

Decisions, statements and papers prepared on the gold mining plans in Roşia Montana

- **ICOMOS Romania: The cultural landscape of Roşia Montană village. In: Heritage at Risk. ICOMOS World Report 2001/2002 on Monuments and Sites in Danger. München 2001, 168:**

Case Study 2: The Cultural Landscape of Roşia Montană village

The village of Roşia Montană is well known in Romanian and European history, because of the discovery of Roman mines containing important epigraphic and original mining material. The intensive exploitation of the gold mines, which was for centuries the only engine for the village economic and urban development, also influenced the evolution of the surrounding geographic area in creating a particular image of the landscape. Forty-two buildings, including two churches, dated from the 18th-19th centuries are listed as historical monuments and the main square and a few streets as protected areas. The village, obviously very rich in the past, is a charming combination of town feature architecture, vernacular houses, and a natural and human-made landscape.

Unfortunately, the 'golden' years of the village are now over. After World War II, Romanian law didn't permit private exploitation of the underground. The gold became a State business and all the small family workshops disappeared (some traces can still be seen: artificial lakes, stone roads and walls, traces of some water canals...). The State Mining Company exploited the gold in surface works - destroying an entire hill, regardless of the archaeological value of the area. After 1989, the economic situation of the Mining Company and also of the inhabitants became worse. They are now either working for the State or unemployed. Many are leaving the village for towns where they can more easily earn a living.

The rich heritage and cultural landscape of Roşia Montană is endangered by both the lack of a program for its economic revitalisation (through cultural tourism or through developing other small production activities) and by the business plans of a powerful investor who wants, again, to exploit the gold resources. This last option will certainly improve the economy of the settlement in creating well-paid jobs for the inhabitants (at least for the next 20 years), but it will also destroy a very important part of the village and its landscape. The main square, one of the most important streets and one of the Roman mines will be preserved, a few buildings, including one church, will be relocated and the rest of the village will be demolished. Important archaeological research works are now in process, as well as an urban development project attempting to find some compromise solutions.

- **Resolution 20 on Roşia Montană (Madrid, 5 December 2002, proposed by G. S. Zouain and Zs. Visy) of the 13th General Assembly of ICOMOS. In: Heritage at Risk. ICOMOS World Report 2002/2003 on Monuments and Sites in Danger. München 2003, 175-176:**

The remains of the largest Roman gold mine in the world lie in Rosia Montană in Romania. The site is in danger of being totally destroyed by a modern private mining project. Already international donors have decided not to contribute to this project because of the serious threats it puts on the natural and cultural heritage of the region.

ICOMOS strongly urges all interested parties in this project, as well as UNESCO and the international community involved in Romania, to do all they can to prevent the destruction of

this important archaeological site. It also calls on the national decision makers to ensure that the international, regional and national protection laws, regulations and resolutions are applied to the site and to other proposals, such as Dracula Park, adversely affecting the cultural heritage of Romania.

- **Resolution of the 14th Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOMOS, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 2003 (proposed by Zs. Visy):**

- Regarding the site of Alburnus Maior in Rosia Montană, Romania
- With reference to the Resolution 20 of the 13th General Assembly of ICOMOS, and
- Taking into consideration some recent information about the site and its current state of threat,

The General Assembly of ICOMOS

- Reiterates its concern about the on-going mining operations that has lead and threatens to continue the destruction of the archaeological site of Alburnus Maior in Rosia Montană, Romania, and its surroundings,

- Calls upon the urgent intervention of the National Authorities and the international community to ensure the appropriate protection of the site;

- Calls for further evaluation of the significance of that site and its archaeological heritage in the context of the cultural heritage of Europe and the world, and

- Express once again its will to collaborate with the Romanian Authorities and other organizations to achieve these.

Adopted by the General Assembly on 31 October 2003, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

- **Statement at the ICOMOS Congress, Pécs 2004 (proposed by Zs. Visy): Heritage at risk in Roşia Montană. In: Heritage at Risk. ICOMOS World Report 2002/2003 on Monuments and Sites in Danger. München 2005, 201:**

Heritage at Risk in Roşia Montană

In spite of all protests (see *Heritage at Risk 2002/2003*, pp. 175/176) the cultural heritage in Roşia Montană is still very much at risk.

According to the plans of Roşia Montană Gold Corporation 331 tons of gold and 1600 tons of silver are meant to be exploited in the region of Roşia Montană in the next 17 years. The open-air mining process would destroy the greatest part of the town as well as several cultural monuments. The Roman and medieval mining galleries of several kilometres length are of outstanding value. Only the medieval centre of Roşia Montană (Hungarian name Verespatak) with its three churches and some buildings from the 18th century or earlier would remain on the shore of a 180 m deep artificial lake filled with cyanides, which threaten the valley of the Maros and the Tisza. The new settlement for the people of Roşia Montană would be situated above the Roman mining settlement Alburnus Maior. The archaeological excavations of the previous years could not bring everything to the light. On the contrary, they proved the extraordinary richness of the site, which would perish completely.

ICOMOS issued two resolutions about the case of Roşia Montană at its General Assemblies in Madrid 2002 and Victoria Falls 2003. These emphasised the responsibility of the decision-makers for the dangerous situation. The ICOMOS congress in Pécs (40 Years of the Venice Charter, 22-27 May 2004) reiterated its concerns about this matter and called upon all

authorities to take further steps in order to save both the cultural and the natural heritage in Roşia Montană:

ICOMOS rejects the investment of the new gold mine of Roşia Montană (Romania). This dangerous technology threatens the natural heritage of the site and the fauna and flora of the rivers Maros and Tisza, as well as the cultural heritage of the old mines used from Prehistoric through Roman and Middle Ages, endangers equipment of the old mining technology as well as 18th-century architectural heritage of the small mining town. The new residential area offered for the inhabitants of the old town would annihilate the remains of the original Roman settlement, Alburnus Maior.

Despite two resolutions of ICOMOS about this case, preparations for the investment are still going on. ICOMOS demands to stop the investment immediately.

- **International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM) of ICOMOS. Statement, Lyon 2004:**

The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM) expresses its concern with the conservation and management of the Roman mining complex at Roşia Montană (Alburnus Maior).

Environmental impacts associated with the current mining venture require an exceptionally high level of monitoring and control.

Ongoing archaeological heritage management must focus upon an encompassing mitigation process that ensures the conservation of both the built heritage as well as the archaeological sites of significance as an integrated cultural landscape.

Brian Egloff, President ICAHM

Willem Willems, Vice-President (Europe) ICAHM

- **Resolution of the 15th General Assembly of ICOMOS, Xi'an 2005 (proposed by Zs. Visy)**

8. Alburnus Maior, Romania

Proposed by the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM) and the International Scientific Committee on Vernacular Architecture (CIAV)

Regarding the site of Alburnus Maior in Rosia Montană, Romania, **as a potential World Heritage Site.**

With reference to the [Resolution 20 of the 13th General Assembly](#) of ICOMOS held in Madrid, Spain; to the Resolution of the 14th Extraordinary General Assembly, held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe; to the resolution of the ICOMOS Conference, held in Pecs, Hungary, 22-27 May 2004, and with reference to the ICAHM Statement on the mining concept at Rosia Montană in Lyon, France, 9 September 2004.

Taking into consideration some recent information about the site and its permanent state of threat,

The 15th General Assembly of ICOMOS, meeting in Xi'an, China in October 2005 resolves to:

- Reiterate its deepest concern about the on-going mining operation that has lead to and threatens to continue the destruction of the archaeological site of Alburnus Maior in Rosia Montană, Romania, and its surroundings;
- Call upon the urgent intervention of the National Authorities and the international community to ensure the appropriate protection of the site;

- Call for further evaluation of the significance of that site and its archaeological heritage in the context of the cultural heritage of Europe and the world, and
- Express once again its will to collaborate with the Romanian Authorities and other organisations to achieve these.

- **Resolution of the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS, Quebec 2008**

4. Alburnus Maior (Romania)

Proposed by: International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM) and ICOMOS Romania¹

Regarding the Roman site of Alburnus Maior in Roşia Montană, an outstanding mining settlement and cultural landscape in Romania, **as a potential World Heritage Site**, With reference to

- The Resolution 20 of the 13th General Assembly of ICOMOS held in Madrid, Spain,
- The Resolution of the 14th Extraordinary General Assembly, held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe,
- The resolution of the ICOMOS Conference, held in Pécs, Hungary, 22-27 May 2004,
- The ICAHM Statement on the mining concept at Roşia Montană in Lyon, France at the European Archaeological Association Conference on 9 September 2004,
- The Resolution of the 15th General Assembly of ICOMOS, meeting in Xi'an, China in October, 2005
- The resolution of the XXIIIrd World Congress of the UIA – the International Union of Architects, in Torino in 2008,

and taking into consideration

- the official statements of the Romanian Academy, those of all the religious communities involved and also those of professional bodies such as the European Council of Architects and the Romanian Chamber of Architects,
- that the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development of Romania interrupted the licensing procedure for the mine proposal and suspended the evaluation of the environmental impact study prepared by Roşia Montană Gold Corporation,
- recent irrevocable court decisions in Romania that annulled an archaeological discharge certificate issued earlier to exploit the Cărnic Massif and also ascertained the illegality of Roşia Montană urbanistic plans,
- and also recent information about steps taken for starting mining operations in Roşia Montană and also other similar threats upon the archaeological, architectural and historical heritage of the cultural landscape of the Apuseni Mountains,

The 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS, meeting in Quebec, Canada in October 2008 resolves to:

- Reiterate its deepest concern about the planned mining operations that has lead to and threatens to continue the destruction of the archaeological site of Alburnus Maior in Roşia Montană, Romania, and its surroundings,
- Call for the urgent intervention of the National Authorities to ensure the appropriate protection of the site,

¹ The independently prepared draft resolutions were written and united by Irina Iamandescu and Zsolt Visy

- Call for further evaluation of the significance of the site as a cultural landscape and its archaeological, architectural and ethnographical heritage together with its spiritual values in the context of the cultural heritage of Europe and the world, and
- Express once again its will to collaborate with the Romanian Authorities and other organizations to achieve these actions and calls for the involvement of the relevant ICOMOS ISC and UNESCO for that purpose.

- **Zs. Visy: Alburnus Maior – a potential World Heritage Site². Document, 2005:**

The Central Massive of Transsilvania is one of the richest gold mining place in Europe. Its richness was discovered in the Bronze Age, giving power and authority to the late Bronze Age cultures of the region, but it was exploited on a much higher level by the Dacians. The treasure of king Decebalus could be one of the richest in gold in this time, so that after the victory above the Dacians in 106 AD Traian could start huge building programs from it, including the construction of his forum in Rome. Some hidden parts of Decebalus' treasure remained in the earth until their were found again, as some 340 kg gold coins of Lysimachos in the bed of the Strigy rivulet not far from Sarmizegethusa Regia in the middle of the 16th century.

The gold mines were in use in the Bronze and in the Iron Ages, but extremely intensive in the Roman era. The centre of this activity was Ampelum, probably a *municipium*, and one of the most important places of the region was Alburnus Maior, the main settlement of the miners. Its archaeological remains are of greatest importance, and the newest excavations have proved the presence of important buildings, sanctuaries and built tombs, apart from the galleries and caves of the mines. In these galleries not only remains and traces of Roman mining activity could be found, but also instruments and hidden treasures. The most famous finds are the more than 25 written wax tablets with contracts, agreements and other unique inscriptions of the 2nd century AD.

Traianus transplanted a lot of people to the new province. One of most important group of them was the miners from Dalmatia who were settled down in the gold mining area of Alburnus Maior. *Pirustae, Sardeates, Ansi, Baridustae* and other Dalmatian tribes are represented in the conglomerate of this settlement. The archaeological remains of these people, buildings, cemeteries and sanctuaries attest their special significance in the province in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. As the gold mining area became and remained in the property of the emperor(s), imperial officers took care about it. The exploitation of the gold, and that of the silver and other metals (*aurariae Dacicae*) was assigned to high ranked procurators, and the people of these domains could live in *vici (kastella)* as *peregrini*.

During the rescue excavations of the previous years several cemeteries and sanctuaries could be unearthed. A significant part of the investigations has been published (Alburnus Maior I-II. Bucharest 2003-2004). It seems quite obvious that there is a connection between the sanctuaries/sacred places and the cemeteries of the settlement. At least four sacred places have been investigated with dozens of votive altars. These lay in the centre of the sacred sites mostly in rows, and it is to be supposed that the ones found earlier without any exact observation could have the same position.

² Written and sent (signed by the author and Tamás Fejérdy) to ICOMOS, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the Cultural Minister of Romania in 2005.

The gold mining was practiced in the Middle Ages as well. A couple of Hungarian place names with their first part 'Aranyos-' (gold-) prove the maintaining of the gold mining and gold washing, and it has been done up to our times.

This short survey can prove that this area is of outstanding cultural value, representing the mining of gold during the last three millennia. The full area with its covered and uncovered archaeological monuments, the region with its outstanding natural and cultural values, the conserved archaeological structures partly opened for the visitors, the museum with its archaeological and epigraphic material, and last, but not least the old town represents a unique place in Europe which is to be preserved, which is to be maintained according to its archaeological value, according to its cultural qualities.

The site has unique values of universal importance. The continuity of the gold mining from the beginnings of the use of the yellow metal by the mankind in the aeneolithic age and the about 10 miles long existing galleries of the Roman mines in a region with plenty of existing remains of the human settlements from different ages up to now and the natural and cultural landscape prove the harmony between nature and population. All this underlines that the site is worth to be inscribed in the World Heritage List.

This place, Roşia Montană is now in danger because of a new mining project, which would destroy the existing settlement with its listed architectural monuments, with the remains of the Roman settlement Alburnus Maior from which only a few, but important structures could be unearthed in the newly started excavations, and which would change this unique cultural landscape into an unfertile, dead region. The planned usage of gifts and cyanides would kill the natural waters, and it would threaten the valley of the Mureş river with a natural catastrophe.

The site meets more criteria for nomination:

- "it exhibits an important interchange of human values over of span of time in a cultural area, on developments in architecture and technology" (ii);
- "it is an outstanding example of type of technological ensemble which illustrates significant stages in human history" (iv);
- "it is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement which can become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change" (v).

"The Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List is designed ... to fill the major gaps in the World Heritage List. It does this by encouraging more countries ... to develop Tentative Lists as defined in paragraph 62" (§ 55). "State Parties are encouraged to consult the analyses of both the World Heritage List an Tentative List prepared at the request of the Committee by ICOMOS and IUCN to identify the gaps in the World Heritage List (§ 71).

In 2003 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined intangible cultural heritage as a new, independent sort of cultural heritage. It "embraces all forms of traditional and popular or folk culture, i.e. collective works originating in a given community and based on tradition. These creations are transmitted orally or by gesture, and are modified over a period of time through a process of collective recreation. They include oral traditions, customs, languages, music, dance, rituals, festivities, traditional medicine and pharmacopoeia, the culinary arts and all kinds of special skills connected with the material aspects of culture, such as tools and the habitat". Alburnus Maior fully corresponds to these criteria through its wax tablets which contain abundant information about the life and customs of the Roman mining settlement. This piece of evidence connect ancient, medieval and modern mining activity in this region better than in any other similar site in Europe or in the Mediterranean.

The only antique gold mining place was inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1997 "on the basis of criteria (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv), considering that the Las Médulas (Spain) gold-

mining area is an outstanding example of innovative Roman technology, in which all the elements of the ancient landscape, both industrial and domestic, have survived to an exceptional degree”. However, it was criticized³ because of its destructive art of usage. Not discussing this question it is quite clear that Roșia Montană represents the non-destructive gold mining technology – at least in the antiquity and in the Middle Ages. The imminent danger is coming from the newly planned gold mining project which will destroy every element of this outstanding cultural heritage site (not to speak about the potential danger of the cyanides).

The Roman mining settlement Alburnus Maior with its industrial, architectural and sacred sites and intangible heritage is an outstanding and unique place where human genius and creativity contributed a lot to the local and European traditions which is a living tradition here. Further researches and excavations will enlarge and enrich this exceptional archaeological site. The investigation of the galleries will surely bring many important finds, among others newer wax tablets.

It is worth to propose then to direct the attention of the Romanian World Heritage Committee to this property which is not only worth to be elected in the World Heritage List but also would fill a gap in it.

³ „The Delegate of Thailand informed the Committee that he was unable to accept the inscription of this site as a cultural property as it did not correspond to the definitions given in Article 1 of the Convention. Furthermore, in applying criterion (i), among others, to signify human creativity, he could only consider this site as a result of human destructive activities as well as harmful to the noble cause of environmental promotion and protection. Germany and Finland agreed with the position of Thailand.”