following dialogue takes place:

> - And haven't you dug deeper, Sir? – What for? Isn't it enough that the lightning messed up my place? Why should I mess it up even more? –Well, to find the thunder arrow!" Surprised, the author of the article asks for explanations: „When lightning strikes, it doesn't come without a burning arrow. God sends it from the sky, to kill the Devil. (…) More than this, the lighting is so strong that the arrow is buried in the ground. If you dig, you can find it, sometimes two metres deep, or five metres or even deeper." Then, the peasant recounts what happened in his village when people dug ten metres down where the lighting had struck and found a stone „like the stones for sharpening scythes. It was made of flint, polished on both sides and sharpened at both ends." It has the power to heal all sorts of illnesses: „stabbing pains, fever, falling sickness, and more other. Those who have such a tool, are rich. People from all over the world would come to you to heal their diseases and you would be rich, really! – Well, but how can you heal with its help? – You put the arrow on the aching spot, like a poultice, you leave it there for a few minutes or you leave it there until the illness is out of the body. And you must know that the pain just vanishes. (Teodosiu 1935: 299-301).

Noticing the teacher's disbelief, he asks for permission to dig the garden himself, but he is not allowed to do it.

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Among other goals, the Monographic school between the two World Wars intended to restore the Romanian peasants' worldview, their ways of explaining the natural phenomena. Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția, who participated in the monographic campaigns in Drăguș (1929, 1932, 1938), published the findings of the research in 1940: *Gospodăria în credințele și riturile magice ale femeilor din Drăguș (Făgăraș)/The Household in the Magic Beliefs and Rites of Women from Drăguş (Făgăraş)*. From the very first chapter, dedicated to cosmological elements, the author considers that the natural environment favourable to human habitat marked the magical representations and practices:

> To give an example, the representation of «the fairy ones» (*iele*, A.O.'s note), maybe the most interesting representation of the region, the special feature of «the fairies' stones» - some nicely shaped and pierced stones – which is believed to remain on the places where these beautiful girls had danced, is connected with this type of stones, proof of prehistoric life in these regions. The unusual appearance of these stones struck people's imagination.
>
> Therefore, a series of healing magical practices were created, in which the fairies' stones» hold an important place. These practices are very often met in the households in Drăguș. (Cristescu-Golopenția 2002: 39-40). Two images of such prehistoric artefacts are included. (see fig.1 and Fig. 2)

One of the female informants from Drăguș village mentions the objects left by the *iele* on their dancing place:

> These holy girls leave something on the ground on the place where they dance, the fairies' stones: a stone axe, a scythe, the little carriage they play with, a stone cross and some stone beads. 'Cause where they dance pierced stones remain, nice ones. And these are made by the fairies, as if they were made by a human being. Why would they be polished like this?" (Cristescu-Golopenția 2002: 65).

It is interesting the presence of the carriage among these objects. It is the carriage they are playing with. One of their attributes is that they fly in a carriage. (Șăineanu, 2012:.65-129). We find this representation in the responses to Nicolae Densușianu's questionnaires:

> Beautiful girls play the clarinet and dance, but they cannot be seen, they have carriages with wheels and hammers made out of stone. When people find pierced stones and stone hammers they say that the «the fairy ones, the wonderful ones» lost them. (Fochi 1974:144)

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The presence of the stone carriages, believed to have been left by the *iele* as a sign of their passing, could be explained using a category of objects from the Neolithic and the Bronze Age: many votive carts (probably used in funeral rites symbolising the sun) discovered on Romanian territory: small carts made of clay and later of bronze, with two or four wheels, with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures, belonging to Cucuteni, Gârla-Mare, Wietenberg (in the south-east of Transylvania) (See Bichir 1964:67–86, Schuster 1996: 117–137) archaeological cultures. We could infer that these miniature carts discovered by peasants were considered to belong to the *iele*.

In Drăguș, the most feared disease was the one caused by the *iele*. They harm (causing limbs paralysis) those people who sleep outside at night or who step on the place where they danced. The remedy is „bathing" the suffering person in the untouched water filtered through those stones. The „bathing" is done only by old women before dawn. „You put those stones one on top of the other, you pour the water from a pitcher and count backwards (pour the water three times). You pour the water through the stones into another clean pot." (Cristescu-Golopenția 2002:122).

Adrian Fochi records a similar practice: those harmed by the *iele* can be cured if they drink the water poured through „the bead of the holy ones". "It seems that such a bead was found in the village of Nisipi-Vâlcea and the ill people are trying to obtain water poured through it, but it is very difficult to get it although there are no charges for it." (Fochi 1975:144).

In Vlădești village, to stop nose bleeding it was used a „stone struck by lightning (pierced by lightning), and three drops of blood must be poured through the hole of the stone." (Ciubotaru 2003:198).

In the middle of the 20th century, in Bihor county, in order to make the delivery of the baby easier, women in labour are given to drink water in which a „lightning arrow" had been washed. This arrow can be found where lightning strikes. „When lightning strikes an arrow plunges down the ground and stays buried for seven years before going out." (Pavelescu 1954:59-60).

Researcher Gheorghe Pavelescu saw such an arrow, dark blue, sphere-like, 2 cm in diameter, and similar to glass crystal. „The lightning arrow" is also mentioned in Almăj area. They would dig at the roots of a tree struck by lightning: „If, by any chance, there was quartz sand, quartz crystal could be formed. People called it "the arrow of the lightning". For locals, this crystal was considered a divine sign, and families kept it in secret." (Andrei 2015:128). It was given to those who went to fight in the war, after uttering the following charm: „Arrow, arrow, / Fallen from the sky, / Brought by the wind, / To us on the earth. / Protect … (the name) / Against fire, against war, / Bring him back / In one piece, as pure, / As strained silver." (Andrei 2015:128).

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Consequently, we have to add another detail here: the category of „lightning arrows" covers not only man-made products, but also natural ones. When lightning strikes a sandy area, containing silica, the high temperature vitrifies the place of the impact, creating a tube-like stone, a little translucent, a sort of natural glass (fulgurite or ceraunite in mineralogy). Another natural phenomenon is the meteorites vaporizing in the atmosphere and reaching the ground as small fragments looking like polished river pebbles, shaped like arrows or discs (aerolite, impactite, tektite). (Anestin 1910-1912:163-167). This natural phenomenon was definitely the one which triggered the beliefs regarding the celestial nature of the prehistoric objects and the connection between gods of thunder or other mythical creatures and the weapons and tools they throw down on the face of the earth.

The motif of „thunderstones" proved to be remarkably old and widely spread, being present from Antiquity to the modern time at all European peoples and also in other regions of the world (north Africa, Middle East, Far East). However, it can only be found in those areas where there was a transition from the Stone Age to the Metallic Ages, therefore it is not present on American continents, on most of the African continent, Australia and South Pacific.

In Roman Antiquity, these thunderstones (most of them prehistoric artefacts) were called *lapis fulminis* or *ceraunia* – from the Greek *keraunos* – lightning, and were considered to have celestial origin. The *ceraunia*e were highly appreciated, being considered magical objects, with apotropaic and thaumaturgic qualities. Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* mentions the „thunderstones which have the shape of stone axes and could be found where lightning strikes."(XXXVII, 51). Suetonius, in *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* writes that Emperor Augustus had an impressive collection of such prehistoric objects in his villa on the island of Capri. He believed that these objects had supernatural qualities. In Greek and Roman Antiquity, the same beliefs were circulating at the level of the masses, these stones being used as amulets, protecting houses and people against lightning. (Faraone 2014: 257-248).

It is curios that neither Greek historians nor Roman ones were interested in the past history of human kind, in monuments and prehistoric material vestiges, although lithic artefacts have always been discovered. (Trigger 1998:307-308). It was only Lucretius who mentioned the stone weapons in *On the Nature of Things:*

> Now, in what manner the nature of iron was found, it is easy for you to learn of yourself, Memmius. Their arms of old were hands, nails, and teeth, and stones, and discovered, likewise branches torn from the forests, and flame and fires, when once they were known.

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> Thereafter, the strength ofiron and bronze was discovered. (V, II, 1255).

The tradition of *cerauniae*'s celestial origin was transmitted from the authors of antiquity (especially Pliny the Elder) to the Christian scholars of the Middle Ages, this transfer also taking place at the level of the masses. The meteorology and mineralogy treatises, the books on natural history (Agricola, Conrad Gessner, etc), the owners of cabinets of curiosities considered all these prehistoric objects to be artefacts which appeared as a result of the lightning, and not as human creations. This opinion persisted in spite of the fact that such artefacts were discovered in tombs, next to human skeletons, or that they clearly showed the human intervention. The worldview of the Middle Ages and, implicitly, the knowledge about the past were dominated by the principle of Bible's authority, the only reliable source for the origin of humanity. According to the holy text, the inventor of metallurgy was Tubal-Cain, Cain's great-grandson (*Genesis*, 4, 22), very close to the moment of Genesis. Therefore, there could not have been a different world before the Biblical creation.

The first scholar who came up with the idea that these objects were man-made was the Italian scientist Michele Mercati (1541-1593), after realising that the weapons and tools of the New World aborigines are very similar to the *cerauniae* considered to be of supranatural origin. In the 16th and 18th centuries, after the great geographical discoveries, the status of these objects changed as the Europeans met the archaic societies where stone weapons and tools were used, in the absence of metallurgy. In fact, the new discourse about prehistoric objects belonging to *cerauniae*, the "thunderstones", appeared together with the beginning of archaeology as a modern science (See Gaudet 2007: 97-112; Goodrum 2008: 482-508).

In rural and urban milieus, the old collective representations associated with the remains of the prehistoric material culture remain unchanged until late in the second half of the 20th century. Here are the names given to "thunderstone" in Europe: „*pierre de foudre*" or „*pierre de tonnerre*" - France, „*pietra di fulmine*" – Italy, „*piedras de rayo*" – Spain, „*donnerstein*" – Germany, „*Thorensten*" – Sweden, „*astralopeleki*" – Greece, „*gromovaiastrela*" – Russia, „*piorunowyklin*" – Poland, „*Perkuno Akmuo*" – Lithuania, „*rai-funoseki*" – Japan, etc.

Edward Taylor, one of the founders of cultural anthropology, is the first to open the study of beliefs about the „thunderstone", in his comparison between the prehistoric societies and the „primitive" ones. Here is the British scholar's opinion on the widely spread myth of the celestial origin of the prehistoric artefacts:

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> With regard, then, to ideas of thunderbolts as furnishing evidence of an early Stone Age, it may be laid down that such a myth, when we can be sure that it refers to artificial stone implements, proves that such things were found by a people who, being possessed of metal, had forgotten the nature and use of these rude instruments of earlier times. (Tylor 1865:225).

> Unlike Tylor whose sources of information were exclusively bookish, Émile Cartailhac brings his own experience as archaeologist and good knowledge of magical beliefs and practices in the rural French world. The French peasants refuse to sell Neolithic axes which are heirlooms and are believed to protect their household. He recounts that a couple of peasants sold a stone axe to an archaeologist. „But it was a terrible storm during that night and, the next day, the man and the woman hurried back and asked for the amulet, saying that they had not slept a wink all night, fearing for the fate of their animals."(Cartailhac 1877:19).

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the French folklorists were interested in the study of heathen surviving practices, in magical and religious facts, considering not only folkloric texts, but also some aspects of material culture. In *Le Folklore de France*, (volume I, *Le ciel et la terre*, 1904), Paul Sébillot, the author of an extended survey for recording and systematic classifying folkloric culture items, describes a practice generally spread in rural France, i.e. prehistoric stone axes were incorporated into the foundations of the houses and in the walls, placed under the threshold or oven, in order to protect them against lightnings (they were even put up in the church towers, as a sort of lightning rod!). Almost all the houses in a place in Haute-Bretagne has a stone axe in the hearth, for protection. They were kept in pockets during storms, with the phrase: „Pierre, pierre, garde-moi de tonnerre". (Sébillot 1904:81). Another survey on the „prehistoric folklore" (and on „thunderstones") in France was conducted by Paul Saintyves, an important French folklorist. (Saintyves 1936).

Lastly, we would like to mention Christian Blinkenberg, the Danish archaeologist who gathers all the information accessible by that moment (1911), thus drawing up the first synthesis on the „thunderstone". *The Thunderweapon in Religion and Folklore. A study in Comparative Archeology*. He went through a lot of information referring to the mythological representations of the lightening and of „thunderstones" (in the Mycenaean civilisation, then in Ancient Greece, for Etruscans and Romans, in folk traditions of different European peoples and of peoples on other continents) and suggested a set of universal constant features: 1. The stones fall from the sky carried down by lightning which buries them deep into the

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ground, to come up to the surface after a certain time; 2. They are included in the apotropaic practices meant to protect the buildings against lightning (it is believed everywherethat lightning never strikes the same place twice), are worn as amulets during storms (see Fig.3); 3. Are used in therapeutic magic for treating people's and animals' illnesses. (Blinkenberg 1911: 64-67)

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Nobody believes nowadays in the celestial origin of the prehistoric objects, and the magical, apotropaic and thaumaturgic practices, so often met in the Romanian villages in the past, have been abandoned. The information we have about „thunderstones" comes exclusively from the folkloric and ethnographic material collected at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, from the responses to questionnaires (about folklore and history), as well as from field campaigns. We believe that data about these prehistoric objects - both intriguing and fascinating – could be found in archaeologists' works. For example, three prehistoric stone artefacts were discovered during the excavation of the Mithraic temple (third century A.D.) in Alba Iulia (ancient town Apulum, in Dacia, province of the Roman Empire). Acccordig to archeologist Aurel Rustoiu:

> the presence of these stone tools is not related to any Palaeolithic or Neolithic settlement from the site or its vicinity, since noother prehistoric finds, structures or layers were discovered during the archaeological excavations in the area (…).The flint tools found in the area of the Mithraeum at Alba Iulia are too small to beused as fire-making instruments. Thus, the reason for their reuse as «discovered objects» has to be discussed by taking into consideration other practices that are related to the magical world (…).They were perceived as an effective means of protecting the owners or various constructions (houses, temples etc) against the devastating effects of lightning. In this context, the three flint tools found in the area of the Mithraeum III could have also had this "practical" function. (Rustoiu, 2018: 483-484).

While documenting the present article, I came across a note in a report from the archaeological excavations in Călinești-Oaș, in 1962. The archaeologists followed the locals who showed them where the „flint and the thunderstone" were, finding there silex tools and weapons from Palaeolithic. (Bitiri 1970:24). Therefore, the oral, folkloric tradition informed about the existence of artefacts in an archaeological site.

The complex phenomenon of „thunderstones" should benefit from an interdisciplinary approach, at the convergence area between cultural anthropology and archaeology. The international archaeology literature mentions numerous cases of prehistoric objects (stone axes) discovered in

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secondary contexts, due to their apotropaic use as „thunderstones" built in houses walls or foundation. These objects appeared during archaeological excavations or during the restauration of those buildings. (Carelli 1997: 393–417). For the present study we do not intend to identify in Romania such cases of prehistoric objects mentioned in excavation reports or in restauration documents. We can just presume that there might be such situations. In Estonia it is considered that 8% of the Neolithic stone axes discovered there come from secondary contexts or from private collections. (Johanson2006:119).

We would also like to mention that in Romania there are many village museums, school museums and private collections, very similar to those cabinets of curiosities, where archaeological items (accidentally discovered or gathered from the peasants' households) could be found next to ethnographic objects. (Mateescu 2009:51-71). Future research endeavours should find out whether these prehistoric artefacts (axes, spindle whorls, etc.) have a story of their own, whether the memory of the objects is preserved, the circumstance of their discovery or their previous owners. All the elements mentioned above lead us to conclude that in the past, these objects had a different purpose, belonged to different long-gone mental horizons, like those which made possible the beliefs in „thunderstones".

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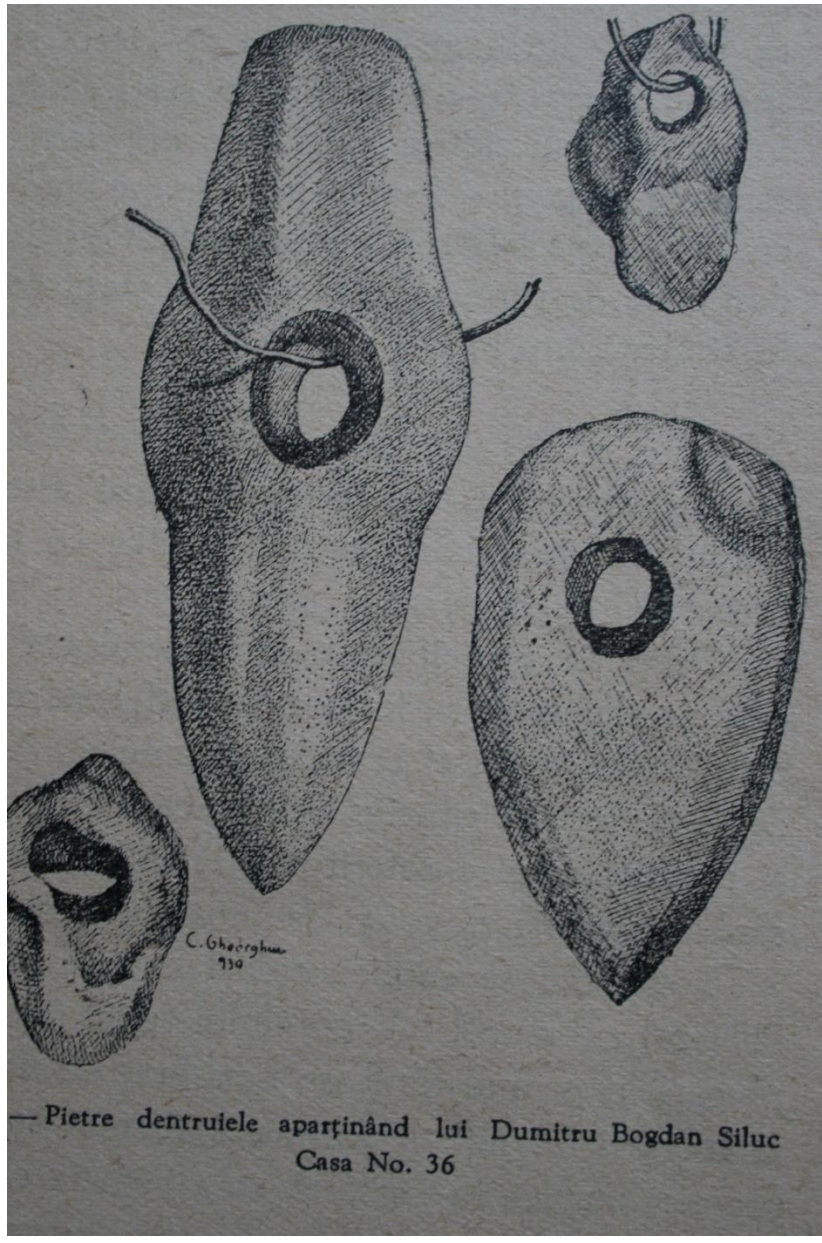

Fig. 1 Thunderstones from Drăguş, apud. Ștefania Cristescu – Golopenția, p. 40

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1. – Pietre dentruiele aparţinând Mariei lui Bacioc, Ulița Mare 133

Fig. 2. Thunderstones from Drăguș, apud Ștefania Cristescu – Golopenția, p. 41

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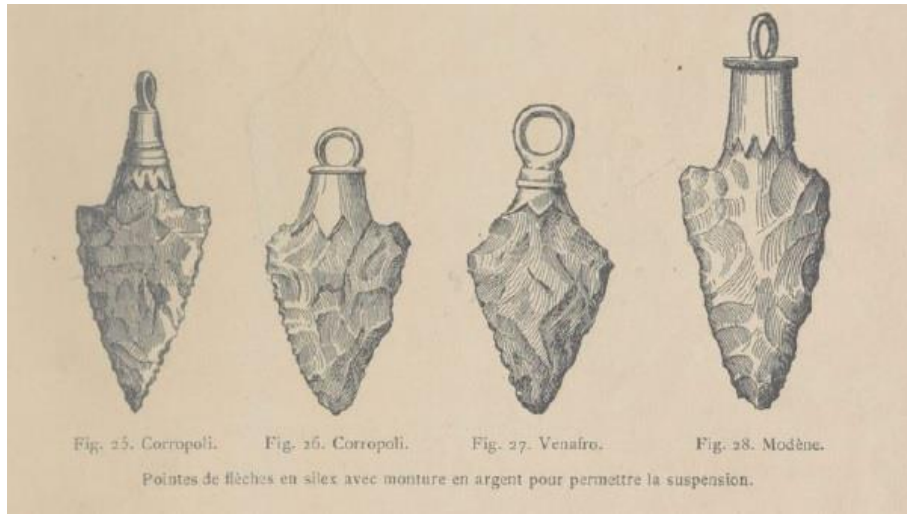

Fig. 3. Stone arrows as amulets (Italy), apud Cartailhac, p. 39

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