

Horia Ciugudean* ANCIENT GOLD MINING IN
TRANSYLVANIA: THE ROȘIA MONTANĂ -
BUCIUM AREA**

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Abstract: In this study, the author reviews the older and newest discoveries regarding the ancient gold mining in the “Golden Quadrangle” of the Apuseni Mountains, Transylvania. The finest and most extensive Roman mining works are those which are still to be seen at Roșia Montana and Bucium, where mediaeval and modern mining activities made very little impact on them. As the existence of pre-Roman hard rock gold mining is still debated by the scholars, some new finds are discussed here, including the Roșia Montana ¹⁴C data and the new results in the study of the metal provenance applied to the Transylvanian gold. Although it is still difficult to estimate the location of the first prehistoric mining areas, some of the ancient opencast mines at Roșia Montană (Găuri and Cetate) and Bucium (Ieruga, Gaura Perii) may be considered very good candidates in this respect. According to the author’s view, a connection could be proposed between the alignment of Early Bronze tumulus-burials graves and the ancient routes of communication in the Roșia Montană – Bucium – Zlatna area. There was a “Golden Corridor” along the Ampoi valley, which connected Transylvanian metal ores with different cultural regions (Lower Danube, the Adriatic shore and northern Greece).

Rezumat: Studiul trece în revistă descoperirile vechi sau recente privind mineritul aurifer din zona “Patrulaterului Aurifer” din Munții Apuseni. Cele mai ample și complexe lucrări miniere din perioada romană sunt cele de la Roșia Montană și Bucium, care au fost puțin afectate de activitățile miniere din perioada medievală și modernă. În condițiile în care existența mineritului subteran pre-roman este încă un subiect larg dezbătut de specialiști, sunt aduse în discuție unele date ¹⁴C de la Roșia Montană și rezultatele studiilor recente de proveniență a metalului aplicate în cazul aurului din Transilvania. Deși este încă dificil de precizat amplasamentul zonelor miniere preistorice, pot fi luate în considerare câteva dintre vechile exploatări la suprafață de la Roșia Montană (Găuri și Cetate) și Bucium (Ieruga, Gaura Perii). În opinia autorului, se poate stabili o conexiune între aliniamentele de tumuli aparținând Bronzului timpuriu și vechile rute de comunicație din zona Roșia Montană - Bucium – Zlatna. Se propune funcționarea unui „Coridor aurifer” de-a lungul văii Ampoiului, care lega zăcămintele metalifere ale Transilvaniei de alte zone culturale (Dunărea de Jos, coasta Adriaticii sau nordul Greciei).

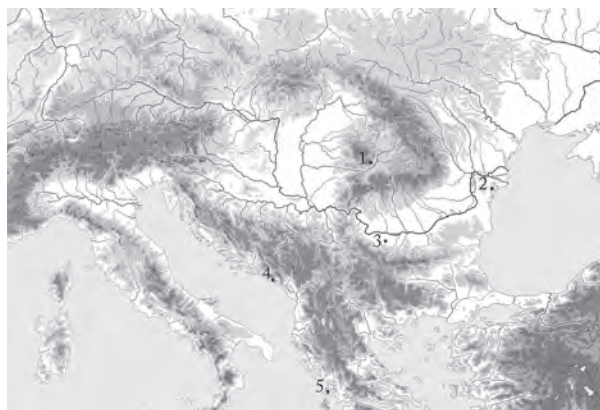


Fig. 1. Distribution of Early Bronze Age gold hair rings (Leukas type): 1. Ampoița; 2. Jurilovca; 3. Târnava; 4. Velika Gruda; 5. Leukas.

Due to its plentiful natural resources, such as rich deposits of copper, gold and silver, the region of Transylvania represents the most likely area of Central and South-East Europe, where some of the major achievements in the development of ancient mining took place. The “Golden Quadrangle” in the Apuseni Mountains (Pl. I/1) has been one of the main producer of gold in Europe.¹

The prehistoric exploitation of gold in the Apuseni Mountains was already proposed at the end of the 19th century, when G. Téglás published some grooved stone hammers from Căraci.² There are many references to the huge number of mounds related to the recovery of gold from placers in the Arieș valley (Fig. 2), at Lupșa, Baia de Arieș, Sălciua, Lunca Arieșului etc., some of them dated with Roman finds.³ There are no field surveys or archaeological excavations in such areas, so it is hard to estimate the beginning of the placer mining. However, the recent discovery of a Copper Age workshop in the Peștera Ungurului cave at Cheile Turzii, was connected by the excavators with the recovery of gold from the Arieș river.⁴ More than 70 gold items were recovered, most of them small beads (<4 mm), together with golden sheets (Pl. III/1-2), either finished or in working process.⁵ Some preliminary analysis showed a much lower content of silver in the composition of Cheile Turzii objects, in comparison with the gold from the

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¹ Huber, Huber 1983; Lehrberger 1995; Udubașa *et alii* 2001.

² Téglás 1888, p. 464, no. 5; Wollmann, Ciugudean 2005, p. 96; Boroffka 2006, p. 74, fig. 2/3; 3/1.

³ Wollmann 1996, 146-148 (with older literature).

⁴ Lazarovici *et alii* 2012.

⁵ Lazarovici *et alii* 2012, fig. 9-12.