# Archaeology and Nationalism in Europe: Two case studies from the Northwest and Southeast of Europe
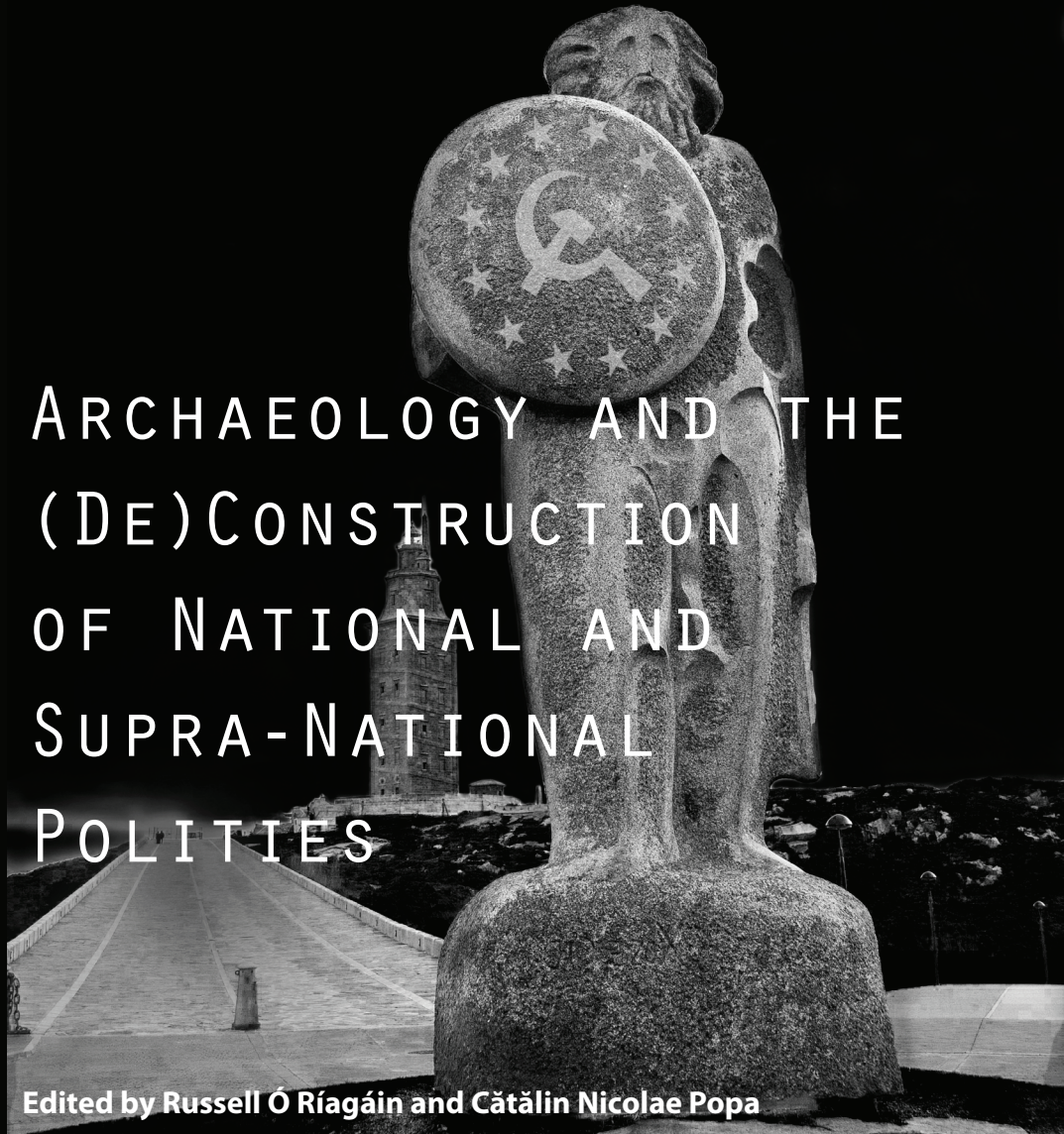
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# Archaeology and the (De)Construction of National and Supra-National Polities

Edited by Russell Ó Ríagáin and Cătălin Nicolae Popa

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**Volume 27.2 Archaeology and the (De)Construction of National and Supra-National Polities**

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# Archaeology and Nationalism in Europe: Two Case Studies from the Northwest and Southeast of Europe

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## Introduction

There is much to be gained from a comparison of the relationship between archaeology and nationalism in Ireland and Romania. A full examination of the relationship between nationalism, state formation and archaeology in both regions would best be the subject of a book rather than an article, but it is hoped that by focusing on certain salient aspects of the subject with regards to the case studies that some useful points can be made. The focus here will be on the utilization of certain episodes from the past in order to legitimate the state's existence both internally and externally.

Trigger (1984) points to the existence of a number of traditions within archaeology, namely nationalist, colonial and imperialist archaeologies. These are ideal types, however, and many archaeological traditions

contain elements of more than one (Trigger 1984: 358, 368). He notes that "most archaeological traditions are probably nationalistic in orientation" and that nationalist archaeology "is probably strongest amongst peoples who feel politically threatened, insecure or deprived of their collective rights" (Trigger 1984: 358). He also draws attention to the connections of this form of archaeology to history (Trigger 1984: 358), and that it "tends to draw attention to the more recent past…to the political and cultural achievements of ancient civilisations or other forms of complex societies" (Trigger 1984: 360). While Trigger points to Czech and Danish archaeology as being examples of the former especially (1984: 358), Ireland and Romania can be taken as further illustrative examples.

The wave of Romantic nationalism that swept through Europe in the nineteenth century did not leave either region untouched. The Early Modern Period had seen both regions lose local sovereignty, to the Ottoman Empire in the case of Romania, and to increasingly centralizing London governments in the case of Ireland. In a similar fashion to other areas suffering the vagaries of nineteenth century European geopolitics, such as the Danish and Czech cases mentioned above (cf. Trigger 1984: 358), a golden age was sought around which to base national identity and sentiment, a period where the inhabitants of that territory had been at the apex of their military, political and/or cultural power. In addition to this, a golden age could also be used to provide historical legitimacy for the independent existence of each new nation and its territorial extent, important considerations in modern European geopolitics (cf. Geary 2002).

Romania stands at the gateway to Europe from further East, while Ireland is an island at its western extremity. This has consequences for migrations studies, for example. Both regions provide useful studies of the relationship between linguistics and archaeology, and how they relate to concepts of ethnicity. Perhaps the case of Romania is much more complex in this regard owing to geographical, political and demographic factors. Romanian was formed entirely isolated from its sister romance languages (i.e. Italian, Spanish, French etc.), as the area was surrounded by Slavic speaking people to the North, East and South and by Hungarian

speakers to the West.[1] Due to its geographical position, the territory was a transitory area for numerous migratory populations until roughly the thirteenth century, with each group establishing their rule for shorter or longer periods over smaller or larger parts. Additionally, the terrain of the region, with the Carpathian Mountains running in an L-shape through the middle, favoured political division, as in the second millennium the western part was integrated into the Hungarian kingdom[2] while the eastern and southern parts were mostly under Ottoman suzerainty. Nonetheless, the language remained surprisingly unitary, although a written tradition developed very late in time, with the first text written in Romanian only dating from 1521.

Ireland's linguistic history is much less complicated, as may be expected from its location on the Atlantic fringe, but this itself can lead to nationalistic misuse. From what evidence remains, a fairly standardized form of the Irish language seems to have been in use as far back as the seventh century AD, and possibly before (cf. Ó Cróinín 1995: 110). However, it must be noted that this evidence is from manuscript and epigraphic evidence, and that there may have been much more variation in vernacular usage, as was the case with Latin in the Classical Period. Linguistic unity does not imply political unity though, and even a cursory analysis of the historical evidence illustrates a fragmented political landscape, albeit one with a marked trajectory towards centralization in the years c.AD 650 to 1170.

The relationship between the study of the past and nationalism has been reasonably well explored in Ireland. Interestingly, academic archaeology and modern Irish cultural and political nationalism developed contemporaneously. The history of Irish archaeology has been discussed to varying degrees of depth by Waddell (2000: 107; and

1 This scenario stands only if it is accepted that the Romanian language was formed roughly in the territory of modern Romania. However, there is another theory that, in its first stages, the language developed to the South of the Danube, in the Balkan Peninsula (Röesler 1871). The latter idea was proposed by Austro-Hungarian scholars in the nineteenth century and is, for obvious reasons, less popular among Romanian linguists.
2 Later on this became the Austrian monarchy and then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For a short period the entire territory was under Ottoman suzerainty.

much greater detail in 2005), O'Conor (1998: 1–16), O'Sullivan (1998: 7–35) and Duffy, Edwards and FitzPatrick (2001: 54–70) for example.[3]

In contrast to this, the relationship between archaeology and nationalism in the case of Romania remains almost entirely unexplored (Gheorghiu and Schuster 2002; Mihailescu-Bîrliba 1997; Niculescu 2002). This can be thought to have occurred due to the strong legacy of the communist regime (1945–1989), although this explanation is largely simplistic. Other less obvious factors came into play, some of which will be pointed out bellow.

## Irish Case Study

The Republic of Ireland is one of the oldest post-colonial national states. Therefore it provides a useful study in the nationalism of a nascent state, and of the colonialism which preceded it.[4] Ireland has largely been defined by the installation of an Anglo-Norman colony there from the late AD 1160s onwards. Although it might be argued that it was not quite the historical zero-point it might seem to be, it is here that the origins of rule from London began, a rule that would continue with varying levels of intensity until the early 1920s (cf. Duffy 1997). This in turn was preceded by a more fluid period of what was probably small scale settlement from Scandinavia from the ninth to the eleventh centuries.

There are two periods of the Irish past that can be singled out as being used to support the legitimacy of an Irish state: the early medieval period and the Iron Age which preceded it, often popularly referred to together as the Celtic past. The early use of archaeology, and its sister disciplines history and philology, by Irish nationalists had to do two things: it had to justify an independent Ireland to the world by providing historical precedent

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3  However, probably an equal number of texts tend to avoid such explicit discussions in their introductions and begin with the archaeological evidence itself (cf. Barry 1987; O'Keeffe 2000; O'Kelly 1989; Ó Ríordáin 1979). That said, attention must be drawn to the fact that in the case of Barry (1987), concerned as it is with the archaeology of late medieval Ireland, that there was no real history of that subdiscipline in Ireland to that point.

4  Despite this, it rarely appears in post-colonial discourse, and even less so do the episodes of medieval colonialism there, which might be taken as being illustrative of the often hodiecentric (cf. Goudsblom 1977: 7 for an explanation of the term) focus of much post-colonial scholarship.

and it had to form a true national identity by having the inhabitants of Ireland see themselves as truly separate people and to have pride in that.[5] Giving the illusion of permanence is extremely important in this respect, especially in colonial regions where the colonial period must be treated as a minor setback in an otherwise independent trajectory. Therefore, it was necessary to provide evidence for the exceptional nature of the Irish people and their culture. Exceptionalism has long been rife in both popular and academic texts on the Irish past, and in both colonialist and nationalist historiography. In this discourse, the Irish are portrayed as having political, behavioural and economic systems vastly different from the rest of Europe in the Middle Ages. This is often portrayed as continuing in some form up until present, justifying setting the Irish aside from the rest of the world. It can be argued that there is evidence for such a discourse in operation in early medieval Europe. One might take the letter by Columbanus to Pope Gregory at the end of the sixth century AD, containing the famous "dwellers at the earth's edge" phrase,[6] as being in response to the othering of the Irish also evident in the large controversy over the date of Easter at the time (*Epistulae* V; cf. Bede 3.25; also Brown 2003; Ó Cróinín 1995; 2005). It is perhaps from the colonialist stereotypes of Giraldus Cambrensis and his contemporaries onwards that it became a much more coherent discourse, used to provide a means to justify Anglo-Norman colonialism and continuing rule from London (cf. Bartlett 1993: 96–101). However, writing in the seventeenth century, Keating referred to Ireland as:

> A kingdom apart by herself like a little world, and that the nobles and the learned who were there long ago arranged to have jurisprudence, medicine, poetry, and music established in Ireland with appropriate regulations (FFÉ: I, 5).[7]

It might be argued that this provides evidence for an appropriation of exceptionalist discourse, and that from here, if not earlier, that native Irish scholars began to glorify Ireland's perceived exceptional nature.

5 This, of course, is paralleled in most other European countries to some extent, as discussed by Geary (2002).
6 *"Toti Iberi, ultimi habitatores mundi"*
7 "na ríoghacht ar leith léi féin, amhail domhan mbeag, agus na huaisle agus na hollamhain do bhí innte i n-allód, gur chumadar breitheamhnas, leigheas, filidheacht agus ceol agus riaghlachaibh cinnte riu do bheith ar bun i n-Éirinn".

The Irish case is one of a number of instances where nationalist archaeology and history have had to debate with, negate and supplant colonial versions of the same disciplines in order to successfully legitimate national identity. Considering the level of denigration apparent in colonialist literature and historiography (cf. Spenser 1633; Orpen 1911–20), if not perhaps archaeology, it is perhaps unsurprising that Irish nationalists in search of a historical anchor for Irish identity and independence would look further back.[8] This led post-independence Irish nationalist archaeology to do its best to ignore the archaeology of the period after the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. In this respect, although O'Conor (1998: 11) has already drawn attention to the following words from Macalister regarding the study of Anglo-Norman archaeology they are worth quoting here:

> In speaking of the antiquities of the period, it will be unnecessary to make more than passing allusions to those remains which are English in all but geographical situation. Such subjects are cross-legged effigies, pavement tiles, Plantagenet coins, arms and armour are a branch of English archaeology and even their extension to Ireland is much more a matter of English than Irish interest (Macalister 1928: 356).

This mindset continued throughout the century, and it was evident in the excavations at Wood Quay, where one of the most important excavations in medieval European archaeology was conducted in a ludicrously short period ahead of the construction of the new civic offices in Dublin in the late 1970s. The site had significant deposits from the Hiberno-Scandinavian settlement there, in addition to equally significant Anglo-Norman period deposits. The latter were largely bulldozed, with the former receiving round-the-clock excavation for just a few weeks. However, it should be noted that this might be seen as having been a generational conflict, as most younger Irish archaeologists were

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8  Interestingly, many of the antiquarians writing on the early Irish past in the nineteenth century were gentleman scholars strongly associated with the Protestant Anglo-Irish ascendency, or from Britain itself. It was their work which would largely provide the basis for the nationalist usage of the material remains of the Irish past in subsequent decades. Waddell (2005) devotes a large portion of his book to this.

vehemently opposed to the project having to be conducted out in this way, and indeed there was also great public outcry. The incident illustrates that while the line of thought as evinced by Macalister remained strong in the corridors of power until comparatively recently, a new generation of the Irish public and academy were now engaging with their medieval colonial past.

In the case of the Iron Age, a link was made to Europe's supposed pan-regional Celtic civilization.[9] As Waddell (2000: 257) notes, a belief in direct and influential contacts with France and Iberia would have had obvious attractions for nationalists in the nineteenth and twentieth century in Ireland. It provided a means to separate Irish national identity from British (or more accurately in this case, English) identity as much as possible. In some way, this has been paralleled by other insular groups speaking a Celtic language, such as the Welsh (cf. James 1999). Indeed, this has led to a pan-Celticism, where the similarities between each area are emphasized.

The basis for [sic] Gaelic link to the Continent was linguistic and archaeological. The Irish language is part of the Celtic branch of languages within the overall Indo-European phylum (cf. Cunliffe 1997: 21–25). La Tène style motifs appear on Irish Iron Age metal and stonework (cf. Waddell 2000; Raftery 1994). For many years, the received wisdom was that both language and art style had arrived in some sort of population movement in the Iron Age (cf. Macalister 1935: 55–58; Mitchell 1994; O'Kelly 1989; Ó Ríordáin 1979: 23). The link became institutionalized in the academy and beyond. University College Dublin has had a Professor of Celtic Archaeology since 1909, as did NUI Galway from 1924 to 1978 (Waddell 2005, 191, 216), and where there is still "The Monsignor Hynes Prize for Celtic Archaeology".[10] Even in recent years, we have had 'the Celtic Tiger'

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9  It might also be argued that some elements of Irish Neolithic studies pursue a similar agenda from at least the middle of the twentieth century, connecting Ireland to other areas on Europe's Atlantic fringe through the parallels in megalithic tomb construction (cf. Mitchell 1994; Ó Ríordáin 1979). Interestingly the former includes a map with the Northwest of Ireland being colonized by Neolithic farmers from France, with no connection to Britain indicated (Mitchell 1994: 37).

10  http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/News_And_Events/news_and_events_index.html

and as late as 15 October 2012 'the Celtic Comeback' touted on the cover of *Time Magazine*. However, despite this model being so entrenched as to be an unquestioned part of the primary and secondary school syllabi and popular culture, it is open to criticism.

It can be argued that the term Celtic is as much a modern phenomenon as an ancient one; in its current usage it tells us as much about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as it does about Europe in the Iron Age and early medieval period (cf. James 1999). Archaeologically, there is little evidence for population movement into Ireland in the Iron Age (cf. James 1999; Raftery 1994). The paucity of diagnostic Hallstatt style material in Ireland has long been noted (cf. Armstrong 1923; 1924a; 1924b; Raftery 1994). Furthermore, the La Tène motifs in use in Ireland were largely rendered in native form and seem to have come into use at different times. They also seem to utilize only certain aspects of the pan-European tradition, along with significant aspects of the native tradition being absent on the continent (Raftery 1994: 221–222). In addition to this, the style is almost absent from the Southwest of the island (Raftery 1994: 227).

For early Irish nationalists and their post independence successors, the early medieval period was a golden age, a high point in the nation's history, with Ireland frequently academically and popularly referred to as the 'Island of Saints and Scholars', as any individual having passed through the Irish primary education system will be aware. According to Ó Cróinín (1995: 196):

> Of all the clichés about Irish history none has been more enduring, nor enjoyed such universal popularity as the 'Golden Age' of early Irish culture.

The period saw the production of a dazzling array of ornate metalwork, manuscripts and monuments as Ireland became established as one of the foremost centres of learning in Western Christendom between the late sixth century to eleventh centuries (cf. Ó Cróinín 1995: 2005). It looms largest of all periods of the past in the Irish *conscience*

*collective*, providing the images used on several generations of coinage, paper money, stamps and other national symbols (cf. O'Conor 1998: 11). It was also no accident that a replica of an early medieval ecclesiastic round tower was chosen as the monument to commemorate Daniel O'Connell, an Irish MP at Westminster who had championed Catholic emancipation and Home Rule in the middle years of the nineteenth century. One also cannot but notice the growing profusion of early medieval style ringed high crosses[11] in use from this period onwards, to such an extent that no graveyard in Ireland is without them, nor any tourist giftshop.

Texts such as Cahill (1995) have continued to reproduce such a view, albeit largely for a popular and Irish-American readership seeking to reinforce their largely imagined perception of Ireland and its past. Perhaps this can be taken as indicative of the successful linking of the past to Irish identity by cultural nationalists. Anderson (2006) draws attention to this trend in general for expatriate communities and their roles in conservative cultural nationalism. One only has to put terms like 'Celtic Ireland' into an internet search engine to be confronted by a plethora of texts ranging from esotericism to jingoism, and all with a common thread of glorifying the two periods under discussion, lamenting their end and emphasizing Irish exceptionalism.

## Romanian Case Study[12]

Modern Romanians, since their coming into existence as a nation in the nineteenth century, have felt a great affinity with two past populations: the Romans and the Dacians. These two peoples are considered to be the ancestors of today's population. However, it is the latter that were chosen to represent a golden age, since it is the Dacian past alone that was able to provide the unique character that Romanian nationalists were looking for and at the same time legitimate the twentieth-century borders of the country.

The name Dacians refers, in current archaeological and popular literature, to the population that broadly inhabited the territory of

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11  Known colloquially as Celtic Crosses.
12  This case has also been discussed more broadly in a different paper (Popa in press).

Romania from the middle of the first millennium BC to AD 106 (i.e. the late Iron Age), when the land was conquered by the Roman armies. This ethnonym was taken from Latin texts, where it was used initially to refer generally to the population inhabiting the middle Danube (Caesar, 6. 25). Greek writers, on the other hand, wrote of the Getai, who occupied the Danube river mouth. Based on a small passage from Strabo (7. 3, 12), the two populations were identified by modern scholars as being one and the same and were unified under the modern ethnonym Geto-Dacians. Nonetheless the name Dacians remains more popular, especially among the non-academic readers, although it is now used basically with the same meaning as Geto-Dacians.

The 'discovery' of the Dacians by modern scholars and the development of the concept are closely linked to the coagulation of modern Romania, as well as the political and ideological shifts that the region went through. The period dating from the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the First World War can be considered to be an exploratory phase, both in terms of political action and archaeological research. During that time, in less than 60 years, the modern Romanian state was formed through the unification of several small provinces. This process required an ideological effort, not just a political and military one, as the territory had been divided since medieval times. It was necessary to create a common history for all the Romanian people,[13] located both inside and outside the borders of the country. This involved finding a historical precedent for the large political structure that Romanian nationalist were aspiring for; something that would link different people with very diverse pasts. Hence, the late nineteenth century was the time when scholars 'recovered' the Dacians from the writings of Caesar and Jordanes and brought them into Romanian history. It was during that period that the Dacians started to be linked to the Romanian people (Hașdeu 1984 [1873–1874]) and the first monographic works about the pre-Roman past of the territory came to light (Tocilescu 1877).

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13 The situation is comparable to that of Italy in the second part of the nineteenth century, which made one of the main contributors to the formation of the Italian state, Massimo D'Azeglio, supposedly say the famous words: "We have made Italy. Now we have to make Italians." ("*L'Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani.*") (Hobsbawm 1992: 4).

The end of the First World War saw Romania tripling in size as it incorporated nearly all the territories that it had laid claimed to. The need to historically legitimize such a large, and by that point multi-ethnic state (Hitchins 1992: 1069–1070), became a critical necessity. Even though common ethnicity represents the main element that defines the European nations, a nation without a past is a contradiction in terms (Hobsbawm 1992: 3; Rowlands 1994: 133); hence there was a need to add longevity to the element of ethnicity, to construct a genealogy. The ideal candidate was the time of the Dacian kingdom, which became perceived as having been a golden age (Lockyear 2004: 33–35), since at no other time in history had a political structure incorporated the entire territory of the newly formed state. The Dacians thus achieved the status of mythical ancestors of the Romanian people and archaeology's duty became to provide the material evidence which illustrated the might of the Dacian *neam*[14] (Gheorghiu and Schuster 2002: 289–290). Consequently, just a few years after the war, in 1924, the most important Romanian archaeology journal to this day was established: *Dacia*. Only two years later, the work of Vasile Pârvan, *Getica* (Pârvan 1926), was published; a monumental volume discussing the prehistoric past of Romania, with a special emphasis on the Geto-Dacians. This book had an enormous impact, not only in academia,[15] but also on the entire spectrum of Romanian culture as it enjoyed great popularity (Lica 2006: 1020).

The Dacian impetus was interrupted during the first twenty years of communist rule (1945–1964). While political regimes always have some impact on scholarly works, if the regime is totalitarian in nature, it can literally order a change in the way research is done (cf. Schallmayer and Kurzynski 2011). This is exactly what happened in Romania, as the party leaders were interested in stressing the importance of the past and present relations of the country with the USSR, thus legitimizing the new political situation. Therefore the Slavs took the place of the Dacians as one of the main foci for archaeological study (Babeş

14  The term *neam*, along with *popor* are preferred by Romanian archaeologists when talking about populations of the past. They basically refer to an ethnic group, a nation (Neumann 2005).
15  Following the completion of his work, Pârvan was invited to hold a series of lectures at the University of Cambridge, in St. John's College (Gheorghiu and Schuster 2002: 292).

2008: 9). Additionally, the Marxist discourse overflowed from politics into academia, as archaeological writings become invaded with superficially used Marxist terms (Dragoman 2009: 192; Matei-Popescu 2007: 288).

The idea of the Dacian golden age resurfaced strongly after 1964, when Ceauşescu came to power. In the first instance, the change in leadership brought about a small relaxation of the political control over academia (Dragoman and Oanţă-Marghitu 2006: 62–64), allowing for the inter-war ideas and interests to re-emerge. Furthermore, since the new communist leader was interested in breaking away from the USSR, the uniqueness of the Romanians was again sought, as nationalism became strongly encouraged in all disciplines. Consequently, a more extreme version of the contemporary French *'archéologie nationale'* (Fleury-Ilett 1996) was established, as research funds were diverted towards sites that would illustrate the 'glorious' past of the nation.[16] Dacian ancestorhood came strongly to the fore in the 1970s and 80s, as communist officials and Ceauşescu became aware of its great potential.[17] This gave birth to the Thracoman/Dacoman movement, which saw the Dacians established as the sole ancestors of the Romanians, thus almost eradicating the Latin component. While most researchers tried to resist the party ideas by retreating to a positivistic discourse,[18] such an attitude only naturalized the nationalist ideas (Tilley 1998: 318) since there were many writings that strongly reflected the ideas coming from the party (e.g. Berciu 1986; Crişan 1977; Fruchter and Mihăilescu 1972; Gostar and Lica 1984; Vulpe and Zahariade 1987). The peak of the Tharcoman movement came in 1980, when the party ordered celebrations to be held for the 2050th anniversary since the formation of the first Romanian state, in the time of the Dacian king Burebista.

Even though the communist regime of Romania came crashing down in 1989, the idea of a Dacian golden age did not follow, as no breakage can be seen in the way archaeology was practiced and written. Indeed, while

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16  For example, important funds were given for the excavation of the site from Grădiştea de Munte, where the supposed capital of the Dacian kingdom, Sarmizegetusa Regia, is thought to have been.

17  Even the car brand established in this period was named Dacia.

18  Babić (2002) identifies a similar type of discourse in Serbian archaeology.

the Thracoman ideas were largely abandoned, most people continued working in the same nationalist framework as in the two decades before, although all Romanian researchers were retreating by now to the 'ivory tower' of a fake objectivism/positivism.[19]

In the last number of years the nationalist voice has been far less vibrant in Romanian archaeology and the Dacian golden age has been sent to the background, albeit not erased. While many researchers are becoming more critical with their data, the interpretations are still stuck within the old ethnic paradigms as archaeological theory of any colour has yet to be incorporated (Anghelinu 2001, 2003). A small number of researchers have even started deconstructing *some* ethnic constructs and divorcing *some* ethnicities from material culture (e.g. Bondoc 2008; Rustoiu 2008), but in the case of the Dacians the process seems to be at a standstill, since the idea of the glorious Dacian ancestors is subconsciously hard-wired in all Romanians today. The few academic studies that have timidly attempted to question the Dacians are mostly ignored and regarded as extravagant (Babeş 1990; Dragoman and Oanță-Marghitu 2006; Niculescu 2004; 2002; Popa 2010; Strobel 1998a, 1998b); when these studies are aimed towards the general public, most readers tend to consider the authors national traitors (e.g. Petre 2011).

The Dacian national myth and its associated golden age have thus proven to be very successful investments in terms of national identity, providing Romania with the solid historical base that each nation requires (Hobsbawm 1990). Through museums, the media and especially the educational system, Romanians were reinvented as the descendants of the Dacians.[20] As a result, bookshops today abound in non-academic books about the 'great ancestors' (e.g. Crainicu 2009; Oltean 2007; Pănculescu 2008).[21] Some of them even continue the Thracoman idea of a unique Dacian ancestry (Săvescu 2002).

19  The situation was similar to the one from Asturia and Léon after the fall of Franco (Marín Suárez et al. this volume).
20  A 1999 fifth form history textbook wrote: "The Getae and the Dacians are the same people. They […] broadly occupied the current territory of our country, which in antiquity was named Dacia. The Geto-Dacians are the ancestors of the Romanian people" (Băluțoiu and Vlad 1999: 77, author translation).
21  Even the Romanian Orthodox Church has integrated the idea into its discourse (Vlăducă 2012: 16–49).

## Conclusions

In the case of both Ireland and Romania, their ancestral connection to a past golden age was given as an ultimate argument for their existence. Whether referring to early medieval Christianity or to a late Iron Age kingdom, this association with an almost mythical time is what was thought to make both the Irish and the Romanians unique.

It could be argued that the two cases have parallels right across Europe and beyond in the past two centuries, where national states have sought precedent and justification in the past. (cf. Geary 2002 for a full discussion). The process is much like the writing of a *curriculum vitae* for a job application: certain details of an individual's biography are emphasized in order to justify that individual's suitability for the position, while other ones are left out. Nascent or prospective states do the same, as they emphasize certain aspects of their biographies which are relevant to them being considered as independent entities, though this would imply the existence of an external audience whose approval is being sought.

The golden age justification is however more for the eyes of the Romanians and the Irish than for that of their neighbours. It is mainly the Romanians that care about the Dacians and the greatness of their kingdom; it is mainly the Irish that care about their country having a Celtic past. Thus, in some way, the golden age serves not as an external legitimation, but mainly as an internal one: a narrative that allows people to answer the simple questions: 'who are we?' and 'why are we the way that we are?'.

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