

**ACTA TERRAE SEPTEMCASTRENSIS**

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## RECOVERING THE PAST. THE CASE OF HERCULES APULENSIS

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**Cuvinte cheie:** *Apulum, Colonia Aurelia Apulensis, statuie, patrimoniu cultural, Hercules, recuperare*

**Rezumat:** *Piesa care face obiectul studiului a fost recuperată, în anul 2013, de organele judiciare în cadrul unui dosar penal privind sustragerea bunului cultural din situl arheologic Apulum, mai precis Colonia Aurelia Apulensis (Partoș), la mai mult de un an de la descoperirea ei fortuită, în cartierul Partoș, cu ocazia efectuării lucrărilor de canalizare. Scopul articolului este acela de a furniza arheologilor și specialiștilor în domeniul istoriei artei, date prețioase pentru a înțelege contextul de descoperire, împrejurările scoaterii la lumină a statuii lui Hercule, capodoperă a artei antice.*

**Key words:** *Apulum, Colonia Aurelia Apulensis, statue, cultural heritage, Hercules, recovery*

**Abstract:** *The statue that is the object of the present study was recovered in 2013 by the judiciary authorities, during a penal file of a stolen artifact from Colonia Aurelia Apulensis, at one year after his discovery, in Partos, quarter of Alba Iulia. The present study aims to inform specialists in archeology about the dramatic situation that an artifact with an exceptional value, was unfortunately, almost lost to the national cultural heritage, but, by chance, or destiny, he was recovered in a way less common for such an object.*

In a recent published study we have specify, without knowing the full depth of the phenomenon, that in an ideal society the archeologist should have common concerns with the prosecutor or policeman (whether specialist in preserving cultural heritage), relating to the investigation of sites, contexts, artifacts and so on, which were the subject of criminal activity. On the same occasion, sad conclusion, consequential opinion was that crime phenomenon has many faces, and Romania

felt in the last twenty years, unfortunately, the disastrous effects of the proliferation of this phenomenon in terms of painful losses of cultural heritage<sup>1</sup>.

The present study aims to inform specialists in archeology about the dramatic situation that an artifact with an exceptional value, was unfortunately, almost lost to the national cultural heritage, but, by chance, or destiny, he was recovered in a way less common for such an object. The story begins in 2012, in Alba Iulia (Alba county), the ancient roman Apulum, archaeological site belonging to the List of Historical Monuments of Romania<sup>2</sup>, and for archaeologists, perhaps the most important Roman city at north of Danube! The location of the epical debut is in the quarter named Partoș (lat. *Portos*), which overlaps entirely *Colonia Apulensis Aurelia* Roman city, archaeological site included on the list of nationally priority interest accordance with the regulations still in use<sup>3</sup>. The significance of this archaeological site has been highlighted on many occasions<sup>4</sup>, being one of the urban centers enjoyed very special attention from specialists in Roman age, given his age and epithet – *Chrysopolis*.

The systematic effort of the local urban administration in 2012, determined the sewerage in the new quarter<sup>5</sup>. Somewhere in late March<sup>6</sup>, in a particularly hot day for that season, team working on digging deep drainage ditch on Dacians street, is on the last sector and was about to reach the intersection with the Regimentul V Vânători Boulevard (fig. 1-2). The work at great depths, as was to be installed penultimate manhole, so the deepest points were reached approx. 5 meters. At some point, in the mound of earth removed by the heavy excavator bucket, one of the workers noticed a *white object* that looked like a human body shape. The worker B. Șt<sup>7</sup> approached curiously the pile of earth and found amazed that from the moist earth emerged the figure from a statue of a bearded man, naked, the marble which

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<sup>1</sup> Ciută 2009, pp. 272-278

<sup>2</sup> LMI 2010 anex at OMCPN 2361/2010, published in M.O. year 178 (XXII) nr. 670 bis, Friday, 1 oct. 2010

<sup>3</sup> OMCC 2483 from 12. 12. 2006; Law nr. 182/2000 republished, O.G. 43/2000 republished

<sup>4</sup> RepAlba 1995, 41-47 with bibliography; Ardevan 1998, 45-51, Diaconescu, Piso 2003, 64-82.

<sup>5</sup> Until 1990, the field of the current Partoș quarter figured in the urban plans as *agricultural land*.

<sup>6</sup> Details of the exact date I received from colleague George Bounegru, member of the research team

<sup>7</sup> Since criminal proceedings are still ongoing, these lines being written 2 months after the recovery of the statue, we will use the initials of the characters involved in the *film* of Hercules recovery, for obvious reasons related to the need to respect the principle of confidentiality.

was made very glossy and the broken left leg at the knee. He called his colleague, Gh.S., who raised her and together they cleaned it by hand to the ground. As was to be confirmed much later, it was the incomplete statue of a man who lacked hands, right leg and feet.



**Fig. 1.** Aerial view of the Partoș quarter, which indicate the area of the discovery of the statue of Hercules (the black square)



**Fig. 2.** Detail of the place (red spot) where Hercules statue was discovered in the vicinity of the intersection of Dacilor street with Regimentul V Vânători Boulevard.

Suspecting that this is a more special piece<sup>8</sup>, the couple wrapped the two pieces of the statue in overalls and then they put it next to the fence of a house where they took their lunch break, waiting for the engineer who leads the team.

Near the two, during removal of the statue of the earth - constant presence during the excavation works on the Dacilor Street - a citizen residing in the house located in the vicinity of the trench drain. S.V.A., look he in the pile of soil and the discovery of two make him it extremely carefully. Realizing that in the earth are also small fragments of white marble, it has recovered them, one by one, finally reaching a total of eight fragments, which put them initially in the garage located right next mouths sewer, then its summer terrace in the inner courtyard, sensing, in turn, that they could be part of a larger size statue.

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<sup>8</sup> From the statements of the two discoverers, sculptural piece was not an isolated case, before finding workers and other artifacts: lamps, brooches, pieces of bone, coins, pottery, altars and so on that which they have learned and then made subject to illegal trade, various people in the city and outside it, providing nice amounts of money for them. The situation is outrageous in a civilized state, in the 3-rd millennium, with laws and institutions dealing with the protection of cultural heritage.

At halftime, C. S., the engineer who is coordinating the work on site came at the work point where the workers were excited to show their discovery. The engineer looked somewhat puzzled at the statue, asking for the workers to put in the trunk of his car, and then asking them to not mention anyone by episode he left without further comment. Arriving at his home in Alba Iulia, he downloaded the fragmentary statue and filed it in the cellar of his house, thinking it will make a decision regarding it another time. His field experience and previous service contracts that they had inside the old citadel of Alba Iulia (the Roman camp, the Austrian channels) made him to be aware that came into possession of a valuable object, however, for unknown reasons, it looked shortly.

For a year, the artifact *went into occultation*, with no one and nothing to betray what happened at Dacilor Street. Only one incident that could have had tragic consequences, consumed just after 2-3 days after the discovery, have to point more clearly for the investigators upon discovery described above. In a Monday, probably on March 26, one archaeologists from the National Museum Alba Iulia, together with the curious citizen (!?), being in tow of the truck throw the excavated soil, *saw death in the face* when the machine is collapsed on one side near the edge of the ditch bank succumbing under the weight of too much. The photo of the accident situation, combined with witness statements proved to be salutary in locating the exact time of discovery. Some pictures taken on his last day of work on that site, the accident will be likely to clarify the context in which it could have discovered the artifact.

The story is resumed in September 2013. The engineer, who meanwhile dedicated to other projects and contracts needed a source of funding for equipment purchased in the spring of 2013, whose payment due date approached. During a visit to Mediaş, the headquarters of the firm contract sewerage above invoked, met the two workers, who were told, nostalgic about the financial advantages they had at Alba Iulia during the course work in 2012<sup>9</sup>. Suddenly he remembers about the artifact who left it in the basement for over a year and thought it had glimpses a possible source of funding. At the suggestion of the two potential buyers is the name of that phone and call them. From this moment its intention to sell the statuette fragment it holds becomes a certainty. To be more convincing, but also for reasons of easear communication, photograph and shows several people he meets (fig. 3). In this way, transaction benchmarks set piece is valued at Euro 6000 and will be sold on September 17.

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<sup>9</sup> See note 7.



**Fig. 3.** Statue of Hercules, photographed by S.C. in his house basement

It's the moment of a real action movie with a "flagrant action" resulting with the fragmentary statue recovered by the police officers. It was then the moment when basically were successful all the efforts to capture illegal transactions and rescue the sculpture. Erau recuperate corpul principal al statuii și gamba stângă,



ruptă, probabil, de cupa excavatorului. Main body of the statue was recovered and left leg broken probably by the excavator. From this point it was clear that we face a statues of Hercules, the hero so popular in antiquity, the original being the famous sculptor Lysip (IV B.C.), the model is known, however, that *Farnese Hercules*, which was discovered after the mid fifteenth century in the *thermes* of Caracalla in Rome and stayed in the palace of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, grandson of Pope Paul III, until it was moved, in the nineteenth century, to its current location, the National Archaeological Museum Naples.

The next day morning, in the location of the house of the *curious citizen* S.V.A., was organized a judicial searches from the following parts, which are recovered from the *summer terrace* where they where exposed as *pieces of art*, other 8 fragments of the statue: his left hand with his rod and fur of the *Lion of Nemea*, the pedestal of the statue with the two feet of the legs and head bull right leg, two fragments of the Nemean lion fur (front right paw and back) and the right hand, fragmented into 4 pieces (hand with the three apples in the garden of the Hesperides, forearm, arm broken in two) (fig. 4).

It was an incredible moment! The statue can be reconstructed at a rate of over 98%<sup>10</sup>, and observation showed that the fragments breaks are all fresh, i.e., when the digger surprise *the statue was full!*

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<sup>10</sup> At the end is lack only a small fragment of right biceps and a negligible part of the lion leg.



**Fig. 4.** Statue fragments recovered from S.V.A.: the left hand with the mace and the lion fur b. Excerpts from his right hand and right leg, c. pedestal of the statue

We are facing a great artifact; exquisite achieved practically a masterpiece of ancient sculptural art (fig. 5-7). Marble and manufacturing exceptional invoice clearly show that this was not a local product. The statue was a special order, most likely made in a workshop in the eastern area (Asia Minor), as a song that could be found, usually in temples. Only the very wealthy persons could afford to order such pieces.

Full statue presented a height of about 90 cm, weighing about 80 kg, very carefully crafted to the smallest detail. Remarkable are the bust, very well polished and facial features, which give Hercules calm, dignified resting, as if resigned to his fate. On the back, in the right deltoid, witness unprofessional extraction from home context, a deep scratch, and bucket teeth left from the excavator.

In the same day of the discovery, was disposed by the prosecutors, a scientific observation, performed by the expert Radu Ciobanu from the National Union Museum in Alba Iulia, who filed the report the same day. From its contents it appears that the part is a genuine artifact exceptional value.

*According to preliminary study estimates piece is part of cultural goods in the category "Thesaurus". The statue is made of marble imported (probably from Asia Minor) and dates back centuries. II A.C. It belongs to an iconographic type known as "Farnese Hercules", a replica Roman statue after Lisipp Greek sculptor of the classical period (IV century BC). From Dacia roman province longer know a single piece of marble similar to Mehadia, found and kept at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, but is smaller and more primitive carved.*

A note about special aesthetic qualities of the statue: it seems that the artist used two distinct models in achieving Hercules: lower legs, abdomen and left hand belong to a young man (*Efebus*) attention which is rendered my left hand, grace and delicacy, thinking more towards features rather feminine, while the torso, back, head and even the right hand belong to a powerful man, muscular, another type. Thus, if we draw a diagonal from top left to bottom right, we see that the artist tried entwining, symbiotic, two characters. Implications for the interpretation of the character may be multiple, stunning patina remains excellent, kept the bust and head, obtained both through the creative process and as a result of friction and lubrication oils lengthy within the temple was probably de-over several decades. The artist has paid particular attention and specific details fur lion and head of a bull. Basically, in the case of the Hercules from Apulum we deal with the representation of three of the 12 labors of the hero: capture (killing?) Bull of Crete, killing the Nemean lion and stealing apples from the garden of the Hesperides.



**Fig. 5.** Hercules discovered in Colonia Aurelia Apulensis (front view)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Photo Călin Şuteu .