

Mihai Gligor, *Așezarea neolitică și eneolitică de la Alba Iulia – Lumea Nouă în lumina noilor cercetări*, Editura Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, 264 p., 217 pl.

It is rare when one finds a fine argument that rescue archaeology is indeed nothing else but good old archaeology in the real sense of the word. The excavations at Alba Iulia-Lumea Nouă come to prove that there should not be any reason for the two „types” of archaeology to be considered different in achieving their goals. Outcome of a PhD dissertation, the present volume gathers in fact the results of over ten years of (recent) archaeological excavations on the site of Lumea Nouă, nearby the town of Alba Iulia (Alba county).

The volume consists of seven main chapters, an impressive bibliography list, a list of plates, a section devoted to the distribution of the archaeological material within the archaeological features, a rather extensive abstract and 217 plates (some of them in colour). The contents of the volume (listed in the original publication both in Romanian and English) is presented below: *Foreword* (p. 7); *Introduction* (p. 11); Chapter I. *Geographic framework. Habitation elements* (p. 15); Chapter II. *History of research* (p. 21); Chapter III. *The stratigraphy of the settlement. Description of research units and archaeological complexes* (p. 25); Chapter IV. *Material and spiritual culture* (p. 59); Chapter V. *Cultural and chronological framework for the Alba Iulia – Lumea Nouă prehistoric settlement* (p. 133); Chapter VI. *Cultural interferences and inter-relationships between the populations documented at Alba Iulia-Lumea Nouă and their contemporaries* (p. 149); Chapter VII. *Overall considerations. Conclusions* (p. 177); *References* (p. 179); *List of plates* (p. 199); *Archaeological material distributed by archaeological features* (p. 213); *Abstract* (p. 215); *Plates* (p. 265).

Structured as most Romanian PhD thesis are, the book begins with a brief presentation of the geographical context and natural environment, followed by a history of the research, both short and concise, enabling the reader to get acquainted with the research issues of the Neolithic and the Eneolithic in the area. The third chapter gives an account of the excavated trenches, their stratigraphies and the main archaeological features. It is perhaps one of the most important parts of the volume, as it allows the author to establish the chronological links among the features and attribute them to various cultures and phases, based mostly on the pottery analysis. Culturally, the archaeological material was attributed to the Vinča, Lumea Nouă, Turdaș, Foeni and Petrești cultural groups, with imports and influences from the Herpaly and Precucuteni. It is remarkable that while analysing the „material culture” the author does not content himself only with the typology and the analysis of the ceramics, as most Neolithic works tend to do, but deals also with other categories of archaeological remains such as the lithics and the bone, antler and shell artefacts, detailed studies (of a rather typological approach) of these having been previously published. They are followed by descriptive presentations of the shell items (mainly *Spondylus*), the figurines and the plastic representations on various types of pots. There is no reference to the faunal or floral remains. Of main importance, and receiving full attention, is the presentation of the multiple burial found on the site (seen as funerary

feature defined by the deposition of human bodies in a very short interval of time). One of the questions for the Lumea Nouă discovery refers to the cause of death of the individuals, leading to their mass burial: epidemics or violent death? The anthropological evidence brings no convincing arguments for either of the proposed scenarios. After having revised several cases from prehistoric Europe, the author tends to settle upon the possibility of having at Lumea Nouă a ritual centre such as the one from Herxheim. Another suggestion is that of having the Foeni group give a special funerary treatment to the human remains, especially to the skulls. But, neither of the suggestions resolves the cause of death of these individuals (no NMI is given, only age and sex determinations). We would also like to add that there are ways of causing violent death that do not leave marks on the skeletons and thus, this explanation should not be easily dismissed. A succession of 10 radiocarbon dates (7 on human remains from the multiple burial, three on charcoal; 8 among all were suggested as correct) pin the Foeni habitation of the site around 5800–5700 BP. It would be interesting though, given the location of the site on the Mureș river – to have some stable isotope analyses on the human remains, thus establishing both the type of diet the prehistoric community might have had and also, whether fish consumption has not introduced a *fresh-reservoir* effect on the ¹⁴C. The following chapter studies the interferences and the links between the human communities documented on the site and those of the Vinča, Pișcolt, Lumea Nouă, Herpaly, Foeni, Precucuteni and Petrești. Obviously, at the centre of this analysis is the Lumea Nouă cultural group and its own manifestations. All considerations and links with other cultural groups were made based mainly on the painted pottery of the above mentioned cultures/cultural groups since „*painting [...] is the only decoration technique that individualizes the pottery artifacts*” for the Lumea Nouă group (p. 157), establishing „*the first classification of a typological and stylistical manner of the painted pottery, [...] over a geographical area dominated by similar shapes and decoration techniques*” (p. 178). This is seen by the author as the main achievement of the volume. To this, we might add the importance of the discussions over the origin of the Petrești culture and its relationship with the Foeni group.

The volume modestly presents its conclusions as only „state of the research” results. But it also brings forth a solid base for a future re-appraisal of the Transylvanian Eneolithic, from various angles of the research, offering firm ground for interesting future studies, if we are only to mention the funerary aspect and the pottery analysis. The graphics of the volume is impeccable, with remarkable black-and-white and colored photos and field plans, easily accessible while reading, given their location at the end of the text part of the book. Understanding the illustrations is a little bit hampered by the fact that the text explanation of the respective plate needs to be looked for in the List of Plates.