

## Introduction

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This volume emerged out of a desire to provide the contemporary Romanian public with a picture of a modern area of research which is little known in this country: the use of aerial photographs and satellite images in archaeology. In short, aerial archaeology. Joining the two words sounds strange at first sight: *archaeology* makes us think of the discovery of material traces of the people who lived in the past, preserved in the ground or under water and coming up either accidentally, when digging the foundations of a new buildings, roads, channels, and upon land planning, or are uncovered by archaeologists due to systematic archaeological excavations; *in the air* there may be no archaeological digging, unless we talk figuratively, if we believe archaeologists to be dreamers, diggers into the past, somehow "aerial" ... And yet, *in the air*, from above, one can identify many archaeological traces, often invisible at ground level. How to do this is the very subject matter of aerial archaeology.

For those who practise aerial archaeology, the investigation into what can be seen from above either during the flights for watching and taking pictures of some areas, or the examination of older aerial photographs, carried out over the time for non-archaeological reasons (mapping, agriculture, tourism, and espionage) aims at identifying as many vestiges of the past as possible before being irremediably lost because of modern development, demographic growth, intensive agriculture and ever more aggressive works in the natural environment over the last decades.

It is a countdown race: what has been preserved from the past civilizations represents a finite multitude of material objects and structures, as menaced as the endangered species. Once we lost these direct testimonies of our past, it will be almost impossible for us to reconstruct human life for the longest part of its history that lacks written sources, but not less for recent periods, when the preserved texts, reflecting only a part of reality, need archaeological investigations to complete them, confirm them, and sometimes, make them understood.

We cannot preserve the entire legacy of the past for the future: some traces inevitably vanish out of human or natural causes; others are investigated by archaeologists, all the found objects are recovered and then the ground gets, as they say in administrative jargon, *archaeological clearance*. If the finds are important and it is decided that it is worth keeping them in place (*in situ*), the future road, canal, construction or pipe is moved to another track. In all the cases, it is crucial to document, to keep all the possible information and map it.

The rhythm in which we can do that is very slow, especially if we began late: there are not enough specialists, money, means, and time. Sometimes no one is interested enough, and the pressures of the economic side are high. Aerial archaeology is a not very costly method that allows the identification of archaeological traces on large surfaces and in a relatively short time,

contributing to the completion of the national or regional archaeological directories and of the heritage maps.

In some Western European countries, there are programmes of aerial investigation, photography and mapping of archaeological sites and historical landscapes for decades, offering many data for understanding cultural heritage and grounds the strategies and policies for its protection, conservation, rebuilding, management and valorisation in order to secure a good life for present and future generations. In Central and Eastern European countries we did not enjoy favourable conditions for practising aerial archaeology after the Second World War, not even after the political changes in 1989, when we continue to have laws confining private civil flights, regarding topographic maps as military secrets and limiting the access to the existing aerial photograph archives.

However, the situation has changed a lot over the last years, especially after the extension of the European Union, including the former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe: now there are no longer administrative hindrances. It depends on each country to develop its own aerial photography programmes in order to complete archaeological maps, including not only individual sites, from prehistory and up to the modern age, but also the cultural landscape over larger areas, as it menaced by the rapid changes in the infrastructure, industrial works, agriculture and the extension of localities. Moreover, the protection of the archaeological sites and cultural landscape is an issue of European concern that was a topic of the *European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage* at La Valletta (1992) and of the *European Landscape Convention* (2000), both ratified also by Romania. European cooperation is good and necessary for conveying expertise, methods, and competence building.

By joining the project *European Landscapes: Past, Present and Future*, 2004 – 2007, co-financed by the European programme “Culture 2000”, we had the opportunity to know directly the most active people, institutions and professional organizations in several countries in Western and Eastern Europe and their aerial archaeology projects. At the end of the project, we asked for the permission to translate into Romanian the final project report, reviewing what is being done right now in 11 European countries in the field of aerial archaeology: the wide range of themes, the results, the perspectives, the field training of young archaeologists, everything illustrated, often spectacularly. Rog Palmer, one of the British specialists renowned in the field and our friend, who comes every year in Romania to work at CIMEC, starting with 2005, agreed to write an introduction in which he gave an account of the photography, interpretation and mapping methods and techniques in aerial archaeology. He insisted to illustrate his text with photos taken in Romania. I and Carmen wrote the Romanian project report in a separate chapter and extended it a little in order to give you more data on what we did, are doing and hope will do in the next years for the fast growing of the Romanian National Archaeological Record using remote sensing. At the end of the book we added a selective bibliography and a list of references on the web for those who wish to read more, and we explained the more technical terms (sometimes difficult to translate into Romanian) in a glossary.

That is the book. We hope you will enjoy it!