

OBJECTS FROM ROȘIA MONTANĂ (ROMANIA)

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Keywords: Roșia Montană, Romania, Roman grave, 19th century memorial monument, socialist blocks, industrial machines and quarries, vernacular house, modern refuse dumps and craters.

Abstract: During the debates concerning the Roșia Montană case (Romania), representatives of the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation, the media, politicians and even “experts” have understood materiality and, implicitly, the cultural heritage as being something actually collateral with respect to the social, economic and political aspects, considered as truly important. At the same time, even though the topic of the cultural heritage of Roșia Montană was fiercely debated, both within the discipline of archaeology as well as in the public space, paradoxically, the objects composing this heritage were ignored, in favour of aspects related to heritage policies. In this paper I undertake to bring forth the objects in Roșia Montană and their stories. I militate to go beyond the heritage issue and study the materiality of Roșia Montană – past and present.

Rezumat: În timpul dezbaterilor privind cazul Roșia Montană (România), reprezentanții ai companiei Roșia Montană Gold Corporation, oamenii din media, politicieni și chiar „specialiști” au înțeles materialitatea și, implicit, patrimoniul cultural ca fiind ceva absolut secundar în comparație cu aspectele sociale, economice și politice, considerate cu adevărat importante. Totodată, deși tema patrimoniului cultural de la Roșia Montană a fost aprig discutată, atât în cadrul disciplinei arheologice, cât și în spațiul public, în mod paradoxal, obiectele propriu-zise care compun acest patrimoniu au fost ignorate, în favoarea aspectelor legate de politicile de patrimoniu. În textul de față mi-am propus să aduc în prim-plan obiectele de la Roșia Montană și poveștile lor. Militez pentru a trece dincolo de problema patrimoniului și a studia materialitatea Roșiei Montane – trecut și prezent.

Introduction

In 1999, Roșia Montană (Alba County, Transylvania) (Fig. 1), a community from the Apuseni Mountains where, even since ancient times, mining was the main activity of the inhabitants, turned into the main objective of a large-scale mining project initiated by Euro Gold Resources SA, renamed SC Roșia Montană Gold Corporation SA (RMGC) a year later. For this purpose, the company started to acquire the inhabitants' buildings and land, located both within the area which was to be affected and outside it. Also, the company financed a national research programme, established and coordinated by the Ministry of Culture, with the special purpose of verifying the area for the future mining exploitation of RMGC, namely the “*Alburnus*

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Maioresc” National Research Programme. Therefore, between 2001 and 2004 large-scale preventive archaeological excavations were carried out at Roșia Montană, to which various national institutions in the field contributed (The National Museum of Romanian History from Bucharest, The National Institute of Historical Monuments from Bucharest, The Bucharest and Cluj Archaeological Institutes of the Romanian Academy, The National Museum of Transylvanian History from Cluj, The National Museum of the Union from Alba Iulia and The Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilisation from Deva), as well as a team specialized in mining archaeology from the University of Toulouse, France;¹ in 2001, ethnographic research was also carried out at Roșia Montană by the Museum of the Romanian Peasant of Bucharest.²

The historic centre of the town and a series of individual buildings have been placed under legal protection by being listed as historic monuments.³ The company undertook to fully promote this cultural heritage while developing the mining project.⁴ RMGC claims to have invested \$11 million by 2011 in research and conservation of the cultural heritage of Roșia Montană and to have planned a further \$35 million investment if the project gets started.⁵ According to the company's discourse, the enhancement of cultural heritage would contribute in its turn to the prosperity of the community, becoming a material element for the development of a more efficient tourism.⁶ As a sign of complying with the promises made, the company even started restoring several buildings.⁷ The first house to be restored and inaugurated was House no. 325, in the *Piața Veche* (Old Square), where an exhibition was set up by the Municipality of Roșia Montană, the National Museum of Romanian History from Bucharest, the National Museum of the Union from Alba Iulia, in partnership with RMGC, and dedicated to the mining history of Roșia Montană, under the title *The Gold of the Apuseni* (Fig. 2).

Together with an entire series of other buildings, the exhibition is to become part of a Mining Museum, should the mining project be

¹ Damian 2003, 2008; Simion *et alii* 2010.

² Popoiu 2010.

³ See the List of Historic Monuments project (1992), <http://www.cimec.ro/Monumente/Lista-Monumentelor-Istorice.htm>.

⁴ *Călătorie* 2011, pp. 28-35.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

⁷ See also the brochure published by RMGC – *Punem în valoare Roșia Montană* (“We promote Roșia Montană”).



Fig. 1. Roșia Montană, September 2011 (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

put into effect.⁸ All these measures taken by the company were assessed by experts in various fields of cultural heritage as being significant and in compliance with the highest standards,⁹ arguments taken over and promoted by the representatives of RMGC as well. However, the promotion policy of the cultural heritage of Roșia Montană was severely criticized, drawing particular attention, for example, to the insufficiency of the elements constituting the protected areas and the importance of the area as a whole, with the urgent need to include Roșia Montană in the UNESCO lists;¹⁰ the unprofessional restorations;¹¹ the ideological content of *The Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition, which claims to refer to the history of Roșia Montană while actually naturalizing and legitimating the capitalist interests of the company;¹² the policy devoid of reflexivity and sensibility towards the architectural heritage;¹³ or the ignorance shown to the materiality of the modern and contemporary age by the *“Alburnus Maior” National Research Programme*.¹⁴ Over the years, several arguments for and against the RMGC policy regarding the promotion of cultural heritage were brought by means of the printed media or TV shows. During the protests from the fall-winter 2013 critical arguments were presented at some workshops organized in *Piața Universității* (the University Square) and in *Parcul Tei* (Tei Park) in Bucharest, in TV shows or press conferences.

⁸ *Călătorie* 2011, pp. 22-25.

⁹ Vulpe *et alii* 2011.

¹⁰ Bălici 2013.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Dragoman 2013a.

¹³ Dragoman 2013b.

¹⁴ Dragoman 2014.



Fig. 2. Roșia Montană, September 2011: the house where *The Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition was set up (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

The facts which I found truly problematic and dissatisfying as far as these debates are concerned are presented hereinafter. First, the fact that representatives of the company, the media, politicians and even “experts” have generally understood materiality and, implicitly, the cultural heritage as being something absolutely collateral in respect to the social, economic and political aspects, considered as truly important; the result was the artificial placement of materiality outside the social or economic field, as if societies and economic systems did not involve large categories of objects. Secondly, even though the topic of the cultural heritage of Roșia Montană was fiercely debated, both within the discipline and in the public space, the very objects composing this heritage were paradoxically ignored. In other words, in most of the produced announcements the objects have never had a paramount role, but served only as a means for approaching some topics related to the issues of cultural heritage within the social-economic framework of present day Romania. Even in exhibitions such as *The Gold of the Apuseni*, where the objects should have been the centre of attention, they were used as mere ingredients for drafting a visual narrative related to the “history of mining”. In this paper, starting from a non-anthropocentric research philosophy,¹⁵ I undertake to bring forth the objects in Roșia Montană and their stories, to release them from the tyranny of prevailing debates.

Five stories

Objects in a grave

The grave (Fig. 3) was part of a Roman cemetery found in the *Țarina* area, which also extended over

¹⁵ *E.g.* Karlsson 1997; Olsen 2010.

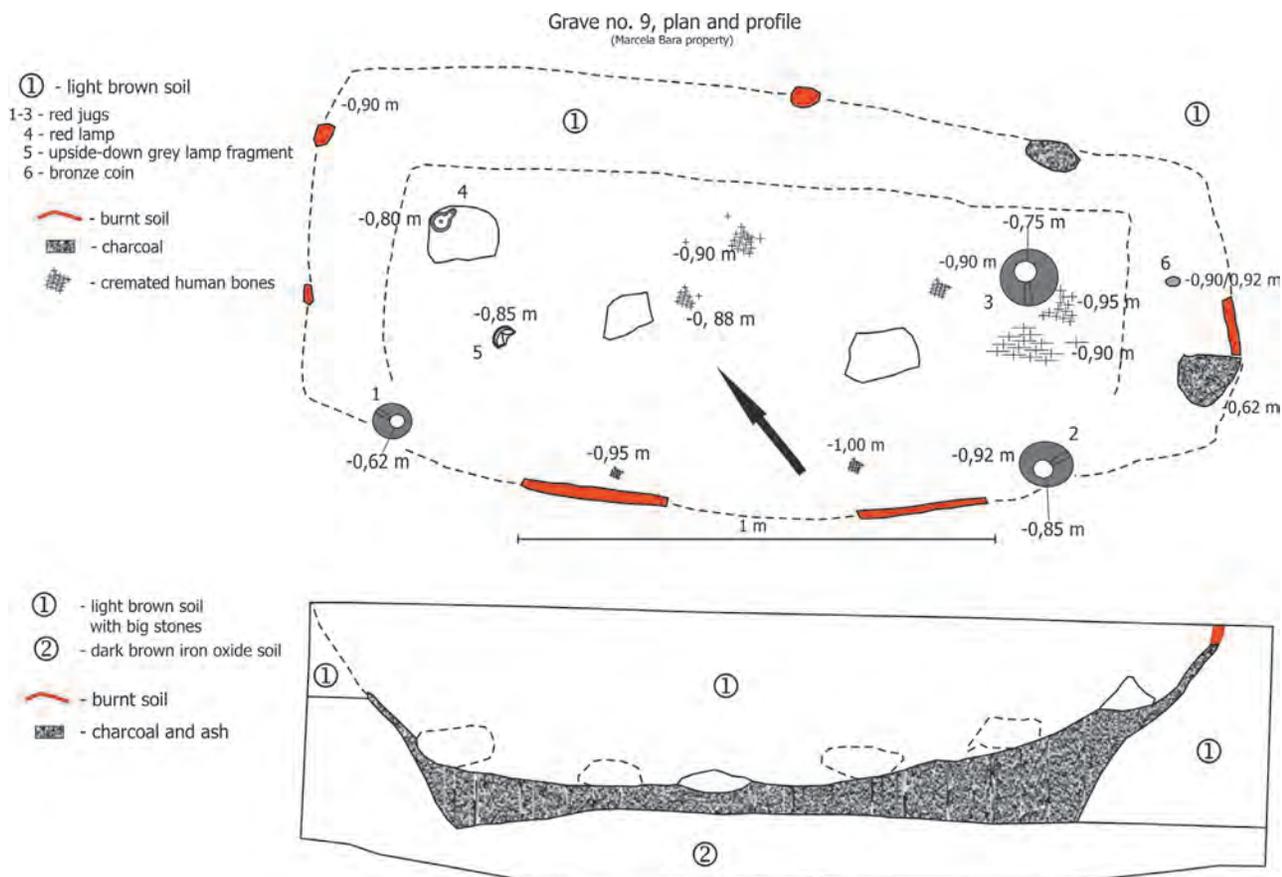


Fig. 3. Roşia Montană: plan and profile of Grave no. 9, Marcela Bara property (source: archives of the Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest [IAB]).

the Marcela Bara property, investigated during 2003-2004 by a team of archaeologists from the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest.¹⁶ The grave was identified in an area excavated in May 2004 (code 011006d010) and, being the ninth funerary complex found until then, received the label “G 9”. Grave no. 9 contained cremated human bones, traces of coal, three jugs and a red lamp, a fragmented lid from a grey lamp, a strongly damaged bronze coin as well as several stones.

The objects from Grave no. 9 share some similarities with many of the investigated Roman graves in Roşia Montană. Chronologically, in the absence of more accurate dating elements, such as a lamp belonging to the *Firmalampen* category, they can be dated to sometime in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD. Regarding their origin, although no direct analysis

was made, the research done on the Roman pottery technology of Roşia Montană¹⁷ so far suggests that the objects have been locally produced.

All the objects from Grave no. 9 are ordinary, but this doesn't make them less relevant. The objects cannot be interpreted as a mere reflection of a religious belief, where the coin represents the obolus which the deceased must pay to Charon (the ferryman) in order to carry his soul across the Styx river, the pots contain the potion which the deceased also needs in the afterlife, and the lamps would symbolize the *lux perpetua*. The objects have more than a signifying function: they have their own individual roles. The jugs, lamps and coins are characteristic objects of the domestic space. They evoke daily gestures, constantly reenacted in the course of one's lifetime. The jugs (Fig. 4) refer to the gestures of pouring and consuming liquids alone or in the company of others; they are objects common for table service, but may

¹⁶ The team's members were Vlad Vintilă Zirra, Florian Matei-Popescu and the author.

¹⁷ Rusu-Bolindeţ *et alii* 2008.



Fig. 4. Roșia Montană, May 2004: Grave no. 9, Marcela Bara property; jug (source: IAB archives).



Fig. 5. Roșia Montană, May 2004: Grave no. 9, Marcela Bara property; lamp (source: IAB archives).



Fig. 6. Roșia Montană, May 2004: Grave no. 9, Marcela Bara property; rocks (source: IAB archives).



Fig. 7. Roșia Montană, June 2003: memorial monument, Laura Coroiu property (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

be used whenever needed. Their material properties make them ideal containers to hold liquids. Whether water or wine, the content is preserved under the best conditions. The lamps (Fig. 5) refer to the gestures of filling, lighting and illuminating; they are essential for carrying out household activities when natural light is absent or insufficient. The lamps are found not only in the owners' households but also at one's working place, inside the mine, as shown by the fact that the Roman galleries of *Alburnus Maior* had hollow compartments carved along their side walls especially designed for these lamps. The coins refer to the gestures of counting, buying, paying or calculating, whereas the stones (Fig. 6), generally viewed by the dominant trends in Romanian archaeological practice as non-objects, refer to the mountainous landscape, to the rocks exploited underground and to those used as construction material.

For the miners of *Alburnus Maior* and their families, the religious significance of funerary objects combines with one derived from practice, from the objects' action in the world of the living. Their role as illuminating marks offering guidance to miners along their underground routes turns them into travelling companions into the afterlife.¹⁸ The underground work/mining and the journey to the world of the dead/death seem to have been conceived in an analogous manner, as in both cases woman/man travels through the unknown guided by lamps.¹⁹ The jugs are efficient containers that preserve the substances necessary to the deceased in his journey to the afterlife. The coin may be for

¹⁸ See also Dragoman 2013a.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

paying Charon, the ferryman, but also for any other unexpected situation in which payment is needed. As for the stones, just as the stone buildings of *Alburnus Maior* are massive, resistant in time and protective of their interior, the stones of the grave protect its contents.

Inside the grave, all these objects acquire a new function. They mobilize the new background of the deceased by building around her/him a never ending familiar and domestic atmosphere, protected against unexpected events. Thus the grave becomes a new home, somewhat similar to that in the world of the living, an eternal home – a real *domus aeterna*.²⁰

Grave no. 9 and the objects within contain the memory of an ancient world, where, as opposed to the universe of modern man, the conceptual borders between utility and symbolism, between the domestic and the funerary, between nature and culture, do not exist; a world where objects accompany the person in a faithful and solidary manner throughout her/his entire life as well as beyond it. The objects grant stability and harmony to people's lives. Silent and modest, they define the home and build it anew in the afterlife. Humans have plenty to learn from them.

A memorial monument

The memorial monument was documented during the investigations carried out in June 2003 at the Laura Coroiu property, where a team of the same Institute of Archaeology²¹ excavated a trench 10 m long and 3 m wide to verify the existence of archaeological remains on this plot (code 011003d001) (Fig. 7). The monument is made of andesite and consists of several elements as follows (bottom – top): (a) square base 0.73 m wide and 0.20 m high; (b) square pedestal 0.52 m wide and 0.43 m high; (c) truncated pyramid with inscriptions in Hungarian engraved on three sides, with a large base of 0.38 m, a small base of 0.19 m and 1.01 m in height; (d) 0.33 m high decorative element. The overall height of the monument is 2.10 m (Fig. 8). The engraved texts reveal that the monument was erected in the mid 19th century in honour of an inhabitant of Roşia Montană, Ebergenyi Mozes, who died in July 1849, at 54, following a landslide that took his life and destroyed his home. In his memory and as a sign of love, his child bearing the same name built the monument. The inscription also suggests that other people died along with Ebergenyi Mozes (see Appendix).

²⁰ Cumont 1949.

²¹ The team's members were Meda Toderaş and the author.



Fig. 8. Roşia Montană, June 2003: memorial monument, Laura Coroiu property (photos: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

The memorial has a long biography, from the 19th century to the 21st, materially marked by the objects found in the ditch excavated on the Laura Coroiu property, in the vicinity of the monument, where we found an Austro-Hungarian bronze coin dated 1897 as well as clay fragments (some glazed), shards of glass or crockery and part of a horseshoe (Fig. 9). When I last visited Roşia Montană (September 2012) the role of the monument was the same. In fact, the monument is in an intermediate building phase. After the construction of the memorial



Fig. 9. Roșia Montană: materials found on Laura Coroiu property, June 2003 (photos: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

monument, the accident and death of Ebergenyi Mozes must have lingered in the memory and discussions of those who knew him. As the years passed by, the memory of Ebergenyi Mozes and his tragic death gradually faded from people's memory. At this stage, despite the engraved inscriptions, the monument is no longer associated with the name of the man for whom it was erected: Ebergenyi Mozes becomes one with the monument. For the inhabitants of Roșia Montană, or at least for some of them, the monument remained a familiar element in the landscape, an integral part of the routes crossed from time to time. Yet, familiarity disappears with the departure of the inhabitants. The monument becomes a landmark in a depopulated landscape with modified routes. From this moment on the monument turns into an "ancient" construction resembling the memorial monuments of the Roman age from *Alburnus Maior* / Roșia Montană in point of materiality and mission. For instance, during the 2004 excavations carried out in the Roman cemetery on the Marcela Bara property, located not far from the plot on which the monument lies, fragments of Roman funerary monuments were found, similar to parts in other places in Roșia Montană. The objects were included in the inventory of archaeological materials developed by RMGC and are intended to

become part of a future outdoor lapidarium of the Museum of Mining.²² Some elements of funerary architecture were included in *The Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition in hall no. 1, called "Archaeology: we excavated and found history". In this hall a funerary inscription regarding an accident in the mine was also exhibited, describing the collapse of the gallery over a miner that was killed in the mishap.²³ The Roman funerary monuments may be considered as an indicator of the possible fate that Ebergenyi Mozes's monument might have: in time the monument could also end up in the inventories of RMGC or as a museum exhibit. Even if it remains in its initial place, considering the depopulation of the locality and the structural modification of the surrounding landscape, the monument will become similar to an *in situ* Roman column embedded in the texture of present day cities.

For a hurried or distracted visitor, the memorial could be perceived as a simple funerary monument of modern age. However, regardless of the monument's fate, as long as it is not destroyed

²² *Călătorie* 2011, p. 25.

²³ Florian Matei-Popescu, personal comment, Bucharest, August 2013.

it will remain a subversive object. In stark contrast with the capitalist-materialist speech of RMGC and with the “bright” social-economic future imagined by the company, the monument shifts focus to entirely different aspects of human life, encouraging meditation on the fragility of life and the impermanence of the human creation. The unexpected death and suffering caused to the family were always a part of the life of the miners in Roşia Montană. Although the monument still stands in 2012, with the passing of time the engraved texts become ever more difficult to read. The Hungarian community of Roşia Montană is endangered: in contrast with the time when the monument was built, when Transylvania belonged to the Austrian Empire (the future Austro-Hungarian empire), in 2009 the Hungarians represented only 0.2% of the local population.²⁴ The gradual diminishing of the Hungarian population of Roşia Montană refers implicitly to the diminishing and the eventual demise of the entire community, irrespective of its ethnic composition. At the same time, the monument encourages the viewer to travel to 19th century Roşia Montană or, generally, to the time prior to the mining project of RMGC, when it got destroyed by the new exploitations. The past evoked by the monument can be compared to the promised future, when the latter will have become itself a past. Last but not least, the monument shifts focus from the historic and political meta-narrative, such as the “history of mining in Roşia Montană”, to the stories and lives of the people and objects, like the story of Ebergenyi Mozes and the monument erected in his memory.

Appendix: the texts of the inscriptions engraved on the memorial monument

Frontal inscription: A JO ATYÀNAK
EBERGENYI MOZESNE FIA SZE RETET
JE LÈÜL EMEL TE SZERETŐ GYERMEKE
EBERGENYI MOZES

Translation²⁵: ERECTED FOR
EBERGENYI MOZES THE GOOD FATHER
BY HIS LOVING SON EBERGENYI MOZES
AS SIGN OF HIS FILIAL LOVE

Right side inscription: HÁZAD FÖLD MEN TE
IS AL DOZOTUL ESÉL SÍRKÖVED GYERMEK
O BÀNATZA EMELE

²⁴ *Călătorie* 2011, p. 13.

²⁵ The primary translation of the Hungarian texts was made by Ekárt Irimie Emeric of Roşia Montană; subsequently, the translation has been revised and completed by Kázmér Kovács.

Translation: YOU FELL VICTIM TOO WHEN
YOUR HOUSE [WAS TAKEN DOWN BY]
LANDSLIDE CHILD'S SORROW ERECTED
YOUR HEADSTONE

Left right inscription: SZÜ LETESE 1795 EV BE
MEG HOLT 1849 JULIUS

Translation: BORN 1795, DIED JULY 1849

Blocks, industrial machines and quarries

During the communist period, housing blocks appear (Fig. 10) in the architectural landscape of Roşia Montană. The new buildings are made of concrete – a material that was a mark of the social progress and modernization. The multi-storey blocks dominate the surrounding buildings through their massiveness and



Fig. 10. Roşia Montană, May 2008: block (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).



Fig. 11. Roşia Montană, May 2008: block in Piața Veche (Old Square) (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

height and denote endurance. From a material point of view, they build a new world, completely different from that of the urban or vernacular buildings of the Austro-Hungarians or the interwar period. This rupture from the past is suggested not only by the appearance and structure of these new buildings but also by their location. Most of the concrete blocks and



Fig. 12. Roșia Montană, May 2008: surface quarry (photo: Vlad Vintilă Zirra).

constructions were erected away from the Historical Centre of the locality, forming a new centre, where the public institutions were moved. However, the Historical Centre was not completely spared: such a block was built right in the *Piața Veche* (Old Square) by demolishing the Ajtai baroque palace²⁶ (Fig. 11).

In the same time-frame both the domestic and the working landscape change. The concrete blocks correspond to various industrial machines and open quarries resulted from the introduction of surface mining exploitation, not used before. As with concrete, the heavy construction equipment used for communist projects was also a symbol of progress. For example, as follows from the episode on the Volga–Don Canal in the *Советская Империя* documentary (produced in 2007 by Artur Bogatov), the great innovation that made this construction site different from previous ones was the full mechanized excavation process. One object of great pride was an immense legged excavator, with a bucket that in itself was bigger than any other excavator. This heavy machine had to be controlled by a team of 17 people with their own Party cell and secretary. As indicated by the sizes of the quarries, overwhelming both in terms of extent and depth, the new methods and technologies create a new working space, of immense proportions, that absorbs countless workers (Fig. 12). Today, “the decomposition” of machines and industrial plants reveals the complex anatomy of the communist working environment that linked together workers, machines, gearing, spare parts, fuels, shacks, working equipment and ore (Fig. 13). A communist everyday sensorial universe, consisting of the engine’s noise, the smell of oil and gasoline, the dust, the workers’ voices, the blazing sun, the gusts of wind, the frigidity of rain and snow.

²⁶ Bălici, Apostol 2006.



Fig. 13. Roșia Montană, May 2008: ruined equipment in a surface quarry (photos: Vlad Vintilă Zirra).

After the Communist regime’s fall in 1989, the socialist blocks remained intact and continued to be inhabited, thus RMGC started to buy the apartments within. At the date when the photos were taken (May 2008), they did not look like the ruined blocks of Zlatna (Fig. 14), a city not far away from Roșia Montană, and the main mining centre of the Apuseni area from Roman times until just recently. Besides, as shown by RMGC plans, during



Fig. 14. Zlatna, May 2008: block in ruins (photos: Tiberiu Vasilescu).

the unfolding of the new mining project the blocks are to be used as administrative offices. In contrast with the appearance of the blocks, in the open communist quarries the machines and industrial installations were in different levels of decay. The communist work environment had disintegrated along with the objects. At first sight, the industrial ruins of the “Golden Age”²⁷ of Roşia Montană might be interpreted as material witnesses of the failure of the communist mining project. Such an interpretation seems to be misleading since the surface exploitation from the communist period was adopted as the main technique of extracting ore by RMGC as well. Moreover, exactly like in the case of the official communist discourse that was accompanying the works at the Volga–Don Canal, the capitalist discourse promoted by RMGC speaks also of the superiority of the equipment used in future explorations: “The new mining exploration and the spectacularity of the equipment that will be used in Rosia Montana will become a veritable tourist attraction in itself, as it has happened all over the world”.²⁸

As Bjørnar Olsen remarked in the case of the blocks from the Kola Peninsula, in the North-West of Russia, from a historical and political point of view the Communist regime ended at the beginning of the 1990s, but in archaeological terms the communist past is still present in people’s lives through its materiality.²⁹ In the specific case of Roşia Montană, the blocks and quarries from the communist period are not abandoned after 1989, but

are integrated in the RMGC mining project. In other words, a significant part of the materiality of the communist mining project comes to be constituted by the materiality of a capitalist mining project – two projects, partially united by the same materiality. Despite the historical and political speeches about the disruption that took place in 1989 and the shift from communism and totalitarianism to democracy and capitalism, the blocks and quarries of Roşia Montană rather show continuity.

Objects in a house

The objects were found inside House no. 519 (Fig. 15) – a two-room abandoned vernacular house, elevated on a basement, with a porch on the facade. The house and objects were documented in May 2008 and were presented in a critical text regarding the RMGC policy to promote the architectural heritage of Roşia Montană.³⁰ The text focused on how this context was treated by the company’s employees and not on the objects themselves, a reason why I decided to focus exclusively on them in this article.

Through the entrance door the porch is accessed, and from here the first room (Fig. 16). The first room has two windows on the wall opposing the door from the porch and a door which opens onto the second room, with two windows on adjoining sides. The walls of both rooms are painted white. Relative to the body perception, the rooms are small, but bright. In the first room (Fig. 17) a ladle and two mirrors were found hanging on a wall; one of the windows had a curtain while on the sill of the other there was a radiator; on the

²⁷ Propaganda name of Nicolae Ceauşescu’s regime.

²⁸ *Călătorie* 2011, p. 71.

²⁹ Olsen 2013.

³⁰ Dragoman 2013b.



Fig. 15. Roșia Montană, May 2008: House no. 519 (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).



Fig. 16. Roșia Montană, May 2008: House no. 519 (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).



Fig. 17. Roșia Montană, May 2008: House no. 519, objects from the first room (photos: a by Tiberiu Vasilescu; b by Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

floor there were a severely damaged bed, some baby clothes and a glass, a jar, a heating device and two rumpled packs of cigarettes, “Kentucky” and “Ronson”. In the second room (Fig. 18) a heating plate, an empty box of “Bonux” detergent, a “Regal” tomato paste plastic jar, a cup with a broken handle, a plastic bread basket, a metal pan, a broken glass, a “Regal” cappuccino glass jar, a metal mug, a metal bowl with two handles, a plastic lid, a plastic bottle, a wooden box, a broken braiding, a bunch of (what seems to be) dry lavender, a broken five star brandy bottle with a metallic label, etc. were thrown on the floor. On the sill of one of the two windows there was a lidded glass jar containing coffee. In the second room there were a metal sheet (with coals, a fragment from a pack of cigarettes, a cigarette butt and other scraps) and part of a chimney, as well as nails, possibly used as hangers, nailed to the ceiling beams. The house was electrified.

Almost all of the objects from House no. 519 (maybe except for the five star brandy bottle) are ordinary objects, characteristic of a modest life of which at least one is found in present day households. They are involved in countless routine household activities such as cooking, eating and drinking, doing laundry and loading the stove. The objects build a protective environment, from the human body level to that of every single room and of the entire house: the heating and protection of the body (clothes and bed linen); a warm home (stove and heating device); illumination (electric equipment); intimacy (curtains which adorn the house and protect it against strange eyes); pleasant odours (the lavender which perfumes the room); the tables, cooking, distribution and conservation of food and beverages (saucepan and heating plate, ladle, glasses, mug, jar and bread basket); cleaning (detergent box).

Still in their usual place, the ladle and mirrors hanging on the wall and the window curtain evoke

the gestures, actions and presence of the people immersed in this environment while, in stark contrast, the objects abandoned in places where they do not belong evoke the final moment, that of the rummaging and the sudden ending of ordinary life. Together, they show the ephemeral nature of the domestic, in the rapid succession of projects and ideologies of modernity, in this case – “relocation”. The objects evoke the finitude of the human life, the transitory condition of the humans. Therefore, the objects from House no. 519 contribute not only to the understanding of this house and the life within but also encourage existential reflection.³¹

The ending is sad. Their modesty and their status as abandoned objects determined the RMGC employees to consider them of no importance. As a result, House no. 519 was emptied. The soul of the house disappeared along with the objects. The abandoned objects were not ordinary things, sold and used even nowadays, they were not just the partial remains of a dwelling from the contemporary past, but the very past of those who lived in House no. 519. Therefore, a conclusion as critical as that from the first text that I dedicated to House no. 519 becomes mandatory: following its policy of promoting the past, RMGC managed to actually destroy it.

Refuse dumps and craters

The landscape surrounding Roşia Montană is a picturesque one – mountains, hills, meadows, forests and lakes. Most of the forms composing this landscape are not actually natural but anthropogenic. The industrial exploitation that started in the Habsburg period and continued in the Austro-Hungarian times and interwar period – for which the water mills, water tanks or rails and barrows for transporting the ore stand as witnesses – led to the formation of refuse dumps and artificial lakes/ponds (Fig. 19).³² In time, the dumps were covered by vegetation, acquiring the appearance of small hills. The pre-communist industrial exploitation created new landforms that, once covered by vegetation, partially reproduced the natural mountainous landscape. The communist period introduces the surface exploitations which led to the maceration of a mountain and the creation of large craters (Fig. 20). Through their shape and colour, the craters produced by the new exploitation technology form an anthropic land that is radically different from the surrounding landscape. In its turn, the mining



Fig. 18. Roşia Montană, May 2008: House no. 519, objects from the second room (photos: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

project promoted by RMGC provides for the dissolution of four mountains.

Beyond the historical differences between the Habsburg, Austro-Hungarian, interwar or communist periods, the material common denominator is the refuse dump. The exploitation from the Habsburg period extends its limits in time, including increasingly larger areas, culminating in (post-) communist surface exploitations. In other words the 18th – 19th century

³¹ See Birstrom 2004.

³² See Bălici 2013.



Fig. 19. Roșia Montană, May 2008: refuse dumps and artificial lake (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

dump announces the 20th – 21st century crater. Taken together, the industrial exploitation of the modern period produces ample geological modifications at Roșia Montană. Just like a secularized Genesis in which the human is assigning himself attributes of God, a new world is created, with new hills and lakes, craters instead of mountains and even a new man hypnotized by the mirage of gold. In the picturesque landscape of Roșia Montană lies hidden the nude picture of the modernist mining exploitations: a world of waste, naturally covered by vegetation or “greened”, gradually forged by rummaging through the given world in search of profit. Following these successive rummages, the entire area became a complex artefact made of refuse dumps, artificial lakes, galleries and industrial plants buried or ruined. Roșia Montană is not a mining city, but a monument of modernity.

Conclusions: Roșia Montană beyond the heritage issue

The objects described in this paper were documented during random investigations, whenever the opportunity appeared rather than following a systematic approach. That is why the objects included must not be considered as being representative for the materiality of Roșia Montană. Also, I am aware of the fact that this random documentation makes the stories poorer since the level of detail and colour that is necessary is inevitably low. However, I believe that they are sufficient to convince that, for the most part, the objects can speak of new things. Between the meanings and functions people assign to objects and what such objects actually have to say there can be significant differences. Thus, I militate to go beyond the heritage issue and study the materiality of Roșia Montană – past and present.

As it can be noticed from the above stories,



Fig. 20. Roșia Montană, May 2008: crater (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman).

the greatest part of Roșia Montană’s history bears the mark of modernity. Therefore, studying the “heritage” of Roșia Montană could be conceived as an archaeology of modernity, an epoch that is in a profound contrast with the pre-modern past of the Roman period.

As for RMGC’s neoliberal mining project, if the pro-capitalist politicians, the ideologists and managers lie, if the scientists delude themselves or deliberately delude others, if the media become silent, the objects shall speak.

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