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European Histories

The Golden Age of Romania
Intangible Heritage of
Schwitzerland

European Histories

- A Magazine about our Heritage and History

The Golden Age of Romania

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Intangible Heritage of Schwitzerland

- Children, Church and Cooking
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Roșia Montană is at the centre of one of the most protracted fights between on the one-hand traditionalists and environmentalists and on the other hand global entrepreneurs on the quest for growth and profit; classic David versus Goliath conflict.

Roșia Montană has turned into a more and more painful issue in present day Romania. The problem is nevertheless that as long as the golden wealth lies hidden in the mountains, this conflict will grow exponentially with the European crisis.

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Paradisstien 5
DK2840 Holte
Denmark

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www.europeanhistories.com
info@europeanhistories.com
0045 24 23 36 10



The open-pit at Certej
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The Golden Age of Romania

A little while ago Eldorado Gold Corporation got the environmental permit to mine for gold at Certej in Romania. The project, which covers an area of 26.7 km², involves processing 47 million tons of ore in open-pit mining and with the use of cyanide. The environmental permit allows among other things the water-consumption of 29 million cubic meters from the Mureş River as well as the deforestation of 187 hectares of forest. Afterwards the processing residues will be stored in an outdoor tailing pond with a total area of 0,63 km² hectares. With a concentration of 1.8 grams of pure gold the mining operation is expected to garner 2.7 mill ounces of gold and 16.3 mill ounces of silver all in all with an app. value of \$10 bill (prices 07.09.2012)

Eldorado Gold Corporation

The main investor, Eldorado Gold Corporation is a Canadian mining company listed on the Vancouver Stock Exchange. In 2011 the company took over European Gold-fields, which owned 80% of Deva

Gold SA Company; the Romanian state-owned company Minvest Deva holds the remaining 20% of the shares in Deva Gold.

This permit has raised uproar among activists and environmentalists engaged in the struggle to prevent the mining of Roşia Montană located in the same

“Golden Quadrilateral” area of the Apuseni Mountains of Transylvania in Western Romania. One reason has to do with the history of the mining operations in the area. In 1971 the dike of a tailing dam broke at Certej; this resulted in 89 deaths when 300.000 cubic meters of toxic residue flooded a nearby village. Another reason

Open Pit at Certej in Huanodora
© www.eldoradogold.com





The old church in Roșia Montană seen from the slope of the mountain © Radu Popescu Vega

has to do with the fact that this permit might actually open the floodgates for permits to mine Roșia Montană, de facto opening this can of worms, worth four to five times more in terms of golden reserves.

A fair assumption, however, is that the permit was given to Eldorado Gold in order to pacify the IMF, which recently came on an inspection tour of the Romanian economy; and at the same time defer a decision on the sore predicament of Roșia Montană.

In the grip of a crisis

The challenge here is that not just Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy find themselves in dire straits these days; Romania – although not part of the Euro-community – is also gasping for economic life. Mid August the International Monetary Fund reached

an agreement with the Romanian government to unlock yet another tranche of a precautionary 5 billion-euro loan on condition that the current Romanian government meets a number of requirements, amongst others an increase in gas prices and a sale of 15 % of the country's natural-gas grid Transgaz as well as a majority in the chemical company Oltchim.

In view of this it was to be expected that Roșia Montană – the location for an open-pit goldmine in the far mountains of the Apuseni - once more surfaces to the political agenda. In all likelihood Roșia Montană is a project, which during the next 17 years might create an income for the Romanian state exactly in the order of the loan from IMF; a titillating project, which nevertheless for political reasons has become less and less viable.

One reason is that the details of the deal, which was struck in 1998 between the government and the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC), were never revealed. Thus the contract has still not been made available for the public although the controversy has been around for 13 years.

Neither does there exist an independent evaluation of the costs and benefits of the project. Nor is it known to what extent has funds been diverged to the pockets of the different stakeholders in the project, politicians, union-leaders, local activists etc.

Further it is well known that one precondition for the project is the forced expropriation of land owned by the citizens of Roșia Montană, as four villages need to be dismantled and people relocated to new homes. Although approx. 80% of the inhabitants have al-

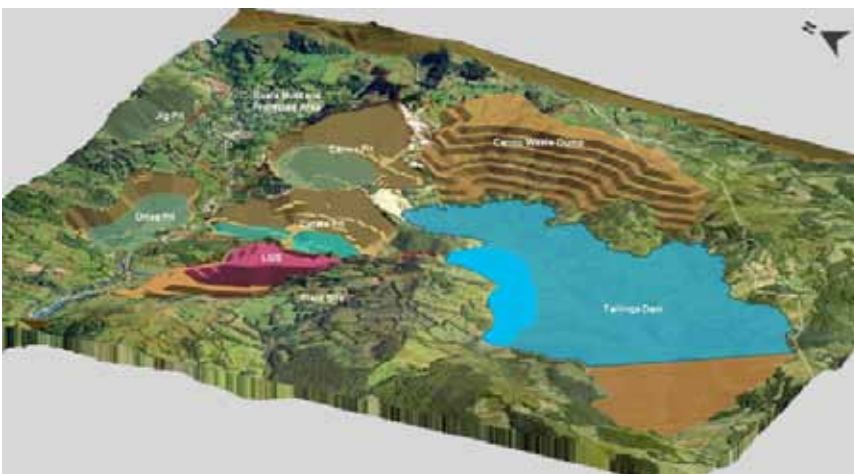
Roșia Montană

Roșia Montană is a collection of sixteen villages lying on the slopes of some mountains in the 'Golden Quadrilateral' in the Apuseni mountains in Western Transylvania in Rumania.

The mountains hold rich mineral resources, primarily gold and silver, which have been exploited for at least 2 - 3000 years. Finally in 2006 the state-run gold mine was forced to shut down in advance of Romania's accession to the EU. However, already in 1995 a deal was signed with the controversial Romanian-Australian businessman Frank Timiș to reprocess the tailings at Roșia Montană.

Eventually the mining licence for an area of 23.8823 km² around Roșia Montană was transferred in 1998 to the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC) of which the Toronto-listed company Gabriel Resources owns 80%, while the Romanian government (via Minvest S.A.) holds 19.3%.

Roșia Montană as seen while the open pit mining goes on
© Gabriel Resources



RMGC plan to replace the old workings with a new operation, which would make it the largest open-pit gold mine in Europe. This would mean that five mountaintops would in reality be blown away, opening up vast craters and bringing the rocks holding the gold to the surface.

The ore containing the gold is then crushed, piled into heaps and sprayed with cyanide, which bonds with the gold. This solution is then collected at the base in order to be separated chemically. The leftover (called tailings) - water holding rests of cyanide and other toxins - is then transferred to a dam. Part of the project it is to build a dam and flood the valley.

The controversies surrounding this project have brought Roșia Montană to the attention of the world.

To sum these up - very shortly - the project is controversial in so far as it:

- Entails an extraction process, which will produce a huge dam of tailing. Such dams are historically very unsound. In 2000 a tailing dam failure in Romania spilled more than 400.000 litres of cyanide-laced mine waste into the Tisza River, killing 1240 tons of fish and contaminating the drinking water of 2.5 mio people along the Danube.

- Destroys a beautiful and diverse natural habitat

- Destroys an area resplendent with heritage stemming from Dacia and later Roman times.

- Implicates the relocation of or touches the homes of 958 households, 3122 persons complete with 10 churches and 12 cemeteries.

- Destroys the opportunity for developing a (World) Heritage Site with focus on the unique mining history of 2000 years and a sustainable tourism economy

- Purports to extract 14.6 mill oz of gold to the value of \$25 bill and 64.9 mill oz silver to the value of \$21.3 bill (prices 06.09.2012). Of this the government can expect at least \$4-5 bill in income.

- Purports to create jobs, modern infrastructure and proper museums showcasing the historical heritage



Center of Rosia Montana © www.rosiamontana-thefilm.com

ready sold their homes to RMGC, a hard core of villagers hold on to their property. This group of people has furthermore been hooked up to an international group of NGOs, which have been lobbying and campaigning for years against the project in view of its expected environmental consequences. For their part RMCG in collusion with the government has for years held the village in a state of limbo, since planning instruments has repeatedly been used in order to block any local initiatives, which might move the community in another direction. As of today the village holds no post-office, no bars and only a small shop, while many houses sold to RMCG are kept deliberately derelict.

Rosia Montană is thus at the centre of one of the most protracted

fight between on the one-hand traditionalists and environmentalists and on the other hand global entrepreneurs on the quest for growth and profit; classic David versus Goliath conflict. All this has turned Rosia Montană into a pregnant symbol as well as a more and more painful issue in present day Romania.

The problem is nevertheless that as long as the golden wealth lies hidden in the mountains, this conflict will grow exponentially with the European crisis.

As of today the president, Basescu, who recently survived a suspension by the PM, represents the pro-mining lobby in the government, while Victor Ponta, PM, is said to consider the project highly controversial. Furthermore Vic-

tor Ponta is married to a very well-known EMP, Daciana Octavia Sârbu, who is known for being officially opposed to any projects concerning a mining operation in Rosia Montană. It is believed that Victor Ponta will win the general elections in December.

Accordingly, during summer 2012, hope has been high in the anti-mining fraternity, since it finally seemed that Victor Ponta might not only unmask the contracts and the alleged corruption in order to procure a more fair and transparent review of the whole project. He has even been expected to stop the plans once and for all.

Unfortunately the recent development in Certej and in the world economy seems to have crushed all hopes – once again!

Rural Tourism in Roșia Montană ?

Short-term golden opportunities versus long-term jobs and income from rural tourism?

This is the dilemma, which is facing planners trying to reflect in a more cool and less emotional manner upon the future of Roșia Montana.

On one hand is the predicted annual income from the mountain, which at least amounts to \$ 4 bill (and maybe even more if the currently very unfavourable contract between the Romanian government and Gabriel Resources is renegotiated, as must be expected).

On the other hand is the Romanian tourism industry, which currently (2011 and in total) contributes 4.5 % to GDP or \$7.3 bill, generating 5.1 of the total employment. Of this 39.2% is generated by foreigners = \$2.9 bill. By far the most of this is further generated at the Seaside with no more than about 5-6 % generated in the region of Transylvania.

Looking at these figures it is in economic terms obviously not a valid proposition to imagine that any tourist boom might fill up the coffers of a struggling Romanian government looking with glee at the prospect of blowing up a few mountains in a region awash elsewhere with more pristine and much less polluted countryside.

These are facts that according to non-partisan observers very seldom figure in the debates between on the one hand the NGO's and local activists and on the other hand the advocates for the gold-mining.

Which leaves as "rational" arguments the very tricky question of the environmental risks, which might be incurred by reopening the goldmines at Roșia Montană, as well as the question of human rights concerning the resettlement of the local population.

Read More:

Travel & Tourism. Economic Impact 2012 Romania

Internal tourism movement and the main Romanian Tourist Destinations (1990 – 2008).

By Alexandru Ilies et al
In: Analele Universității din Oradea – Seria Geografie Year XXI, no. 2/2011 (December), pp. 333-339

The Curse of the Gold: Discourses Surrounding the Project of the Largest Pit-mine in Europe. By Istvan Egresi
In: Human Geographies. 2011, Vol5, no.2, pp. 57-68

Overgrown pit from earlier mines



Roșia Montană in Universal History

*Where to begin? The internet overflows with papers, reports statements, journalistic travel reports etc. However, half a year ago (winter 2011) a group of very distinguished scientist gathered at the Babeș-Bolyai University at a conference organised by The Romanian Academy, ICOMOS Romania and the University in order to produce an overview of the many questions raised over the years. Recently the results were published by Cluj University Press. **The publication may be accessed here***

“Roșia Montană in Universal History” is a book which aims to be a kind of “white paper” on the facts and fictions of the place, its history and the current controversy surrounding the project of gold-mining the mountans.

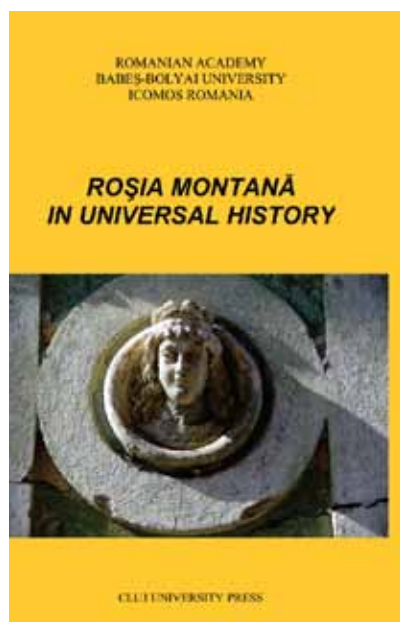
The papers touch upon the geology, the impact of mining, the landscape and the environmental risks incurred by the project, the challenge of climate, the archaeology, the fauna, the flora and the biodiversity, the cultural heritage, socio-economic evaluations of the project, the legalities and the cor-

ruption in politics and the media. Finally a couple of papers outline an alternative sustainable future build around the development of a local economy based on tourism and agricultural development and a call for the continued lobbying for getting Roșia Montană at the UNESCO World Heritage List.

In the introduction a short presentation on the position of the Romanian Academy is given. Here we may read that the “The Academy considers that Romania’s underground gold deposits represent a non-renewable resource of national strategic importance, and

is the property of the Romanian State, whose fate cannot be decided solely by the local authorities. Consequently, the decision on the opportunity to exploit the gold resources should be taken in consultation with the entire population of the country, possibly through a national referendum.”

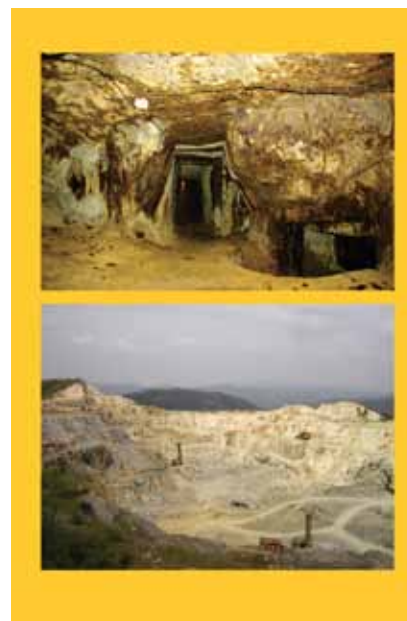
To this is added a resolution agreed upon by all the distinguished Romanian scholars, who were present. Here the arguments are listed for desisting the mining project (The full declaration is posted in the introduction):



Roșia Montană in Universal History

Report from the international Conference on “Roșia Montană in Universal History” was held from 11.12.2011 -12.11.2011 in Cluj-Napoca. It was organized by the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, the Romanian Academy and ICOMOS Romania.

Cluj University Press 2012



1. Roșia Montană has a specific natural potential
2. The geological heritage consists of deposits of gold, silver, copper, tellurium, wolfram etc. It constitutes Roman's strategic resources, which must be harnessed according to the country's major interests
3. There is a need for a reevaluation and auditing of the mineral deposits (which are deemed much larger than hitherto considered)
4. According to the current contract Romania has practically assigned the deposits freely to a foreign country/company
5. The historical, archaeological and cultural heritage of Roșia Montană is unique
6. A destruction of these – the Roman galleries, the archaeological sites, the cemeteries, the churches) – implies that important parts of the history of the Romanian people will be irrevocably affected
7. Only a very small part of the Roșia Montană heritage has been scientifically researched.
8. The landscape and environmental risk of the RMCG project are multiple, severe and long lasting
9. The government is called upon to defend the historical, archaeological and cultural heritage of Roșia Montană
10. The project conflicts with the absolute majority of the principles of the EU's spatial development plans
11. The project is not sustainable
12. The project will have serious psychological effects on the population of the area, currently emigrating from Roșia Montană
13. The conference calls upon a reconsideration of the project in terms of its legality
14. The project must be stopped and replaced with a sustainable strategy of long lasting economic growth in the local area
15. The conference called upon the necessity of working for the enlistment of Roșia Montană at the UNESCO World Heritage List – a project hitherto blocked by the Romanian Government

Films about Roșia Montană

The debate over the Rosia Montana mine project has inspired several documentaries:

Rosia Montana - Town on the Brink/Dorf am Abgrund. 2012. A film by Fabian Daub

The price of gold. A Film by Directors: Stela Nacu, George Adamescu Year: 2004

Gold Futures – or Új Eldorádó (2004) by Tibor Kocsis

Mine your own business by Phelim McAleer and Ann McElhinney. Funded by Gabriel Resources



Looting

Just before Christmas 1916 a train left the central station in Bucharest for Moscow. The train was guarded by 200 gendarmes and drew 17 carriages loaded with 97 tonnes of gold-bars and gold coins. In today's value more than 6 billion. Seven months later another train left with the National archives, thousands of paintings, precious medieval and manuscripts, the crown jewels as well as ancient treasures like the jewels of the Voivodes of Wallachia and Moldavia and other antique valuables, such as the golden treasures of the Dacian royalty and the Petrosa treasure.



The treasure of Decebalus probably consisted of such distinctive Dacian bracelets

Source: Wiki

Naturally the gold as well as the rest of the treasures were immediately confiscated by the Soviet Union and for a long time none was known as to the whereabouts. Apart from the archives, which were restored in 1935, it took until 1956 before some of the paintings and other antiques were returned to Romania. Although much was

lost forever all in all 39,320 Romanian art works like paintings, drawings, engravings, icons, tapestry works, religious objects, gold coins and medals.

During the 20th century Roma-

A Roman soldier loads part of the treasure of Decebalus onto a horse.

From: Column of Trajan. Source: Wiki



nian governments repeatedly tried to negotiate a full return of the valuables. After the fall of the USSR the Romanian government tried once more, but even then the position of the Russian government was adamant. Finally in 2003 a commission was given the task to analyse the issues surrounding the expropriation, but so far no outcome has been reported.

Decebalus' Treasure

Obviously this was not the first time, the people living in modern Romania were robbed. One very early example is the treasure of the Dacian king, Decebalus, which was robbed by the emperor Trajan in at the end of the Dacian wars in 106 AD. According to the Roman historian Cassius Dio, the king had hid his gold near his residence under the bed of the river Sargetia, which he initially dammed while a hole was dug to place the gold and silver in. Afterwards it was covered with stones and the river once more let to flow. Textiles and



more perishable artefacts were then hid in caves after which the slaves were killed. Nevertheless the Emperor discovered the hiding places and the huge treasure was taken to Rome. These spoils were enormous. According to a contemporary source it should have amounted to 1900 – 2750 tonnes of gold plus silver and double up in pots and pans. Naturally this figure is totally unlikely. Whatever the real amount of gold, which was taken to Rome, the spoils contributed immensely to the flourishing of the empire in this period. Remarkable building ven-

Drinking cup from Nagyszentmiklós .
Source: Wiki



The Avarian Warrior on the jug from Nagyszentmiklós .
Source: Wiki

tures in Rome are witness to this. Just to name a few, Trajan had the Pontine Marshes drained, built a new aqueduct, increased the army by founding two new legions and above all built Forum Ulpium and

had the column of Trajan raised in order to celebrate the war.

The Avars

Somewhat later we hear of another war in the Romanian heartland, which ended up in pilfering of a huge amount of gold. This time it was Charlemagne (742 – 814) who waged war on the Avars (or Huns) as they were called in the contemporary chronicles. In the biography of Charlemagne by Einhard we hear that “these Franks, who until then had seemed almost like paupers, now discovered so much gold and silver in the palace [of the Avars] and captured so much precious booty in their battles, that it could rightly be maintained that they had in all justice taken from these Huns, what they had unjustly stolen from other nations that is: the church.” (Einhard: The Life of Charlemagne §13). According to the York Annals (Historia Regum) the treasure consisted of

gold, silver and precious robes of silk, which was loaded on 15 wagons each drawn by four oxen.

Quite remarkably we have a personal letter from Charlemagne to his queen Fastrada, in which he himself described the booty: “And they (= his son Pippin and his Italian army) plundered the fortress and stayed there that night and until the third hour on the next day. And they withdrew without conflict with the spoils, which they had seized. And they took 150 of the Avars alive... (Letter to Fastrada, September 791).

Nagyszentmiklós

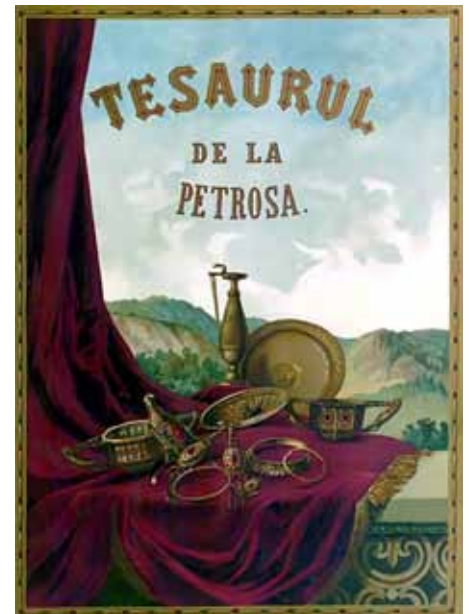
Later on Transylvania and other parts of what later constituted Romania became part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. During this period – the 18th and 19th century the earth once more seemed to cough up unspeakable treasures. However this time they came also in the form of spectacular archaeological finds. One such hoard consisted of 23 early medieval gold vessels, dating

from the 6th – 10th century and in total weighing nearly one ton of gold. It was found in 1799 near the town, which was then known as Nagyszentmiklós or Gross-Sakl-Niklaus (in Romanian: Sânnicolau Mare). After the excavation the treasure was brought to Vienna, where it may still be seen in the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

The treasure is generally believed to be Avarian, but each piece with a mixed origin. Since 1997 the Romanian government has tried (in vain) to get the treasure back to Romania, claiming that it was illegally brought out of the country during an occupation. However, international law does not allow for claiming stolen artefacts back from museums, except for those, which were seized during WW2 and so far Vienna has been negative.

Pietrosa

Another such treasure – the Gothic Pietrosa Hoard from the late fourth-century – was found in 1837 in Pietrosale and was at that



National Romantic Publication from 1899 celebrating the treasure of Pietrosa. Source: Wiki

However, all the 22 pieces of gold were part of the valuables shipped to Russia in 1917, and only part of it (12 pieces) was returned in 1956.

No wonder the Romanians are sceptical as to the planned “looting” of Roşia Montană...

*A plate from the treasure of Pietrosa
Source: Wiki*



The Gold Mines

The oldest Neolithic piece of gold from Romania is the anthropomorphic man found at Moigrad. The mask weighs 750 gr. and is hammered out to a very thin plate from a heated nugget. Probably the gold was sieved from water and running streams with the help of a wet animal skin. The technique is well attested from the 5th century BC from Georgia, where sheep fleeces were stretched over wooden frames, which were submerged into a stream. Gold flecks borne down from upstream were caught in this. Afterwards the fleeces were hung in trees to dry before the gold was shaken or combed out.



The Dacians attack the Romans from the Column of Trajan
Source: Wiki

A description from Strabo (64/63 BC -24 AD) tells us that in Chalcis “gold is carried down by mountain torrents, and that the barbarians obtain it by means of perforated troughs and fleecy skins, and that this is the origin of the myth of the golden fleece” – the story about Jason, who travelled from afar with his band of Argonauts to get the golden fleece, in order to restore his kingdom.

Wherever this myth took form, the technique was not only ancient and primitive. In the Apuseni Mountains it remained in use up until 2WW.

Somewhat later actual mining “using fire and water” became part of the available technologies. At

Roşia Montană this technique has been identified next to the Cetate quarry, where a number of “holes” or rather narrow galleries following gold veins were found. These were exploited by crushing the rocks through fire, which was then sprinkled by water and vinegar. However, very little archaeological excavations have been carried out demonstrating the pre-Roman exploitation and it is not known how widespread the technique was.

Roman wax tablet from Roşia Montană



One witness to these mining activities are the numerous and quite astounding pieces of Dacian jewelry in the form of bracelets and helmets which has been found in graves in Dacia (present day Transylvania). Another witness is the dating of the mines. Some of them reach back in time before the Roman conquest. Probably the Dacians recruited Roman engineers, who afterwards reported to the Romans about the rich golden ores found in the mountains in the “Golden Quadrilateral” area.



Roman galleries at Roșia Montană

At least there is no doubt that the Dacians' wealth in gold was the foremost reason for the Romans to initiate the wars in 101 - 106 AD, which ended in the total conquest as depicted on the column of Trajan.

Soon after the war the Romans must have begun to mine Roșia Montană in a more systematic way. All this is very well documented; partly because the mineshafts and tools ended up in a time warp; partly because 50 wax-tablets have been found in the galleries (intact or in fragments) documenting contracts, loans and other legal matters pertaining to the administration of the mines. Unique are the names of the deities invoked in these texts, which were signed at Alburnus Maior, the Roman name for Roșia Montană.

The Procurator Aurarium (Administrator of the Gold Mines) leased the mines to individual entrepreneurs or groups of people. Every mining settlement was composed of mines, houses, a temple, a graveyard and the entrance to the leased galley. All this has been excavated piecemeal around Roșia

Montană, but no systematic survey has been conducted and the findings – although rich – are both sporadic and enigmatic. Most spectacular are the mineshafts, cut out with chisel and hammer and complete with shelves for lamps. Since 2001 at least 7 km. of such Roman galleries have been surveyed and mapped. But gold was also washed from the rivers and separated from the sand by the use of milling.

It is believed that each year about 5 tonnes of gold was exported to

Rome after the Roman occupation of Dacian kingdom.

In the aftermath of the Barbarian invasions, Rome lost its grip of this very lucrative business and mining grinded to a halt until it was resumed again in the 12th century. At that time German miners colonized the mountains, invited by the Hungarian rulers. At this time the ancient techniques were still used. It is believed that the use of gunpowder was not commonly used until the 17th century, when the number of water mills increased dramatically. Around 1676 there were 77 stamps. A hundred years later the number had risen to 226. In the same period another innovation, wooden pumps, was introduced in order to drain the shafts. From the same period the many artificial lakes, still visible in the region, were constructed. One example is the Tăul Mare located in the Eastern Part of the village at 930 metres above sea level.

During this period the mines were personal property. After 1924 the Romanian government expropriated the underground and the mined gold had to be sold to the

Tăul Mare at Roșia Montană



State at a fixed price. After the communist takeover, the mines were completely nationalised and industrialisation took place, introducing the use of mercury and cyanide.

After 1990 the mines were declared unprofitable and in 2006 they were closed down indefinitely, at which time the miners were left without jobs or a livelihood. At the same time, however, the rights to the gold mining Roşia Montană, was transferred to the RMGC, of which Gabriel Resources Ltd. Were given 80% of the shares.



Roşia Montană in the background © Popadanmihai

See more:

The best place to get an overview of the golden treasures is in the **National Historical Museum in Bucharest**, where some of the finest pieces are on permanent show.

Read More:

The history of the Mines:

Emilia Paşca: Gold Culture and the History of Industrial Heritage at Roşia Montană. In: Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics, 2010, Vol V, no. 9-10, pp. 81 -96

Good introduction to the political ramifications of the dispute surrounding Roşia Montană:

Istvan Egresi: The Curse of the Gold: Discourses Surrounding the Project of the Largest Pit-mine in Europe. In: Human Geographies. 2011, Vol5, no.2, pp. 57-68

The role of EU and NGO:

Christina Elena Parau: Impaling Dracula: How EU Accession Empowered Civil Society in Romania. In: West European Politics, 2009, Vol 32, no. 1, pp.119-141

The dispute about relocation:

Irene Velicu: To Sell or Not to Sell: Landscapes of Resistance to Neoliberal Globalization in Transylvania. In: Globalizations, 2012, Vol 9, no. 2, pp 307-321

The Cultural Heritage:

Vasile Surd and David Turnock: Romania's Apuseni Mountains: Safeguarding a Cultural Heritage. On: GeoJournal 2000, Vol 50, pp. 285 - 304.

Intangible Heritage of Switzerland





In 2008 Switzerland signed the UNESCO Convention pledging to safeguard its intangible cultural heritage. Part of such a pledge is to compile and periodically update an inventory of the living traditions. A few weeks ago (primo September 2012) the final bruttolist was finally published.

Being Switzerland, the process however took quite another form than the usual top-down procedure followed by most other signatories.

As Switzerland is a rather loose federal organization (the Swiss Confederation) consisting of 26 cantons each with their own constitution, legislature, government and courts and the prerogative to decide on their own cultural policy, the process of choosing the inventory could not be consigned to a few professionals on a working committee as is usual among

other nations. Instead the cantons were each presented with the task of identifying and documenting their living traditions, while the federal authorities acted as coordinators of the process.

Due to this process the result is a fascinating amalgamation of what the Swiss people (or their local representatives) found is part of their cultural heritage, and the vision of the cultural professionals





acting on the federal level. All in all this vouches for a rather more spirited catalogue than what is normally the case.

Biker's meeting

One of the striking elements on the list is the wide variety. Some of it – e.g. **cheese-making in Gruyère** - naturally figures. However, why the **bikers' meeting** held in a restaurant in Canton Solothurn every week from March to October is on the list, have puzzled at least **some observers**. But

the meeting has attracted motorcycle enthusiasts from all over Switzerland and abroad since 1968 and it felt right to include it in spite of its less than ancient roots.

However, downright odd is the way in which the The Swiss Graphic Design Association has succeeded in getting **the Graphic Design and Typography** from the 20th century on the list. Or to name another artistic tradition: **the Illustration, Comics and Poster art in Geneva**. Add-

ing these to the list totally dilutes the concept "Intangible Heritage". (Why not just artists like e.g. Anton Graff?) One detects the hand of an inveterate artsy, "anti-heritage" member of some committee..

Restrictions

One reason though, why everything did not turn totally wild, was the categories delineated by UNESCO, which has to be applied. The committees were simply obliged to classify their intangible heritage according to the categories: "social practices", "performing arts", "oral expressions", "traditional craftsmanship" and "knowledge concerning nature". This – one presumes – must have stopped at least some of the wilder suggestions.

Ethnological Research

As a special side-project, the selections process and the meetings of the different committees were closely followed by a group of ethnologists, who did extensive fieldwork, taking part at meetings of the committees, conducting interviews etc.. This is still work in progress, but a preliminary report by Florence Graezer Bideau - **Inventorier les "traditions vivantes". Approches du patrimoine culturel immatériel dans le système fédéral Suisse** - has been published.

According to this report it appears that some traditions were simply included because they had been offered as suggestions by a number of (city) Cantons and not because they in any sense might be considered specifically "Swiss". Another restriction was the need to be fair to the different linguistic regions as well as religious churches or affiliations in Switzerland. In the end, the list had to be balanced.



Another project has been executed at the Hochschule Luzern concerning the development of tourism surrounding intangible heritage.

A manual was developed presenting four cases plus a model to be used as a “how-to”, when developing, packaging and marketing different types of intangible heritage.

The four specific cases are: the Etlebucher Alpabfahrt, the production of musical instruments in Herisau, The traditions of cheese-making in Gruyère and the carving of masks in Lötschental.

See the List:
Die lebendigen Traditionen der Schweiz - Les traditions vivantes en Suisse - Tradizioni viventi in Svizzera - Las tradiziuns vivas en Svizra

Touristmanual:
Lebendige Traditionen und Tourismus Leitfadens

Research project:
Intangible Cultural heritage: The Midas Touch?
Preliminary report by Florence Graezer Bideau

Children, Church and Cooking

What is the sense of place of Switzerland? One of the interesting question is to what extent the new list is distorted in any significant direction?

What are the characteristic traditions of Switzerland according to

the Swiss themselves? A recent inventory of the Intangible Herit-

age conducted according to the guidelines of UNESCO gives us a very good hint.

A photo NOT shown on the homepage of the “Lebendige Traditionen”
 © Steinmüller



The list is comprised of 165 traditions, categorized into five groups. Some of these are deemed to be characteristic of all Switzerland:

- 1) Consensus-seeking and direct democracy
- 2) Playing the Alphorn and the Büchel
- 3) Wind bands
- 4) Clubs and Societies
- 5) Feldschiessen – Shooting Contests
- 6) Fondue
- 7) Jass – a card-game
- 8) Schwingen- a local type of wrestling
- 9) Graphic design and typography
- 10) Dry Stone Walling

From this list it might be deduced, that Switzerland is all about direct democracy, a specific kind of horn-music, cheese-eating (and the implied Alpwirtschaft), plus male clubs and societies engaged in wrestling, shooting and card-playing. Probably without any deeper reflection the list thus demonstrates that women suffrage was not made totally obligatory before 1990, when a decision by the federal court outlawed the discrimination in the last corner of Old Switzerland, the Canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden; whose traditional **assembly** by the way has been listed.

Kinder, Kirche und Küche

This distinctive whiff of gender discrimination is emphasized by the choice of photos chosen to accompany the site, presenting the list. Out of 165 top-photos (those which crop up when a specific entry is chosen) only 5 % show women in an active role – as cooking, silk-ribbon weaving, taking part in an operetta or guiding children in (religious) processions. Only in one instance

– in the presentation of **the Glarus Cantonal Assembly** – a woman has an official political or active role outside the traditional spheres of cooking and childrearing.

Even when the site presents traditions concerning farming of cheese production, women are rendered invisible, although they were active participants in the Alps and were known to sport male outfits in order to be able to do the work of mowing and gathering wild hay and fodder. Whenever the men were busy otherwise (war, trade, handicrafts etc.) the women took the full responsibility for the pasturing of the cattle and the production of butter and cheese. And needed practical outfits to walk in the mountains. As expected, this raised an uproar amongst the bourgeois critics, who wrote the first ethnographic descriptions of traditional life in the Swiss Cantons in the 19th century. However, probably to no avail.

Politically Swiss women were – as is well-known - disenfranchised

until 1990. Culturally this is presumably still the case as witnessed by this UNESCO list of intangible heritage.

In this connection it is fascinating to note that one of the few female traditions, which has been lucky enough to find room on the list, is the Meitlisunntag, which is a three-day festival in Farhwangen, where women traditionally takes over the political rule in celebration of their role in the Battle of Villmergen in 1712.

In the Ethnological studies of how the process of picking and choosing the traditions were carried through, much has been written about the silenced traditions of the immigrants from e.g. Croatia and Turkey. As opposed to this, the silencing of the women has somehow escaped the administrators of the project, although the late introduction of women's votes is a feature within Swiss Culture, which is commonly known and remembered abroad.



Sense of Place – Switzerland

What is Swissness? Do we get closer to a definition of this “intangible” idea, when looking at the catalogue of traditions? And how does it compare to other such sites as MySwitzerland.com - the official website of Switzerland Tourism - and www.swissworld.org - the official gateway to Switzerland managed by the “Federal department of Foreign affairs”?

Lebendige-Traditionen.ch

Looking in detail at the UNESCO list it appears that Switzerland is indeed very ephemeral :

Nearly 2/3 of the traditions are thus characterised as “Social practices”, “Oral Expressions or Performing Arts (three of the five UNESCO Categories). As opposed to this only 28 % belong to the more practical categories: “Knowledge Concerning Nature and Traditional Craftsmanship”.

Swissworld.org

This does not differ markedly

“Chästeilet“ is the traditional division of the cheese produced on the mountains during summer. In the UNESCO list does not figure except as a tradition in the Bern Canton. Source: www.MySwitzerland.com



from the official introduction to Switzerland, although it starts out by listing a series of artists, composers, filmmakers etc. as part of the cultural heritage

Further down it does focus on a number of features, less prominent or not even mentioned on the UNESCO-list: Language, mountains, landscapes, the Swiss Flag and its anthem(s). However it ends up by listing eleven different ways in which the Swiss celebrate their local, regional and national heritage through festivals and seasonal costumes.

MySwitzerland.com

On this site a dedicated page tells about the different traditions and culture of Switzerland.

All in all the site lists 390 items. Of these 79 belong to the “Popular costumes and festivals of Switzerland - roughly corresponding to the 119 items on the official list, which have been characterised as either “Social practices”, “oral

Traditions according to categories

Oral Expressions – 17 / 10 %

Performing Art – 14 / 9 %

Social practices – 88 / 53 %

Knowledge Concerning Nature – 25 / 15 %

Traditional Craftsmanship - 21 / 13 %

Performances or the performing Arts”.

However, interestingly enough there is only a small overlap between the two lists (roughly 10 - 15 items figures on both lists).

Apart from that the website primarily endorses “materialities” like cheesemaking, top museums, abbeys & churches as well as castles. Thus the tourist-site obviously reflects the idea of a tourist, who wishes to see “the highlights” - the scenery, the architectural heritage and the “great” traditions (of “Alpwirtschaft” and cheesemaking).

While the UNESCO-list tries to list what the Swiss themselves believe are characteristic features, the tourism site presents us with the glossy tourist “Heidi-character”, most of us carry in our hearts. In that perspective it pays to listen to the Swiss themselves.

READ MORE:

Inventorier les « traditions vivantes ».

par Florence Graezer Bideau

