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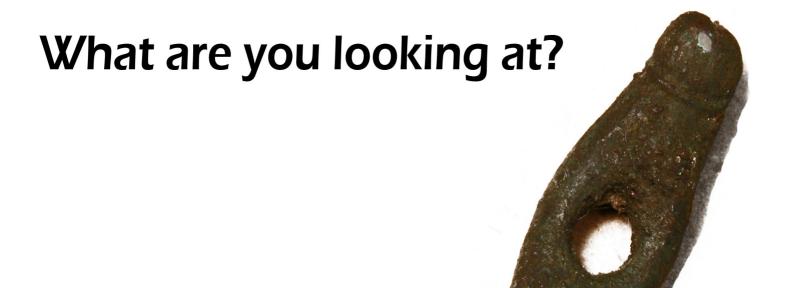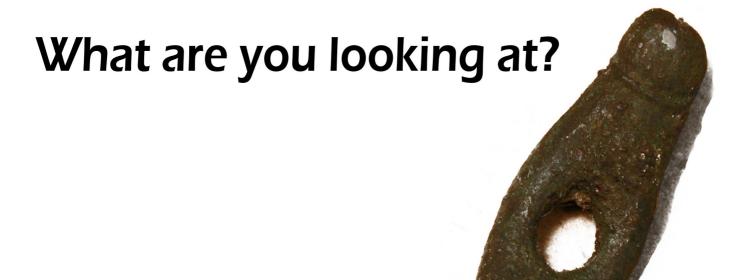
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INDEX

ROȘIA MONTANĂ

When heritage meets social activism, politics and community identity

Alexandra ION

Institut of Anthropology Francisc I. Rainer

Abstract

"Archaeology for Whom?" A situation where this question gains particular importance is the case of rescue archaeology projects, especially those facing big economic projects. It is the purpose of this article to propose a reflective attitude towards our practice. Thus, I will focus on the case of the site of Roșia Montană (Romania). Here, the contentious topic of a proposed cyanide gold mining exploitation brought forward a series of relevant questions: what is heritage, for whom it is meaningful (and in what way), and what is the relationship between heritage and sustainable development of a contemporary community.

Keywords

Rescue archaeology, Heritage, Landscape, Roșia Montană, Mine

One of the fundamental questions in archaeology still remains the one asked thirty years ago by Rebeca Panameño and Enrique Nalda (1979, apud McGuire 2007: 10): "*Arqueología para quien*? (Archaeology for Whom?)". Archaeology, like any other discipline, creates a certain kind of knowledge, designed for a certain audience and presupposing a specific ethical and political attitude towards the world. In the last decades, archaeology has been faced with feminist, post-colonialist and post-modern deconstructivist critiques, all trying to highlight the need for archaeologists to reflect on the consequences of their work within the contemporary world.

A situation where this question gains particular importance is the case of rescue archaeology projects, especially those facing big economic projects. We are undergoing times in which economic and political decisions are affecting large communities, changing old ways of life and shaping new landscapes. In this context, the traces of the past (heritage and archaeological sites) are caught in the middle and what happens with them in turn affects, destroys or reshapes the way communities' identities are imagined (through the sense of place, shared history, traditions, values etc.). Therefore, archaeology can become a powerful tool for understanding the world, our own identity within it and critically reflecting on how communities want to have their future shaped.

This article will focus on one such situation, the case of Roșia Montană (Romania), by exploring the issues pertaining to the fate and interpretation of heritage when confronted with large industrial projects.

What happened at Roșia?

In September 2013, Roșia Montană, a site in the Apuseni Mountains, western Romania (Transylvania), hit the international media, through journals such as the Huffington Post and The Guardian or through the BBC channel. The contentious topic of a proposed cyanide gold mining exploitation in the area of this Romanian village was introduced by titles such as: "Protests continue in Bucharest against gold mine plan in Rosia Montana" (Wong 2013)[1], "Romania's struggle for democracy is encapsulated in a village" (Ciobanu 2013), "Who is Roșia Montană? - or the Dawn of A New Generation" (Romocea 2013) etc.. At a glance, the concepts of "democracy", "a new generation", "economical solution" have been used along "heritage", "identity" and "sustainable future", illustrative for the complex local and national ecological, heritage and social implications of such a significant economic project.

It is not the intention of this text to draw a full analysis of the situation, as it encapsulates several levels of analysis, problems and ramifications. What I would be presenting is a brief overview of why studying, protecting and understanding heritage in such a context is a complex matter, one that involves choices regarding

1 In the peak days of protests, up to 35.000 people took part in the streetsaccording to media reports.

three issues: what is heritage, for whom it is meaningful (and in what way), and what is the relationship between heritage and sustainable development of a contemporary community.

It all started in 1997 (see RMGC. Project History), when the Euro Gold Resources company (transformed in 2000 in Roşia Montană Gold Corporation) advanced a project to exploit the gold deposits from Roșia Montană (a site with a long mining tradition). The exploitation would affect an area of four mountain massifs (see "Technological process in the Roşia Montană Project"). Consequently, according to the Romanian law, they needed an archaeological discharge certificate for the area of the future exploitation. In 2000, archaeological prospections started (with the financing of RMGC Gold Corporation), gathering archaeologists from the National Union Museum of Alba Iulia and the Projection Centre for the National Cultural Patrimony (Damian 2003: 9). In 2001, the Ministry of Culture and Cults initiated the "Alburnus Maior" National Research Program with the aim of "evaluating the archaeological potential and conducting rescue excavations" and surface archaeological research in the area of the Roşia Montană "on Valea Cornei...,Cârnic, Orlea, Ţarina, Văidoaia, Cetate, Carpeni mountain massifs" (Damian 2003: 9). This program involved the participation of several interdisciplinary teams of archaeologists, speologists, topographers, geologists, etnographers, historians, architects, IT experts, from 12 institutions from across Romania and a French one (see Damian 2003, 28).

The research program led by the National History Museum lasted for six years, up until 2007, a period in which an area of 700.000 sqm was covered by archaeological research (Damian 2003: 9). Throughout this period what was brought to light was a heritage "in layers", material remains spanning more than two millennia: pre-roman discoveries, vestiges of the "Alburnus Maior" Roman mining settlement founded during the rule of the Emperor Trajan (with dwellings, tombs, sacred areas, and an underground mining sistem, "part of the largest, most extensive and most important underground mine complexes within the Roman Empire. It is, in this important respect, unique."- Wilson *et al*. 2011: 7), traces of medieval occupation, and of mining activities during the Austrian empire (18th-19th centuries) (Bâlici 2013). All in all, there have been uncovered more than 150 km of "galleries, extraction chambers, vertical workings, shafts, drainage channels" (Bâlici 2013: 206)

from all historical periods (up until the communist era), with their above ground counterparts - roads, wooden trackways, reservoirs, a processing plant etc. (Bâlici 2013: 206). To this, one can add the architectural and intangible heritage from Roșia, with several historic churches of five denominations, significant vernacular architecture etc. (see Bâlici 2013 for a great overview of the built heritage and ARA 2009, Fig. 03 for a map of the distribution of heritage in space).

Understanding heritage

What should happen with this heritage? Is it worthy of being studied further or should it make room for the economic "development"? (The unspoken question being: Whom will serve archaeology and heritage protection in each case?). In Romania, there have been three main answers to these questions: one coming from the "Alburnus Maior" archaeological Program, one from the investor and one from other academic bodies.

The "Alburnus Maior" Program was followed by 2 certificates of archaeological discharge, both contested in court by some of the local people grouped around the Alburnus Maior Association (see http://www.rosiamontana.org/) (the first certificate being cancelled by court in 2008). This decision has also been met with virulent reactions from a part of the academic community (Alexandrescu *et al.* 2002, Ciugudean 2012, Piso 2003, The Romanian Academy 2013) who claimed that the heritage, especially from Roman period should be preserved due to its unique quality. There are two things which should be noticed.

Firstly, at Roșia, the archaeological program was designed as a rescue archaeology one ("excavations were performed in order to archaeologically discharge the area outside Roșia Montană, West of the Cetate massif", Damian 2003: 9), which by definition is an endeavour which uncovers partially, and with a deadline in mind, the designed area[2]. The focus on Roman vestiges and on the more spectacular ones was chronologically fragmented, as critiqued by Piso or Ciugudean, with little interest in the archaeological research of modern times or the Habsburg and communist periods

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2 This is in no way a critique of the hard work and commitment of the archaeologists who took part in the Program; it is meant just as an evaluation of the interpretative framework in which it was designed.

as highlighted by Wilson et al. (2011; 2013: 9). In addition, the expanse of archaeological research covered only a small area ("0.2% of the 1,100 ha for which RMGC sought the archaeological discharge", according to Piso in O'Hara 2004: Part II, Para. 22, or 4% of an area of 100 ha according to the president of the Romanian Academy, Haiduc 2004).

On the other hand, the topic of the exceptional quality of some individual discoveries which appeared in either pro or against exploitation (Jennings 2013) positions is insufficient for understanding the heritage from Roșia. Following the same line of "unique" qualities, even the investor proposed the conservation in situ of some monuments (http://www.rmgc.ro/proiectul-rosia-montana/patrimoniu.html) while altering the rest of the landscape through mining activities. Even though such a focus might be understandable given the importance of the outcome of the debate (the extraordinary/unique quality of dicoveries possibly turning them in reasons to stop the exploitation on the one hand, and getting across the arguments to the public on the other hand), an archaeologist can go further. Roșia presents the opportunity of reflecting on the workings in/through the landscape's resources throughout history, to experience different ways of being in the world (of mining and living in the same place for over two millenia).

As the Wilson *et al.* 2011 document states, Roșia is a great case of cultural/historical landscape. Thus, heritage does not mean just "ancient archaeological remains, sites and historic structures" against a setting (the landscape) (Waterton 2005: 311), something which can be replicated/selectively preserved or overlooked. Rather, heritage equals landscape, a process rather than a static amalgam of material remains (Waterton 2005: 311). Roșia Montană is a palimpsest of mining exploitation from roman up to communist times (see Cauuet *et al.* 2003, 2004, Ciugudean 2012), and should be understood as "a sequence of traces of the past that have been built up, written over and rewritten" (Muir 2000 apud Holtorf and Williams 2006: 237). Such a landscape-as-heritage can also be described as one of "retrospective memory" (Holtorf and Williams 2006: 237), one which embodies memories of past practices and world views.

If one applies this interpretative framework, of the biography of place (see Anschuetz *et al*. 2001 and Samuels 1979), engaging with the landscape-as-heritage pertains not only a physical or

economical dimension, but also a social and symbolic one (Waterton 2005). In this context, any archaeological endeavour should take into acount the implications beyond the material remains, to treat the remains as of equal focus in order to understand how the past or present identities have been shaped along the alteration of the landscape. This landscape, with its mines, trees, roads, Hapsburg churches and communist era machines, creates a sense of place for a community, a historical landscape in which/around which communities have been built. In this process nothing was left out, nature and culture shaped each other; even the "natural" features are deeply marked by human agency, bearing memories of mining activities: from artificial lakes, "tăuri" (Tăul Secuilor, Tăul Cornii), to suggestive toponyms, Cetate (Citadel) Massif, Gauri area (Pits) etc.

> *"A unique light...is sieved in the Roman-Catholic cemetery around a cathedral-like church...; and then the climb towards Tăul Mare lake leaves you breathless, slips you through the mountain homes, most having...tall gates and windows highlighted by neoclassical Victorian stucco...among the old schools' buildings (German and Hungarian)"* (Grancea 2011).

Surprisingly (or not), those who have taken explicitly this approach of the landscape biography in their quest for protecting the heritage have been mostly architects, especially the ARA association (through the use of the "cultural landscape" concept in ARA 2009, exhibitions, press conferences[3]), along the efforts of other bodies, such as the Romanian Academy, the EAA (TEA 2003), ICOMOS, and few Romanian archaeologists (see Dragoman 2013a, 2013b). This way, certain aspects of the heritage will not get displaced (and selected for conservation or study due to their "unique" character), like selectively taking away pieces of a puzzle, rather than gaining meaning only in relation to each other.

Final thoughts

Roșia Montana can make an interesting case study for the archaeological and cultural resources community as well, as it

3
http://www.privesc.eu/Arhiva/18548/Conferinta-de-presa-cu-tema--Exploatarea-miniera---un-act-de-vandalism-cultural--despre-studiul-expertilor-britanici-asupra-patrimoniului-de-la-Rosia- , 24 October 2013

provides the perfect environment for applying the idea of "a praxis of archaeology that involves knowing the world, critiquing the world, and taking action in the world" (McGuire 2007: 10). After all, who would benefit from the destruction/conservation of heritage? The investor, the nation, the community? Romania's economy is trying to develop on capitalistic principles and even though economic projects need to be done, can they happen by endangering and displacing a sense of identity and of shared values? What is the role of heritage in the sustainable development of Romania? In this light, what does sustainable development mean? At a local level, part of the community fights against being displaced (with a focus on the heritage which is most significant to them, their dead being moved, the fear of houses being abandoned and left in ruins, and of the churches in danger of being destroyed), which "is contrary to the demographic growth policy of Țara Moţilor and to the requisites of the area's sustainable development" according to the Romanian Academy (2013: 4). At a national level, voices are opposing the project given the place's unique situation—not of unique pieces, but of unique pieces living together, within the context that gave birth to them.

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