

# ROMANIA: A FUTURE FOR THE PAST

## Aerial information in landscape recording and conservation

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### **Introduction and objectives**

Aerial survey is as yet virtually unused in Romania for archaeology or landscape study. Through the Culture 2000 project the Institute for Cultural Memory (CIMEC) is promoting its introduction through the examination of 'historical' air photo sources and if possible through the initiation of a small programme of exploratory air survey towards the end of the project.

The geographical focus of the work lies in part of the Lower Danube Valley, archaeologically one of the most rich areas in Romania from early prehistory to modern times. Many ancient sites there have been destroyed or are now at risk of damage or destruction by modern development and intensive arable cultivation. Many more await discovery through the aerial techniques which have proved so fruitful elsewhere in Europe. By drawing these sites to the attention of officials and cultural resource managers, the project will contribute to their long-term conservation and future enjoyment by schoolchildren, young adults and public at large.

- The aims of the Institute's contribution, as refined during Year 1 of the project, are as follow
- To enrich the National Archaeological Record by identifying the exact location of known sites and by discovering and documenting 'new' ones through the examination of aerial photographs, archive sources, digital photography and digital cartography.
- To use the resulting information to compile maps of archaeological sites, monuments and landscapes and of protection zones around them.
- To collect previously unrecorded archaeological data of all periods from a pilot area and to make the material available to the public, cultural resource managers and researchers.
- To place individual settlements and ritual or military sites in context with one another, and to demonstrate their relationship with the physical and ecological landscape around them.
- To identify the changes in the landscape which have taken place in recent decades by comparing older and more recent aerial photographs.
- To promote information exchange and development in the use of GIS, the Internet and other forms of digital communication, and to facilitate the digitising and dissemination of air-photo information on the ancient landscape and its significance in modern times.
- To organise workshops and seminars to introduce students, archaeologists and cultural resource managers to the practice and uses of archaeological air survey, photo-interpretation, mapping and record creation in exploration, presentation and conservation.
- To co-operate with co-partners in the design of an Internet exhibition and of education packs and other means of raising public and official awareness of 'aerial' techniques in the identification, presentation and conservation of heritage landscapes across Europe.
- If possible, to initiate a small programme of active aerial survey in Romania.

### **Progress to the end of 2005**

Work in the first phase of the project has had two main goals: gathering information for the pilot area to be surveyed, and training archaeologists in the uses of air photographs and GIS.

### **Work in the chosen study area**

The first task was to identify and assemble bibliographic, cartographic, photographic and GISdata for the chosen study area, the Mostiștea Valley and its environs in the Lower Danube area. It was decided to focus on a pilot study of the Malu Roșu site at Sultana, alongside Mostiștea Lake, analysing landscape change on air-photos taken between 1972 and 2003. The fortified settlement is near Sultana village, on a high terrace above the lake, eroded to the extent that only an area about 30 x 35m across still survives. In the 1920s this



*Participants in the second Romanian training course approaching the promontory above Lake Mostiștea where once stood the ancient settlement of Malu Roșu*

became the first prehistoric site attributed to the Gumelnița culture to benefit from scientific research. More extensive excavation took place in 1975.

Unfortunately no report was published, the archaeologists died and their excavation diaries and other documents were lost. Today, archaeologists from two major museums are re-excavating the site to establish its basic stratigraphy. The little information available shows that the occupation deposits were about 4m thick, covering three evolutionary phases of the Gumelnița civilization. Remarkable finds in various museums show the site to have been of special significance during the Romanian Calcolithic (Copper) Age.

During 2005 aerial photographs from 1972, 1986 and 2003 were purchased from the National Institute for Cadastre. The evolution of the archaeological excavations over this thirty year period and the progressive erosion of the lake shore have subsequently been plotted as a digital map. This has already proved of great value to the archaeologists working on reconstruction of the earlier research and conservation of the site remains.

### **Training courses and attendance at meetings**

A week-long training course in aerial archaeology and the uses of GIS in heritage work was organised at Bușteni from 9–15 May 2005 through Culture 2000 and the EPOCH Network of Excellence. There were 34 participants from six countries, including six from CIMEC itself.

In September 2005, during a week-long course in Bucharest, five Romanian archaeologists received intensive training by Rog Palmer from the UK in the interpretation of aerial photographs. One day was also spent on targeted field-walking in the Mostiștea Valley.

The Culture 2000 project also helped Romanian representatives to attend the Culture 2000 and Aerial Archaeology Research Group meetings at Leuven in September 2005.



*Participants in the first Romanian training course, at Bușteni in May 2005, including (left, front row) the Director and Deputy Director of CIMEC, organisers of the Romanian part of the project.*