

A COMMENT ON THE “OXFORD REPORT”, THE MATERIAL HERITAGE OF ROȘIA MONTANĂ AND THE POLICY OF ROMANIA’S MINISTRY OF CULTURE*

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Keywords: Roșia Montană; material heritage; the “Oxford Report”; Ministry of Culture; Romania.

Abstract: In the present text, read at a press conference organised in October 2013, at the time of public protests against a new and neoliberal mining law, I argue that the criticism raised to the policies of Roșia Montană Gold Corporation mining project, regarding the material heritage of Roșia Montană (Alba County, Romania), have been deliberately ignored by those responsible with heritage within the Ministry of Culture of Romania, while promoting in the public and political space only the interpretations that were in favour of RMGC; I also maintain that the archaeological researches carried out beginning with 2001 at Roșia Montana and coordinated by the Ministry of Culture, as part of “Alburnus Maior” National Research Programme, are far from matching the current academic standards in the field. Therefore, the policy of the Ministry of Culture regarding the material heritage of Roșia Montană must be solidarily challenged by the members of the archaeological community.

Rezumat: În textul de față, citit la o conferință de presă organizată în octombrie 2013, în timpul protestelor publice împotriva unei noi și neoliberale legi a minelor, susțin ideea conform căreia critica adusă politicilor companiei Roșia Montană Gold Corporation, referitoare la patrimoniul material de la Roșia Montană (județul Alba, România), a fost deliberat ignorată de către cei responsabili cu patrimoniul în cadrul Ministerului Culturii din România, promovând, în schimb, în spațiul public și politic, doar interpretările ce se aflau în asentimentul RMGC; de asemenea, susțin că cercetările arheologice efectuate începând cu anul 2001 la Roșia Montană și coordonate de Ministerul Culturii, ca parte a Programului Național de Cercetare “Alburnus Maior”, sunt departe de a corespunde standardelor academice din cadrul câmpului. În consecință, politica Ministerului Culturii privind patrimoniul material de la Roșia Montană trebuie cât mai solidar combătută de membrii comunității arheologice.

Given the fact that the report by the British scholars¹ may be freely consulted by anyone willing to

** Text presented at the press conference entitled “*The mining development – an act of cultural vandalism. What do the British experts say on the heritage of Roșia Montană*”, called by The “ProPatrimonio” Foundation, The Romanian Chamber of Architects, The “Architecture. Restoration. Archaeology” Association, The “Alburnus Maior” Association and ICOMOS Romania, Bucharest, 24 October 2013. The press conference has been organised at the time of public protests against a new and neoliberal mining law.

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¹ Wilson *et alii* 2011.

do so, in the following short account I will not dwell on the published arguments, and I will refer instead to the situation of the report in the context of the narrative on the material heritage of Roșia Montană. Thus I wish to emphasise a few worrisome aspects, with respect to the relation between the archaeological field and the political one, upon which I believe it is worth reflecting.

(1) According to the authors of this report, specialised in archaeology of the Roman Empire, the habitation from *Alburnus Maior* (Roșia Montană) has an exceptional character within the whole of the Roman world, and therefore its preservation *in situ* comes necessary. Even on restricting the analysis to this chronological segment, the importance of vestiges from the Roman period is believed to justify the inclusion of the archaeological landscape of Roșia Montană on the list of UNESCO sites, an argument which was contested up until now by supporters of the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC) project. From this perspective, the launch of the RMGC mining project would equal an act of “cultural vandalism”. It is worth noting that the opinion of the British archaeologists coincides with opinions expressed, one way or another, by the most prominent representatives of Roman provincial archaeology in Romania, such as, for example, Ioan Piso of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.² Nevertheless, in the public space, some established politicians and people from the media have relativised the critical voices, by invoking the existence of opposite views and placing the equal sign between the different opinions. Thus, they have created the impression that they adopt an attitude which is neutral and objective in respect to all expressed opinions, leading them to conclude that the archaeological arguments raised by critics would be extremely subjective, therefore fragile; consequently, the only pretended objective arguments would remain those of economical and, maybe, ecological nature. Those politicians and people in the media who used the mentioned discourse have proven a total lack of familiarity to the way in which knowledge is produced and a research field works, such as the archaeological one. It is not the place to go into further details, but one needs to say that plurality of opinions, however contradictory these may be, does not mean in any circumstances that within one discipline all interpretations have the same value: in the specific case of Roșia Montană, I consider that no archaeologist specialised in Roman provincial archaeology could argue, at an international thematic conference for instance, that *Alburnus Maior* is not of outstanding importance and should not be preserved *in situ* – except with the risk of immediately falling from the status of specialist and even of that of archaeologist.

² E.g. Piso 2003.