

THE GOLD OF THE APUSENI EXHIBITION: ABOUT THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE OF ROȘIA MONTANĂ (ROMANIA)*

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Keywords: Roșia Montană, industrial heritage, Roșia Montană Gold Corporation, the *Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition, modernity, Romania

Abstract: This text is a critique of an exhibition dedicated to the history of mining in Roșia Montană (Alba County, Romania) and organized by the Roșia Montană's Town Hall, the National History Museum of Romania (Bucharest), the National Museum of Unification (Alba Iulia), and Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC) – a private mining company interested in the resources of the region. I maintain that by the way the exhibits are presented the exhibition destroys the difference of the pre-modern pasts, naturalizes and promotes the present capitalist values and economic interests of RMGC.

Rezumat: Acest text este o critică a unei expoziții dedicate istoriei mineritului din Roșia Montană (județul Alba, România) și organizată de Primăria Roșia Montană, Muzeul Național de Istorie a României (București), Muzeul Național al Unirii (Alba Iulia) și Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (R.M.G.C.) – o companie minieră privată interesată în resursele regiunii. Susțin că prin maniera în care sunt prezentate exponatele expoziția distruge diferența trecuturilor pre-moderne, naturalizează și promovează valorile capitaliste și interesele economice din prezent ale R.M.G.C.

Introduction

In 1999, the Euro Gold Resources SA company, which was renamed a year later Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC), obtained the license to exploit the gold and silver deposits in the area of Roșia Montană locality (Alba County, Transylvania).¹ Euro Gold Resources SA/RMGC initiated a major mining project which was providing the exploitation and, hence, the radical transformation of the environment, including a large part of the locality. However, according to RMGC's discourse, promoted both on the official website and in the media, the project was meant to bring prosperity to the area. Among the measures promoted by RMGC as likely to contribute to the sustainable economic development of the locality, is included the restoration and enhancement of the cultural heritage. Thus, as the sources which support the project show, by 2011

“RMGC has already invested 11 millions dollars on the research and preservation of cultural heritage and will allocate 35 million dollars more, far beyond the specific legal requirements, as part of the company's commitment to enhance the cultural sites for tourism.” (*Călătorie* 2011: 32, see also the brochure of the exhibition *Aurul Apusenilor. The mining history exhibition from Roșia Montană*)

The first achievement to this effect of the RMGC's project was the opening, in 2010, of the *Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition, dedicated to the history of mining in Roșia Montană (Fig. 1), on which the Roșia Montană's Town Hall, the National History Museum of Romania (Bucharest) and the National Museum of Unification (Alba Iulia) have also collaborated. The exhibition was arranged in the House 325 of the Historical Center of the village, acquired by the company in 2003 and included, among other houses in the protected area of the locality, in a planned museum complex called the Mining Museum.² At the time of my visit (September 2011), the exhibition consisted of three halls: one of them had as theme the archeological researches conducted between 2001 and 2006 in Roșia Montană with RMGC's support under the *National Research Program "Alburnus*

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¹ According to RMGC's official website: <http://www.rmgc.ro/>; accessed: 23 November 2011.

² *Călătorie* 2011, pp. 22-25.



Fig. 1. Roșia Montană, the Old Square: the building in which the *Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition was arranged (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman, September 2011).

Maior” – initiated by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and coordinated by the National History Museum of Romania in Bucharest; another hall had as theme the mining at Roșia Montană over time; in the third hall a multimedia exhibition had been arranged, where the visitor could see the future Mining Museum (see also the brochure of the exhibition *Aurul Apusenilor. The mining history exhibition from Roșia Montană*).

In this text, I intend to analyze the manner of enhancement of the industrial heritage of Roșia Montană by RMGC. I mention from the beginning that by “industrial heritage” I refer to the whole repertoire of material culture used in mining activities in the contemporary era, from individual equipment to equipment or vehicles up to exploitation areas themselves. One way to approach this topic is a contextual analysis of some components of the *Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition.

A critical view on RMGC’s exhibition regarding the history of mining in Roșia Montană

Among the arranged halls in the *Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition from House 325, most relevant to the subject matter hereof is the hall dedicated to the mining. In this hall, various specific categories of objects belonging to all historical periods known in Roșia Montană were exposed: ancient, modern and contemporary. We find the same manner of the exposure to the hall level also on one of the showcases (Fig. 2). In the showcase, from the top shelf and continuing to the bottom, were exposed lighting instruments used from Antiquity to the present, while working underground: Roman ceramic lamps, an iron lamp from the Modern Age, lamps with carbide and rough bronze pipes for the lamps with carbide, lanterns with candles, an oil lamp from brass and an oil lamp of zinc table, electrical lamps for mining and mining helmets from textolite, a battery for the electric lighting on the underground. Except for a wooden wagon used for the transportation of the ore until the beginning of the twentieth century, located in the middle of the hall, other equipments were not exposed. Nevertheless, RMGC created “Program 20 – The Industrial and Contemporary Heritage” in order “to ensure a meaningful experience for the visitors regarding the mining tradition in the region, including through the presentation of the various mining technologies used over time”.³ Moreover, in a publication of RMGC, after a section in which are described the main methods of gold extraction used in the Roman, Medieval, Modern and Contemporary times, we learn that “The industrial equipments used in the past have been inventoried and some will be restored and organized for museistic/touristic purposes.”⁴ This visual narrative is apotheotically complemented by a program of RMGC “designed to provide visitors the opportunity to know the characteristics of mining activity which brings the modern mine in Roșia Montană - sporting and cultural activities in the new quarry, the opportunity of interaction with the large machines which will be used by the new mine”.⁵ All these data confirm that the representation through the objects of all the ages documented in Roșia Montană is not at all accidental, but deliberately constructed.

³ Vulpe *et alii*, 2011, p. 151.

⁴ *Călătorie* 2011, p. 46.

⁵ Vulpe *et alii*, 2011, p. 152.

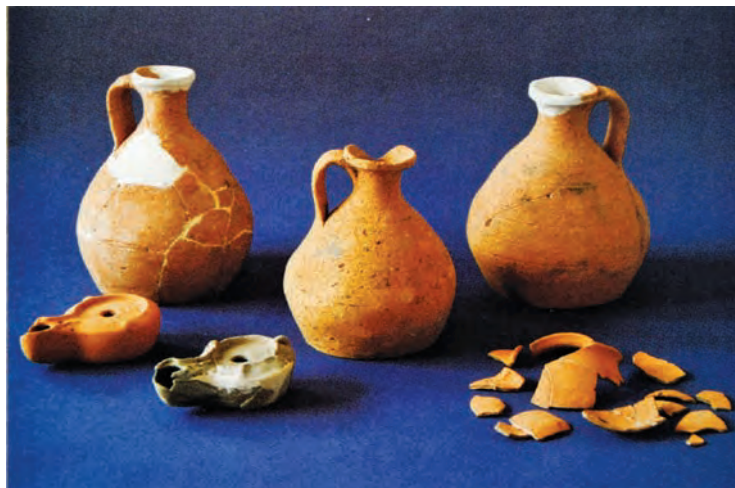


Fig. 3. Objects from the Grave no. 268 of the Roman cemetery from *Tăul Corna* (after Damian 2008, Pl. 345).

Fig. 2. Roşia Montană, the *Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition: showcase with lighting objects from different periods (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman, September 2012).

Also, in the *Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition, the objects are decontextualised and reduced to a single meaning, that of practical tools used in mining activity. Under this action of simplifying the complexity of the objects, the lamp of the Roman Age and the cap with the electrical lamp from the contemporary period would belong to the same world, simply because they have the same function. To this impression, contributes also, the title of the hall dedicated to mining – “People in the service of gold”; the given meaning is such that, between the universe of the people from different historical periods were no significant differences, all of them having the same existential foundation: the gold mining. A brief excursus on the lamps of the Roman Age shows however, that is not the case. In Roman times, lamps are not only met in settlements, but also in cemeteries. In the cemeteries investigated at Roşia Montană, the lamps form the largest category of ceramics⁶ (Fig. 3). In fact, the lamps go through the same transforming process as people, being burned on the pyre along with the deceased, as indicated by the traces of secondary burning arranged either on the entire body of the object, or in areas unrelated to its use as a lighting object.⁷ Through its presence in both the domestic and the funeral space, the lamp creates a symbolic link between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In metaphorical terms, it illuminates both the living and the dead. Because of its small size and fragility, the lamp doesn't seem to be so suitable to the manipulation/the direct lighting in the mining activity, which is characterized by almost continuous movement in confined spaces; more suitable for this purpose would be for example a torch. Instead, as the residences located along the galleries of the mine show, the lamps were used to mark the route; in other words they guided people, as today a pilot lands on a runway marked by lights. Consequently, during the work in the mine, the lamps have value as a group of objects and not as individual objects. The significance of these objects is not abstractly given by those who have made and used them, but is given through practice, through action. Precisely in their capacity as guides, the lamps become a travel companion for the

⁶ Rusu-Bolindeţ, Băltăc 2008, p. 33.

⁷ See Damian 2008, p. 71 ff.

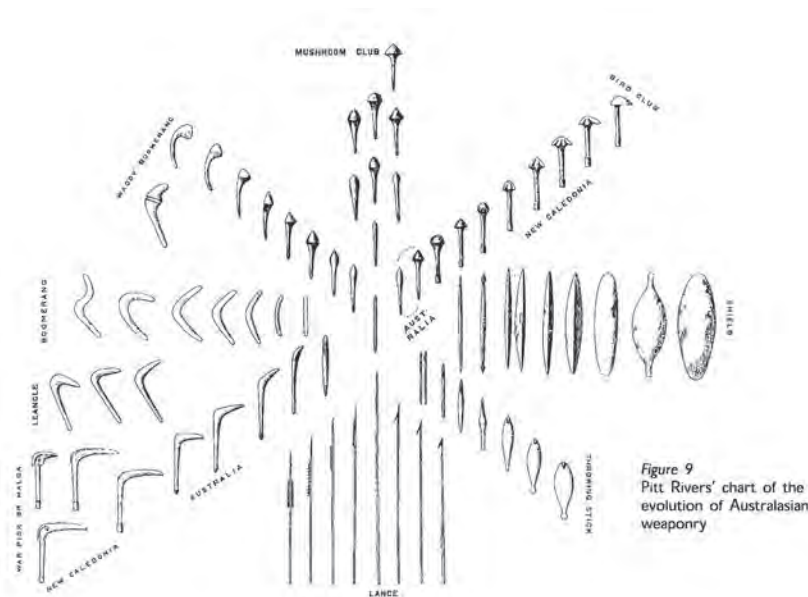


Fig. 4. The scheme of the evolution of Australasian weaponry according to Pitt Rivers (after Lucas 2001, p. 72).

example, in the case of the mentioned showcase, it starts from the Roman oil lamp, passes through the little gas lamps of the modern period and arrives at the contemporary electrical lamps. Thus, the exhibition is the product of a nineteenth-century concept, in which the scientists explained the changes in the material culture in Darwinist terms (Fig. 4). Through this evolutionary narrative is transmitted the idea that, the change and the progress (“the evolution”) of a community were determined over time by the technological progress, not by the theoretical and critical reflection. Thus, the visitor is encouraged to perceive the mining project initiated by RMGC, which is also the most modern and technologically advanced, as enrolling in an innate, natural and necessary last step in the line of the evolution of mining at Roșia Montană. Not starting the RMGC’s project would mean interrupting the evolution, stagnation, lack of progress and, implicitly, negative consequences for a community whose reason to exist has been and continues to be the mining. This vision of social progress through technology is not only RMGC’s own, but it also characterized the communist mining project. Therefore, a look at the mining equipment from the recent past of the mining activity calls for reflection.

Roșia Montană is really a settlement, in which, from Antiquity to the present, the main activity of the inhabitants was the mining. In the surrounding landscape, traces of the mining activities carried out here along the time are present, such as mine galleries, installations, artificial lakes or landfills. However, compared with the exploitations from the earlier periods, the ones from the recent past, specifically from the communist period, are distinguished by the fact that in the 1970-1980s was introduced an exploitation strategy that had never been used before, namely open pit large scale exploitations. This type of exploitation continued for a while after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 (Fig. 5) and will be practiced by RMGC also.

The landscape produced by the surface exploitations of the communist period (and immediately following years) is a deserted, “lunar” landscape. The distressing feeling induced by the image of the quarries is also emphasized by the contrast with the picturesque scenery offered by the mountains and the surrounding hills. Because of their sizes, the traces of the exploitations have a particularly strong impact on the visitor. When you are in these quarries, the impression is overwhelming. The quarries are like gears that macerate the landscape, turning it into “ore” and becoming, thus, increasingly bigger, of gigantic proportions (Fig. 6). The mountains seem fragile in front of the force of these gears: some were already dissolved, others were only partially affected, while more distant mountains seem like waiting. Through their appearance and sizes, the

dead, hence their frequency in the graves. The work underground and the death are analogically designed: the person travels through the unknown underground or to the world of the dead guided by lamps. The lamps are not just functional objects, but indispensable objects during the limit experiences of the Roman miner from *Alburnus Maior*. Or, reducing the significance of the lamp to that of a lighting object, the authors of the exhibition turn it into a kind of prototype of contemporary lighting objects.

To summarize, through the manner of exposing the objects and through the uniformization of their meanings, the exhibition is building and promoting a visual evolutionary narrative, from simple to increasingly-more-complex: for



Fig. 5. Images from a quarry near Roşia Montană (photos: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman, May 2008).



Fig. 6. Images from a quarry from Roşia Montană (photos: Tiberiu Vasilescu, May 2008).

surface exploitations evoke the great transforming power of the (post-)communist project: they refer to the overcoming of any obstacles, to expansion, and, by the volume of the excavated ore, to increased production and economic progress. As shown by the facilities and the equipment present in the quarries, some still in use, some abandoned, this transforming power was/is provided by the technology (Fig. 7). Through this technology, the landscape is reduced to its function of “source” and decomposed into a series of “raw materials”. This manner of exploitation is not at all the natural continuation of the evolution of an activity which dates since the Antiquity, as RMGC’s exhibition implies, but it is the result of a modernist vision. As Bjørnar Olsen shows,⁸ following on Bruno Latour, the modernity has created two fundamentally different ontological zones, one of the humans and one of the non-humans (geological shapes, animals, plants, objects); from that moment, between the two zones has been created an asymmetrical relation of domination, in which the humans have

⁸ Olsen 2003, p. 95.



Fig. 7. Ruined equipments from two quarries from Roșia Montană (photos: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman and Tiberiu Vasilescu, May 2008).

become the central element. The modernity marks a radical break with the pre-modern period. For example, at the Ojibwa community from Canada, people can take a variety of forms, including the stone,⁹ which a modernist perspective classifies as a rock. For the Ojibwa, “the person” is not a subcategory of “the human” as is the case from a modernist perspective, but a comprehensive category in which “the human person” is just a subcategory, along with others, such as, for example, “the stone person”.¹⁰ Similarly, at some communities from Peru, the mountain has power and influence, it must be fed, and people get in return its help.¹¹ Including from Christian perspective, the world is seen as a Creation of God, every thing in itself having its own reason sown by the Creator¹² (Fig. 8). Even if the human being is the crown of the Creation, and the world was created by God as a gift for the people, between the humans and the things created by God there must be a relationship of respect and reciprocity; ultimately, through the reasons of the things, the human being knows God.¹³ As I already said, however, the modernity reverses this report.

For an entire series of people, the industrial landscape of the quarries was a familiar/intimate one, the environment in which they were immersed every day, as well as the place in which they earned their bread. The ruins of the abandoned facilities and equipments in various parts of the quarries evoke a lively and diverse universe, composed by the human voices, the engine noise, the dust and the exhaust gases, etc. (Fig. 9). The facilities and the equipments in “decomposition” reveal complex internal structures which refer to the existence of a special category of workers, the one of the connoisseurs of these machines, of those who were able not only to use them, but also to repair them (Fig. 10). Likewise, the equipments refer to the repetition and the routine of gestures necessary every working day to lead them. On this line it is worth mentioning that, as Jean-Pierre Warnier shows, through sensory-motricity, the subjects always incorporate the material culture they use.¹⁴ The sensory-motricity represents, along with images and words, one of the media of the symbolization – *i.e.* the process by which the subjects introduce into their psychical envelope, the experiences from the outside world and which allows them to tame or to adapt that experiences.¹⁵ Detailing the meaning of the term “incorporation”

⁹ Ingold 2000, p. 91.

¹⁰ Bird-David 1999, p. 71; Ingold 2000, p. 91.

¹¹ Sillar 2009.

¹² Stăniloae 2003, p. 337 ff.

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ *E.g.* Warnier 1999a.

¹⁵ Warnier 2001, p. 14 ff.



Fig. 8. The Holy Mount Athos: notice posted close to the Megiste Lavra Monastery (photo: Radu-Alexandru Dragoman, May 2011).

The incorporation of the utilized material culture is an essential element in the construction of a subject or a group.¹⁷ Therefore, following on J.-P. Warnier, we can assume that, through the long repetition of specific gestures, the material properties of the machines were embodied by those who used them, helping to the creation of a subjectivity characteristic to the community of the miners. Or, at some moment after 1989, the installations were closed, the machines were frozen, and the workers did not return. If we consider the incorporated character of the material culture which composed the quarries from Roşia Montană, then, the loss or the radically change of the workplace by a person who worked for a long time or even a lifetime in those quarries cannot be understood as a simple “change” in his social life, but as an “amputation”. Unfortunately, apart from an ethnographic study,¹⁸ the *National Research Program “Alburnus Maior”* did not imply also an ethnoarcheological approach, that indicates the conceptual poverty of this program.

Warnier affirms:

“Je parlerai d’*incorporation*, non pas de l’objet, puisque l’objet reste extérieur au corps du sujet, mais de sa dynamique qui, elle, est intériorisée par la prise que le sujet exerce sur l’objet. Cette prise se réalise par tous les points de contact et de perception entre la chose et le sujet: doigts, mains, pieds, siège, dos, toucher, ouïe, vue, perception gravitationnelle par l’oreille interne, proprioception neuro-musculaire. [...] L’incorporation de la dynamique de l’objet s’effectue par la mise au point de conduites motrices mémorisées par le corps et qui se manifestent par des stéréotypes moteurs. Ce sont des gestes ou séries de gestes qui, à force de répétition, peuvent être effectués sans effort ni attention particulière, avec efficacité, dans la plus grand économie de moyen.”¹⁶

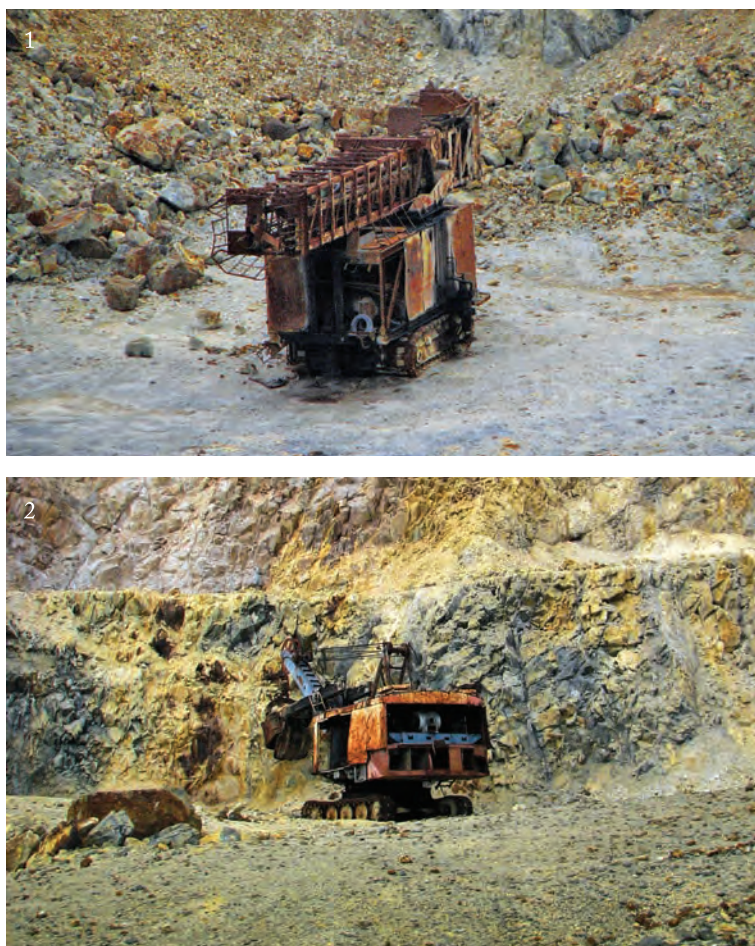


Fig. 9. Equipments abandoned in a quarry from Roşia Montană (photos: Tiberiu Vasilescu, May 2008).

¹⁶ Warnier, 1999a, p. 11; underlined in the original.

¹⁷ Warnier 1999b, p. 12.

¹⁸ Popoiu 2010.



Fig. 10. Equipment abandoned in a quarry from Roșia Montană (photo: Tiberiu Vasilescu, May 2008).

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the industrial ruins from the quarries contradict the message of the *Gold of the Apuseni* exhibition. Located in their former context of use, the material traces are more relevant in their ruined state, rather than when they were in “full swing”: the movement of people, facilities and equipments builds a continuous time and creates the image of an ongoing action, without a valuator endpoint, while the absence of the people, the vastness of the empty quarries, and the ruins of the abandoned facilities and equipments compose a retrospective image, they constitute the material memory¹⁹ of the contemporary mining exploitations. This material memory reveals the nude status of the modernist project: the claimed technological and economic progress left behind just devastated landscapes and trauma.

Being far from a simple moment in the evolution of mining in Roșia Montană, the modernist mining projects, whether is about communist one, or is about the RMGC’s one, can be considered symbols of a new geological era, already proposed in geology and also, recently introduced in the archaeological debates, namely “the Anthropocene”.²⁰ This new era is characterized by the fact that, for the first time in the long history of the humanity, the humans have become the main factor of the geological and bio-climatic changes, through pollution, exploitation of the planet’s surface, deforestations, systematizations of the watercourses, etc. I share Alfredo González-Ruibal’s opinion, that “the Anthropocene” began 250 years ago, when the ruthless and more intensive exploitation of the nature and the society has become a form of economic policy considered legitimate on a global scale.²¹ In the official discourse, the RMGC project puts the material traces from different periods under the sign of similarity and continuity in order to naturalize a deeply modernist initiative, interested exclusively to exploit.

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¹⁹ Olivier 2008.

²⁰ Solli 2011.

²¹ González-Ruibal 2011, p. 62.

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