

Mircea Babeş.\* THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF ROŞIA MONTANĂ, BETWEEN TRUTH AND LIES\*\*

The speaker is a professional archaeologist with 50 years research experience and 10 years spent teaching archaeology as a professor at the University of Bucharest. For 30 years (until 2007) the speaker has been a member of the *National Archaeological Commission* (NAC) and in this capacity has taken part in all debates concerning strategy, research projects and protection of archaeological sites and monuments in Romania. I was the only NAC member who voted against *discharging of archaeological value and protection* the Cărnic Massive and other sites in December 2003. Such a measure would have led to the destruction of the most valuable traces of Roman mining and culture in Roşia Montană, the antique Alburnus Maior, through the implementation of the mining open pit project proposed by the *Roşia Montană Gold Corporation* (RMGC). I defended this cause in front of the Appeal Court in Alba Iulia, who has annulled the damaging decision of the NAC (in the winter of 2004), and in August 2006 I submitted to the Ministry of the Environment a detailed analysis of the disastrous impact of the mining project on the archaeological patrimony, as resulting from the *Environmental Impact Analysis* (EIA). I am aware of the new documentation submitted by RMGC to the Ministry of Culture in 2009, based on which the NAC and the Inspectorate for Culture of the Alba District decided in the summer of 2011 to approve the discharge of archaeological protection for the Cărnic Massive. Only a year before (in July 2010) I had submitted to the Culture minister, mr. Kelemen Hunor, my critical observations regarding this documentation, but apparently without any effect.

The documentation generated by the RMGC, or by other companies, institutions or individuals who were paid by the mining company must be critically evaluated against the actual reality in the field, the technical recordings performed by the archaeologists and the scientific publications issued in the last 3-4 decades. Such an analysis, carried out professionally, objectively and in respect for the truth, leads inevitably to the conclusion that, in order to circumvent any possible objective and legal obstacle against the mining project, in our case the indelible presence of the archaeological heritage of universal value and the national and European laws which protect it, RMGC has deployed an aggressive strategy of propaganda and PR, frequently using lies, deception and diversion.

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Last but not least, recent information which have become public reveal actual acts of corruption, involving one way or another buying certain voices and attitudes in order to influence the media and the public opinion and finally to influence the political decision makers in favour of the mining project. The most illustrative example is the case of the so-called „Independent group for monitoring the cultural heritage from Roşia Montană“, composed of 8 academics, who beginning with February 2011 assembled on five RMGC-sponsored sessions in order to publicly declare, against all evidence and common sense, that the mining project in Roşia Montană would be the best opportunity to save the archaeological patrimony (!) and not the direct occasion of its massive destruction. The explanation for this strange attitude is to be found in the statements of some members of the group, who have publicly admitted that they have been paid for the „expertise“ provided to the company. What was the price paid by RMGC in order to persuade three members of the Romanian Academy (among them the former ministry of Culture who has signed the first discharge of archaeological protection for the Cărnic Massive in January 2004) in order to express an opinion opposite to the well known critical position of the Academy itself towards the mining project, is a well kept secret. What is nevertheless known is that the discharge which sacrifices the Cărnic Massive and its 4 km of Roman galleries, unique in Europe, brought the promise of a substantial (75 million USD) sponsoring for the Ministry of Culture by RMGC. From the individual corruption of „independent“ academics, who became mercenaries of the company, there was just a tiny step to the institutionalized corruption of the Ministry of Culture. By the way, we should also recall that a few years ago the professional prizes awarded by the same Ministry were also paid from contributions of the same generous sponsor (!!). It should be added that, as expected, the mass-media – particularly this year, and especially the televisions, including the public TVR – were also generously showered with money paid by the company for commercial advertising, disseminating materials of disinformation and untrue propaganda of low quality, aimed at diverting the eye of the public from the devastating impact of the project and at spreading the idea of great and lasting benefits for the whole country. The National Council for Audiovisual Media had to intervene at least once in order to stop the broadcasting of materials that gravely distorted the reality.

The propaganda campaign of RMGC is equally based on outright lies and on lies by omission, which we can find both in the documents submitted by the Company to state authorities and in those aimed at broad public dissemination. One should first notice the campaign aimed at minimizing the importance of the archaeological patrimony from Roşia Montană, even despite the valuable research and discoveries

made in the last 10 years by Romanian and French (Toulouse) archaeologists with funding from RMGC. This financial support was in fact not an act of generosity for science and culture from a putative future investor, but merely the fulfilment of its legal obligation to fund archaeological excavations leading (or not) to the archaeological discharge – the precondition for the environment approval. The discoveries made during these investigations at the surface (4 Roman sanctuaries in Valea Nanului, the hipocaust building in Carpeni, more than 1400 tombs of Illyrian colonists, including a funerary stone monument) as well as underground in the Cârnic and Orlea Massives (descending galleries with stairs, chambers with central pillars, a wooden device for evacuating water) prove, against the wish of the potential investor, the exceptional importance of this great Roman site and the imperative necessity of its conservation for systematic, in depth research, and of its preservation in the collective memory of Romanian and European citizens. An example of a Roman mining site of unique value, investigated by the French researcher Beatrice Cauuet, is the great “Cârnic network“, composed of 2750 m of galleries spread over 13600 sqm, piercing the massive between the landmarks of 921 and 1019 m altitude. In their wish to receive approval for a profitable mining exploitation, the documents provided by RMGC deliberately and shamelessly minimize the destructive impact of the mining project on the area requested for license (a total of 4282 ha). The heaviest impact will be suffered by the central zone of the future exploitation, of approximately 1000 ha., which also contains the vast majority of the Roman archaeological objectives, both on the surface and underground, known and surely yet unknown, such as most civilian settlements and Roman roads. Practically all the activities and destructive interventions of the planned mining exploitation will be focused in this area: 4-5 open pits, huge sterile rock stockpiles, the preparation plant, the tailings pond and dam, industrial deposits and roads, etc. An irreversible consequence of the mining project will be also the destruction of the *cultural landscape*, shaped by the human exploitation and living of the area for almost 2000 years, which will be replaced by an artificial landscape, without the four massifs around which the Roman settlements were gathered, now replaced by huge excavations, likely to be filled with water or sterile rocks. The RMGC propaganda, which is spread over all possible channels, does not mention the widely destructive effect of the project that totally disagrees with the desire for an effective and complete protection of the historical and archaeological site Alburnus Maior. A compromise between the Company that wishes to exploit to maximum profit the gold from Roşia Montană through the open pit method and wide use of cyanide, and those who want to save the still existing archaeological patrimony in its

entirety is not possible. The apparent willingness shown by the Company on certain occasions, particularly in the present propaganda campaign, to contribute to the preservation and restauration of some monuments and to support local cultural tourism is merely a diversion, a tactical manoeuvre aimed at silencing the critical arguments of the opposing ecologists and of those who truly want to preserve the archaeological heritage. The RMGC project contained ever since 2005-2006 a so-called “Management plan for the cultural patrimony”, a demagogical document proposing not less than 116 project-tasks, all of secondary or null importance. We should mention that, as a price for the planned demolition of the Cârnic Massive, this plan proposes as an “exchange coin” the preservation of isolated monuments of mostly lesser importance, such as the isolated circular tomb from Hop-Găuri, the mining, mostly modern works of Piatra Corbului, the Cătălina-Monuleşti gallery or the ruins from Carpeni, all lost in a flat stelenar landscape among the open pits, the sterile rock stockpiles and some industrial installations. Of the initially promised budget of 25 million USD, 8 million were meant to serve to the construction of a Disneyland-style replica of a Roman mining gallery at the surface. Today, in its attempt to buy the good will of the Ministry of Culture, the Company has increased its offer to fund patrimony-related work to 75 million USD and, as a consequence, has obtained the certificate of archaeological discharge, and thus the approval for the exploitation and destruction of the Cârnic Massive, including the ensemble of exceptional Roman mining works.

The evidence is accumulating for the use of incorrect methods and means, including individual and institutional corruption, used fearlessly by RMGC in order to lift all possible legal restrictions concerning the protection of the natural and cultural landscape as much as of the archaeological sites in Roşia Montană. I personally believe that this behaviour of the company constitutes an infringement of the national and international law and moral norm, which should govern also in Romania a lasting economic development without putting at risk the natural and cultural environment. That is why I would like to suggest to the honoured delegation of the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament to initiate a thorough analysis of the Roşia Montană case, including the degree to which the actions of the RMGC and of the Romanian government are in agreement with these laws and norms inside the European Union.

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