

ARCHAEOLOGY, MEMORY AND HISTORY: THE COMMUNIST-ERA RUINS AT GALEȘU/NAZARCEA (ON THE DANUBE-BLACK SEA CANAL TRAIL)

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Abstract: The article presents the results of the archaeological research carried out in 2012, 2014 and 2015 at Galeșu/Nazarcea (Poarta Albă commune, Constanța County), in an area where, according to the information provided by several former political prisoners and locals, there once was a forced labour camp on the line of the Danube-Black Sea Canal. This endeavour started from the premise that the ruins of the former labour camp are part of the material memory of the communist concentration camp system and the period that followed, the archaeological research of which can contribute, along with other forms of memory (historical sources, memoirs, etc.), to a more nuanced understanding of a segment of Romania's recent past. The main objective of the archaeological research was to unearth the memories contained by the site and the surrounding landscape. A preliminary study regarding the public gain from the valorisation of this material memory was also taken into consideration.

The excavations in September 2014 have revealed a rectangular construction 25.20 m long and 7.80 m wide, with its inner space divided into several areas: a floor drain and traces of a cap from a washing unit (a sink, bathtub or shower), a brick floored room, a cellar, and a water reservoir. Another structure was excavated in October 2015. Of considerable dimensions (25x9 m), the building displays different characteristics. Eight sondages were made, from which the construction techniques were identified: foundation dumps filled with cement mixed with rocks, layered on a footing made from boulders of considerable dimensions, which became the base of the mortar held brick walls. The building had several inner walls. The floor layout was different, possibly in relation to the use of the rooms, with a board flooring, a thick layer of bitumen or an extremely brittle cement screed. On one of the long sides there were two entrances marked by access stairways. In the context of an existing slope, three of the corners of the building seem to have been consolidated through a system of stairs cast onto a pile of rocks. Other three sondages were made in order to check if a structure (C19) was indeed a building or a simple cone formed by collapsing earth. Along with these buildings other structures have been documented which belonged to the former labour camp, as well as the ruins of the subsequent period: industrial ruins, dikes, basins, enormous earth dumps, etc. To complete the data, information was collected from people living in the area, including a witness from the period the labour camp was in use.

The moment of the construction and functioning period of the forced labour camp constitutes a prophetic time for the communist landscape that followed. Removing the apparently natural landscape, the archaeological research has documented the naked image of the modernist project – a secularized, anthropocentric Genesis whose existing claim is founded on the successive ruining of the different social engineering projects. Based on the obtained results we would like a more ample research and capitalization strategy to be adopted, which should include not only the former labour camp at Galeșu and its surroundings, but as many of the ruins associated to the project of building the Danube-Black Sea Canal as possible.

Rezumat: Articolul prezintă rezultatele cercetărilor arheologice desfășurate în 2012, 2014 și 2015 la Galeșu/Nazarcea (comuna Poarta Albă, județul Constanța), în spațiul unde, potrivit informațiilor oferite de câțiva foști deținuți politici, dar și de localnici, ar fi existat o colonie de muncă forțată de pe traseul Canalului Dunăre-Marea Neagră. Demersul a pornit de la premisa că ruinele fostului lagăr se constituie în memoria materială a sistemului concentraționar comunist și a perioadei ulterioare, a cărei analiză arheologică, în relație cu alte forme de memorie (surse istorice, memorii etc), poate contribui la o înțelegere mai nuanțată a unui segment din trecutul recent al României. Scopul principal al cercetării arheologice a fost acela de a scoate la iveală memoriile conținute de sit și de peisajul înconjurător. De asemenea, s-a avut în vedere un studiu preliminar privind valorificarea pentru public a acestei memorii materiale.

Săpăturile din luna septembrie 2014 au pus în evidență o construcție rectangulară de 25,20 m lungime și 7,80 m lățime, având spațiu interior divizat în mai multe zone – un sifon de pardoseală și urme ale soclului unei instalații de spălat (chiuvetă, cadă sau duș), cameră cu podea din cărămidă, beci, rezervor pentru apă. O altă structură a fost cercetată în luna octombrie 2015. Clădirea, de dimensiuni considerabile (25 x 9 m), prezintă caracteristici diferite. Prin cele opt sondaje efectuate au fost precizate tehnicile constructive: șanțuri de fundație umplute cu ciment amestecat cu pietre, suprapuse de un soclu din bolovani de dimensiuni apreciabile, care au constituit temelia pereților, clădiți din cărămizi legate cu mortar. Clădirea dispunea de mai mulți pereți interiori. Podeaua era amenajată diferit, posibil în funcție de destinația camerelor, cu o dușumea de scânduri, cu un strat gros de bitum sau cu o șapă de ciment extrem de friabilă. Pe una dintre laturile lungi existau două intrări marcate de scări de acces. În contextul existenței unei pante, trei dintre colțurile clădirii par să fi fost consolidate printr-un sistem de trepte turnate peste o umplutură de pietre. Alte trei sondaje au fost efectuate cu scopul de a verifica dacă o structură (C19) era o clădire sau un simplu con format din pământ scurs. Alături de aceste clădiri au fost documentate alte structuri aparținând fostului lagăr, precum și ruinele unor construcții din perioada ulterioară: ruine industriale, diguri, bazine, halde imense de pământ etc. Pentru completarea datelor au fost culese informații de la oamenii locului, inclusiv un martor al perioadei de funcționare a lagărului.

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Momentul zidirii și durata funcționării coloniei de muncă forțată se constituie într-un timp profetic al peisajului comunist ce a urmat. Îndepărtând aspectul fals natural al peisajului, cercetările arheologice au documentat imaginea nudă a proiectului modernist – o Geneză secularizată, antropocentrică, a cărei pretenție de dăinuire are la temelie ruinarea succesivă a diferitelor proiecte de inginerie socială. Pe baza rezultatelor obținute ne-am dori să se stabilească o strategie de cercetare și de valorificare mai amplă, care să cuprindă nu doar fostul lagăr de la Galeșu și peisajul înconjurător, ci cât mai multe dintre ruinele asociate proiectului de realizare a Canalului Dunăre-Marea Neagră.

Introduction

Galeșu is one of the forced labour camps from the 1950s communist period, located on the line of the Danube-Black Sea Canal.¹ The former camp is located 5.5 km to the north-east of Poarta Albă and 2 km north-east from Nazarcea, on the right bank of the Carasu-Poarta Albă-Năvodari Canal (Fig. 1). Even if the name of the camp is often mentioned in memoirs and the literature dedicated to the political repression in Communist Romania, its ruins have been forgotten; besides, in general, the research of the material universe of the repression and resistance has been, until now, either reduced to exhumations of the victims,² or has been completely ignored.³

The area assigned to the former camp was only rediscovered in 2012, when the identity of the site was determined with the help of a few former political detainees from the labour camp at Galeșu. The site also lingered in the memory of several locals, as a former concentration space.⁴ Based on these testimonials an Orthodox monastery dedicated to the martyrs and confessors from the communist prisons was built. On the occasion of digging for the foundation of the church it was mentioned that “chunks of stones from the former foundation of the Galeșu labour camp” were found, as well as a series of objects: “rusty steel nails 20-25 cm long, tin strips from the metal beds, a fragment from a canteen with a rusty broken handle, a fragment of a lock bolt from the cell door”.⁵ The construction of the monastery, at the initiative of Father Justin Pârnu, himself a former political prisoner, continues the Orthodox tradition of building *martyria* to honour the memory of persecuted Christians. Indeed, many of the political prisoners at Galeșu were priests and confessors for Christ, Father Ilie Lăcătușu and Father Constantin Galeriu being among the most famous. Thus, the cornerstone of the new Monastery of the Romanian All-Saints was laid at Galeșu (Fig. 2).

In this context, in 2012, the first archaeological survey was made, when a series of structures were photographed and mapped, of which several had probably belonged to the former forced labour camp.⁶ The research continued in 2014 and 2015, which meant the completion of the topographic plan, as well

¹ For synthetic presentations of the history of the labour camps at the Canal, see Mareș 2008; Cojoc 2011; Stănescu 2012, pp. 123-369.

² For a critique see Dragoman, Oanță-Marghitu 2013.

³ But see Dragoman 2015.

⁴ The choice of the site on which to build the Romanian All-Saints Monastery took into account the presence of the material remains of the former camp (Romanov, Petre 2013, pp. 181-183). In the context of founding the monastery, several former political prisoners (Roman Dănilă, Father Gheorghe Oancea, Ioan Negoită) confirmed that it was actually situated where the former labour camp had once been (Romanov, Petre 2013, pp. 129-144, 181-182). From this point of view, Roman Dănilă's statement is pertinent: “I am happy that the monastery is being built exactly on the place where the sheds used to be, on the hearth of suffering” (Romanov, Petre 2013, p. 144). At the same time, Sofia Tudosa Romanov carried out a series of interviews with (former) locals from Galeșu/Nazarcea and Poarta Albă (Nicolae Rizea, Father Constantin Lungu, Vasile Gheorghe, Dinu Dumitru, Constantin Monea, Gheorghe Delicote, Gheorghe Săceleanu) who confirmed this identification, and also provided data on the functioning period of the labour camp, and the fate of the buildings after the works at the Canal were stopped (Romanov, Petre 2013, pp. 111, 124-127). The conclusions of the discussions were included in a book dedicated to the building of the new monastery: Romanov, Petre 2013. In 2014, during a visit at the archaeological site, while researching the buildings, Valeria Lungu, from Nazarcea/Galeșu, recognized constructions that belonged to the forced labour camp. During a discussion in October 2015, Milică Gigea, vice-mayor of Poarta Albă, has assured us that at least since 1964, the year he became an inhabitant of the Nazarcea/Galeșu village, the site of our archaeological research has not been occupied by other constructions. Moreover, he knew since communist times, from the elderly villagers' accounts, that there had been a forced labour camp on that site during the construction period of the Canal.

⁵ Romanov, Petre 2013, p. 196.

⁶ Dragoman, Florea 2013. Because it administratively belonged to the locality of Poarta Albă and also due to the name of the monastery, it initially determined us to believe, and mention in the published report, that the domain of the future monastery has been part of the former labour camp at Poarta Albă (the largest of the camps from the Canal), but we later realized that it was actually the area of a separate detention centre.



Fig. 1. Map with a part of the political detention centres from the communist period (Mihai Florea).



Fig. 2. The Romanian All-Saints Monastery at Galeşu in September 2014 (all photos by Radu-Alexandru Dragoman, if not otherwise mentioned).



Fig. 3. Ruins of building C20 in August 2012.



Fig. 4. Ruins of building C9 in October 2015.

as excavations that were carried out in two of the identified structures, one in the western sector of the site (C20), and another in the eastern sector (C9) (Figs. 3, 4); in addition, three small sondages were made in an undiagnosed structure, that has the shape of a prolonged earth mound (C19). Starting from the premise that the archaeological remains represent the material memory of the past,⁷ the archaeological research tried to explore the layers of memories contained by the material traces attributed to the former camp of Galeşu.

⁷ Olivier 2008.



Fig. 5. The road leading to the Romanian All-Saints Monastery.



Fig. 6. Communist-era basin. In the background – earth dump (Florina Pop).



Fig. 7. Landscape along the Canal.

Roads and images

Splitting from the road at the exit from the village, the gravel road towards Poiana begins its meandering through glimpses of agricultural works which alternate with ephemeral frozen instances of the ruining of the communist landscape, here painted in the dirty and dilapidated white of the former CAP (Agricultural Production Cooperative) buildings. Then starts the ascent bordered by vineyards and the long and apparently narrow stairway of the peak (named Deposit 1 – *Depozitul 1*), built – according to some locals – from the excavated land from “the second” Canal (Fig. 5). On the horizon, the volumes of the Romanian All-Saints Monastery (two buildings under construction erected until the roof level, the oratory and two houses with ground floor and one story, of which one is made of wood and the other of concrete, the tower bell, the semantron and the wooden roadside crucifix dedicated to the memory and veneration of the new martyrs), seem to rise suddenly, prompt and cyclical, every time one follows the road from the wilderness of the green carpet of the village’s former grasslands. Every morning, this road was climbed by the youth of Nazarcea and Poarta Albă, employees of the working site. Through here passed the cars heading for Poiana or parked in front of the church before the Divine Liturgy or the Holy Unction Service that held every Thursday night. Horse carriages or donkeys returned home from their cultivated lots and herds randomly crossed the road that cut the green with the white of its pebbles.

Up at the peak, the road reveals other images of the monastery: the little house of the abbess, the orderly fire wood piles and the chaotic stacks of boards to be used in construction, the small monastic community attending to the services and living according to liturgical time, the monastery children aiding the builders in their construction work, and the village women helping around in the kitchen.

The road cuts through the land of the monastery leaving to its left, towards the Canal, a waving terrain, wounded by pits and covered in garbage spread over the thistle fields that metallically whisper their dryness. The artificial green peak accompanies the road from afar, revealing its “ziggurat” stairs and yellow wounds left after chunks of land were snatched by machines to feed the hunger for levelling earth. Further on, another country road splits itself from the main one, descending towards the “ziggurat”

flanked by a row of electricity poles, and the pairing between earth and the flow of electrical power illustrates the artificial scene of a landscape that wears the masks of the year. Seen from these roads, the earth dump uplifts its haughtiness in layers as a screen which conceals the artificial waters of the Canal, and as a dam that stops the landscape from rolling over in waves and freezes everything into the image of a rust stained green carpet. The weeds and thistles stubbornly try to heal the mounds covered in a green that fails to mask the artificial, to swallow the field full of holes, some filled with water, from which sheep or goat herds sometimes stop to drink. Astray, meaningless concrete panel buildings, plastic bottles and piled up glass sherds pop up from the tall weeds. Surrounded by green small earth mounds, a concrete basin hides its immense circularity (Fig. 6).



Fig. 8. Site plan of Galeşu (Mihai Florea).

From the top of the “ziggurat” another artificial summit is revealed towards the east (Deposit 2 – *Depozitul 2*), which meanders as an effigy-mound amongst other concrete ruins of communism – constructions and settlements from the 1980s which time transformed into an archaeological landscape. Bordered by the circular upper-parts of a reservoir, a concrete and breeze block building reveals a yellow plastered wall which still supports the ceiling and from which fragments of the perpendicular partition walls run on both sides. Facing south, a rectangular building, east-west oriented, has the ceiling almost glued to the foundations while on the concrete slab lie the cinder blocks and the cement from the walls. Separated from this building by three artificial weedy earth mounds, further south, a concrete platform cast in stacks, which has the step of a staircase adjacent to it and on top of which lay scattered fragments of asbestos. Immediately towards the south, a rectangular cement foundation now supports only isolated limestone boulders. Two parallel “horn-shaped” concrete elements colour the uncanniness of the ruins. Further on, the tall concrete base of what used to be a building thrusts its massive cement and boulder northern corner into the scenery. A sequence of small artificial mounds lead towards other ruins: a building with elevated walls followed by a rectangular platform with a square base, a deepened rectangular concrete construction with a partition wall, and finally a rectangular foundation with screed, with two massive concrete fragments on top.

There on the horizon, beyond the elongated “ziggurat”, on the other bank of the Canal, the green terraced landscape is interrupted by islands of round or square buildings (a water tower, the wastewater treatment plant, former wineries and zootechnical farms, a water and a power plant), prisms of undefinable colours and discolorations of white, green or blue that measure the flow of time, arranged in the grass either on their long side resembling matchboxes – functionalist manifestos of efficiency and economy – or rolled on their short

Excerpt from Caiete ARA 7, 2016.



Fig. 9. 1. Aerial photo of the site at Galeșu.

side to create silos that hurl to the sky the memory of socialist agriculture (Fig. 7). From these survivals in the deserted landscape, electric wires are sent to the horizon as rays of progress carried by relays and polls planted in rows, and, against the blue background of the sky, they seem enlarged details of some realist-socialist paintings that collected dust in the storehouses of the museums, final flickers that no longer dream of any reality.

Recollection, memory and ruin: the materiality of the space assigned to the forced labour camp

On the plan and in the aerial images (Figs. 8, 9), the ruins seem to draw two distinct sectors. In the western part, the ruins (most of which are destroyed, affected or covered by the buildings of the monastery) are denser, set parallel and seem to have been gently lain in the grass. Here, the concrete foundations, on which pieces of mill board can still be found, discipline nature in right angles, and the horizontal of the screed that can be seen at the corners seems to be a platform on which time has sacrificed the ruins of the walls molten in a thin layer of bricks and plaster fragments

covered by a vegetal layer. The satellite photos from 2011, taken before the construction of the current monastery began, suggest the presence of some rectangular buildings, east-west or north-south oriented, placed within a 6 meter distance from each other.

In the eastern sector however, the ruins, most of them surrounded by a ditch (C4, C5, C6, C7, C8 and C9), make up an airy space. During the droughty years, when grass doesn't grow up to reach the waist, the alignment of this prism-shaped islands covered in nature emanates a funerary atmosphere. Visible fragments from the bottom of the walls, sometimes as high as 0.60 m, massive chisel-cut boulders but also the fractured steps of the stairs that reveal the stones on which they have been cast, add vertical strikes and massiveness and monumentality to the space. Polished screed pieces are rather rarely seen through the tall grass of the western sector. Instead, here the green intricacy of the grass is often brutally broken by the black of the cast bitumen paving. The cement base of the walls, with the small curb-stone on the exterior margin, is lacking from this space, since here the foundation of the brick walls is strongly emphasized by the fragments of mill board which time has impregnated in the thin cement layer cast onto the boulders. During the draughty years, the stripes of dried grass draw in the vegetation blanket that covers the surface of the ruins from this sector the lines of some interior walls, making the image of the room layout seem like a 1/1 scale plan. The parts that are exposed (the base, the stairs, the bitumen, the gutters, and the lines of the interior walls) make it easy to guess the small communities formed by related buildings (C6,



Fig. 9. 2. Interpretation of the aerial photo (Cătălin Nicolae).

C7, C8, C9). Besides, together with N4 and C19, these seem to form a distinct group organised in three rows, from west to east, each made up of two buildings. The first alignment is composed by N4 and C4, followed by C5 and C19, making C6 and C7 form the eastern edge of the former labour camp. The two plots created by these rows are delimited from the south by C8 and C9. In the case of the former two it is possible to observe that they had two entrances, each with their steps placed on the northern side, which allowed access to the previously mentioned plots. The dimensions of these buildings, as far as it was possible to notice, are similar. Another group seems to be formed by C1, C2, C18 and C21 which are placed as a square. Regarding this grouping, at least in the case of C1, steps could be observed on the west side of the building which indicate the access from the building to the precinct marked by the four ruins. In both sectors, a deepened rectangular structure has been identified in the vicinity of certain buildings, with walls coated by bricks bound by mortar (C10 and C15). Fragments of ceramic pipes, some filleted with connecting jacks, discovered near structures in both sectors (C5, C9, C13 and C19), suggest the existence of a general sewage system. This is also indicated by the interpretation of the aerial photographs, and also by the observations made in structure C13, which was destroyed by a borrow pit up to the level of the boulders from the foundation trenches, where a fragment of the pipeline seems to have been preserved *in situ* along the long eastern wall (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. Sewage pipe, probably *in situ*, belonging to structure C13.



Fig. 11. Structure identified in August 2012, no longer in existence in September 2014.



Fig. 12. Structure identified in August 2012, subsequently partially destroyed.

This layout of the ruins in space that suggests an organization into separate sectors seems to have also characterized the forced labour camp at Peninsula. As is evidenced by a sketch of the camp,⁸ the more densely occupied sector contained the aligned built barracks of the inmates together with office buildings, the kitchen, the storehouse, the infirmary and the hospital, while the “airy” sector comprised the visitation room, the guard post, and the food kiosk; outside of the camp *per se* there were the buildings intended for a battalion of the *Securitate*,⁹ the commandment, and the houses of the officers and their families.

A row of ruins in the eastern sector at Galeșu (C4, C5, C6, C11, and C17) draws the northern margin of the site up to structure C26, destroyed by the excavation of a pit. According to some testimonies,¹⁰ the circular cement tank situated further north could also have belonged to the space of the camp. This group of ruins together with the two distinctive sectors seem to delimit an empty space, free of constructions (with a surface of approximately 1 ha), best revealed by the distance between structures C13 and C21. Nonetheless the existence of this space (which corresponds to the assembly area mentioned in documents) is not certain. The area is crossed by the road to Poiana, and is either covered in piles of garbage or earth dumps, or destroyed by the borrow pits.

Sadly, the surface of the site is severely damaged today. At the end of 2012 and in 2013 the buildings of the Romanian All-Saints Monastery were erected and, in order to level the ground, several borrow pits were mechanically dug, action which determined the destruction of certain structures, and the extracted soil was deposited in the area on which the monastery buildings were erected. Thus, other traces of structures identified in 2012 were covered. The buildings of the monastery and the paved alleys overlapped most of the west sector structures. By digging a pit for a pond several ruins from a large structure (C26) were destroyed; it still had the steps of the entrance stairs (Fig. 11). Also other structures from the eastern sector were affected. The ruins of a structure (C2) are traversed by a land road that breaks from the road to Poiana and descends towards the Canal. On the right side of the road to Poiana, on the north-eastern limits

of the monastery grounds, the traces of a structure (C21) partially destroyed by mechanical equipment can be identified: the shape and lines of the concrete foundations that were levelled down to the road level, whole or fragmented bricks, plaster pieces, large cement chunks with poured bitumen onto which gravel was stuck (Fig. 12). The missing spot, resulted from excavating the soil necessary in levelling the land on which the monastery buildings were raised, now resembles an archaeological sondage through a structure with impressive dimensions, oriented east-west and covered in grass, with visible undisturbed foundation traces in the southern

⁸ Cârja 1993, pp. 243, 249.

⁹ The Romanian secret police during the communist period: The General Directorate for the Security of the People.

¹⁰ Romanov, Petre 2013, p. 114.

side, covered in a thin layer of debris. The building of the Romanian All-Saints Monastery thus represents the acceleration of a process of obliterating the material traces of the space belonging to the forced labour camp, which can be attributed to the total lack of interest for an archaeology of the recent and contemporary past, shown by the institutions dedicated to the study of communism and by the archaeological field in Romania in general.

For now, the harmonisation of the results of the archaeological surveys with the descriptions of the forced labour camp from the memorial literature is difficult.¹¹ Memories suggest that the labour camp of Galeşu was “perched up high on a hilltop that dominated not only the locality but the entire surrounding landscape”,¹² stretching along the coast and occupying a rectangular surface delimited by a double network of barbed wire. From the front of the camp there started “a long dirt road that reached the paved street”.¹³ According to other testimonies,¹⁴ “the main road” was gravelled, “crossed the middle of the labour camp” and “ascended into a slight slope”. The barracks of the inmates, approximately 20 m long, boarded a “plateau” of almost 1 ha, and “across from the camp” stood the homes of “all the *Securitate* agents” and the “barracks of the soldiers”.¹⁵ According to another description “on the right and left side of the main road the wooden barracks were lined in an H, built in the same way as those from Peninsula. On the left side, near the gate, there were two brick buildings where the administration offices and the warders’ dormitories had been.”¹⁶ It is mentioned that inside the camp, apart with the inmate barracks, there were also storehouses as well as workshops where mechanics, welders, turners and electricians worked (some mechanical workshops were led by a chief-engineer),¹⁷ a restroom area (on the west side of the camp),¹⁸ and the “F Sick Ward” (which the prisoners called *Santa Fe*).¹⁹ A former political prisoner, Roman Dănilă, remembers that the labour camp was in fact protected by three barbed wire fences with “two corridors in between them and a safety trench which was dug and raked all the time so as to reflect potential traces. In the corners there were observation points, and on top of each tall pole there was a covered booth for the guards to rest”.²⁰ On the other hand, some locals evoke a different image of the forced labour camp space: “The barracks were made of adobe, from panels that were 2 meters high and made of willow branches and reeds plaited and tied with wire. Being thus built, they were bound by cement and lime mortar. People remember there being 7-9 barracks, of which the best looking functioned as an annex of the commandment, as the headquarters were in Poarta Albă. Another barrack hosted the canteen and the others were dormitories. There was also the water reservoir and its place is visible even today”.²¹ Father Constantin Lungu, whose parents had their household “further up from the colony, on ‘Ocneru’s Hill’” remembers that “in the labour camp there were wooden sheds, plank lining onto some pillars”.²² According to Roman Dănilă, who was a former prisoner in this labour camp himself, in each wooden barrack there were about 300 detainees and 4 bedrooms.²³ The prisoners in the camp worked in different places: “some kilometres up the glen”, where they were arranging an embankment; on a “railway site” situated “quite some kilometres” away and to which you could arrive by passing through the “gulches and wilderness” to finally climb “up to the high terrace”;²⁴ on another working site rocks were crushed with a hammer;²⁵ and in

¹¹ Dumitrescu 1994, pp. 18-19, 24, 26; Radina 1981, pp. 83, 87; Gurău 1999, pp. 432-497; Mareş 2008, pp. 223-224; Bălănescu, Buchet 2011; Stănescu 2012, pp. 339-347.

¹² Gurău 1999, p. 433.

¹³ Dumitrescu 1994, p. 26.

¹⁴ Gurău 1999, p. 433.

¹⁵ Dumitrescu 1994, pp. 18-19; Stănescu 2012, p. 339.

¹⁶ Gurău 1999, p. 433.

¹⁷ Stănescu 2012, p. 275.

¹⁸ Gurău 1999, pp. 460, 491-492.

¹⁹ Radina 1981, p. 87.

²⁰ Romanov, Petre 2013, p. 139.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 114.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 124.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

²⁴ Dumitrescu 1994, pp. 21, 24.

²⁵ Radina 1981, p. 83.

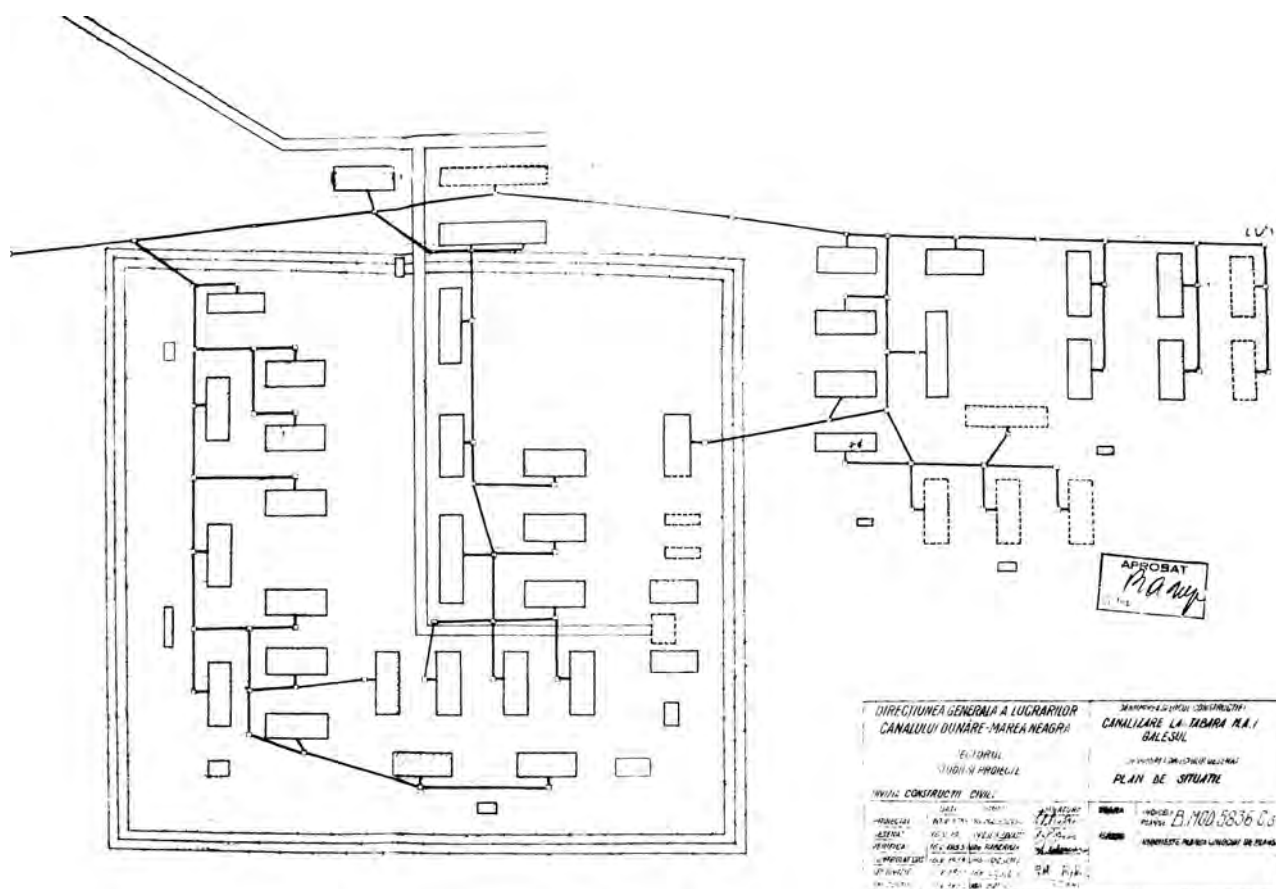


Fig. 13. Sewage plan of the forced labour colony of Galeșu, drafted in 1952.

the place called *Mustața* (The Moustache), from a “hill top” 2 km away from the camp, “in the direction of the labour camp named *Culmea* (The Peak)”, the prisoners worked at “levelling”, that is they were spreading the earth brought by tippers or trolleys.²⁶ Beside the railways lined along the Canal, from Poarta Albă to Năvodari, there were also special rails for each labour camp.²⁷ The deceased prisoners were buried in the village cemetery, “without a priest, a prayer or a cross at their heads”; at least this is what some of the witness accounts reflect.²⁸ According to another testimony, the prisoners were transported from the camp to the cemetery in Poarta Albă since, as result of starting the Canal diggings (when many households from Galeșu were displaced), the village cemetery remained on the other side of the Canal.²⁹

Both the archaeological research and the testimonies differ significantly from the image given by the official documents. Thus, the plan of the sewage system of the “Galeșul MIA³⁰ camp”, made in 1952 (Fig. 13), does not contain anything related to the diversity of the material culture that forms the forced labour camp, but only a greatly schematised reality – an idyllic image of the rational planning of reality. Moreover, there are contradictions even at the most basic level: even if the same geometric ordering confirmed archaeologically can also be found in the sewage plan, the spatial distribution of the buildings differs. This difference between the official plan and the archaeological one is an extra argument for an analysis of the materiality that the official documents pretend to represent.

²⁶ Gurău 1999, pp. 434–435.

²⁷ Dumitrescu 1994, p. 37.

²⁸ Gurău 1999, p. 473.

²⁹ Romanov, Petre 2013, p. 113.

³⁰ Ministry of the Internal Affairs; in original: “tabăra MAI Galeșul”.

Beyond differences, the most important aspect remains the relationship between the diverse types of memory, between recollection, oblivion, collective memory, and the material memory of the ruined site. People unravel the thread of the narrative ball to weave the testimony of suffering and death, of resistance, revolt and submission, guilt and betrayal, courage and fear and rebirth of hope, of hunger and thirst, cold and heat, mud and dust, wheelbarrow and spade. The scene is minimally outlined; the essential characteristics are connected to suffering: the barrack with bunks, the barbed wire fence, the infirmary, and especially the working sites, the canteen, wheelbarrow and shovel. During the long detention of some witnesses, the scene from the Galeșu forced labour camp was just an episode. People passed through here in the different stages of the camp's shifting biography. The scenery of the stage changed between the moment Vladimir Dumitrescu described it (before being transferred to other forced labour camps) and Vasile Gurău's arrival. The wood, the rectangular shape of the barracks, the mud and thirst, the wheelbarrow and the spade are replaced by a more complex scenery which combines the H shaped barracks with the mechanics workshops and the bulldozers. In the Peninsula forced labour camp, it was only in the spring of 1952 that the construction of the brick barracks began (in the same period similar works are ongoing at Poarta Albă).³¹ Also, some of the detainees³² noticed about the same period (fall of 1952 and spring of 1953) a major change in the construction of the Canal through the introduction of several modern means. By putting together the testimonies, a complex diverse world is born, that juxtaposes to the triad of suffering (detainee-wheelbarrow-shovel) an industrial community formed of welders, bulldozer drivers, carpenters and electricians. From this complexity, the archaeological survey retains the durable elements (cement, concrete, bricks) and misses the ephemera and the modesty of wood or straw. In its turn, the materiality of the ruins at Galeșu is fragmentary. It is possible that the real surface of the camp of Galeșu may have been larger than the area on which the identified ruins are spread. These are distributed on a land that after the camp had been abandoned was transformed in the communal grassland, and the lack of agricultural workings was the element that favoured their conservation. On the other hand, the terrain around the grassland has intensely been ploughed and cultivated since communist times and as a result, other material traces might have been destroyed. Or on the contrary, perhaps the terrain was spared by agricultural interference precisely because of the presence of the camp ruins. Also, as we have mentioned before, almost the entire western sector of the area, where the ruins are scattered, has been destroyed, and a significant area of the surface assigned to the former labour camp is covered in garbage and earth piles. As we will see below, the archaeological excavations had a limited, preliminary character, only three of the structures being (partly) excavated. Also the space in between the ruins has not yet been excavated.

The stillness of the ruins, their funerary alignment and the time melted under debris, with a colouring mixed between brick-red and the matte grey of the cement, deprived of poetry, dusts the living life in a harsh clumsy way (which many of the witnesses of suffering from Galeșu tried to describe) and the sequence of the events from that excruciating time. Because of this imperfect relation, the archaeology of a past no matter how recent is not simply an auxiliary that certifies history. In relation with recollection, memory and history, archaeology only reveals the things that are hidden from sight, forgotten or unuttered, it nuances and opens up new perspectives, drawing images in which the past converges with the present in unexpected constellations.³³

The investigated structures

Next to the cell of the abbess, towards the south, there are traces of a structure identified in 2012 (C20). The structure, east-west oriented, has a rectangular shape of large dimensions (25.20 x 7.80 m). Before being excavated, fragments from the screed and the cement base, on which there once stood the walls, were perceived through the tall grass. After cleaning, the structure revealed its entire dimensions (Figs. 14, 15), and a layer of debris (with a thickness of 0.10-0.15 m) materializes the passage of time, from abandonment to the

³¹ Cârja 1993, p. 248.

³² For example, Cârja 1993, p. 424.

³³ Cf. Agamben 2009, p. 137; Benjamin 2002, pp. 196-197.



Fig. 14. Ensemble view of C20.

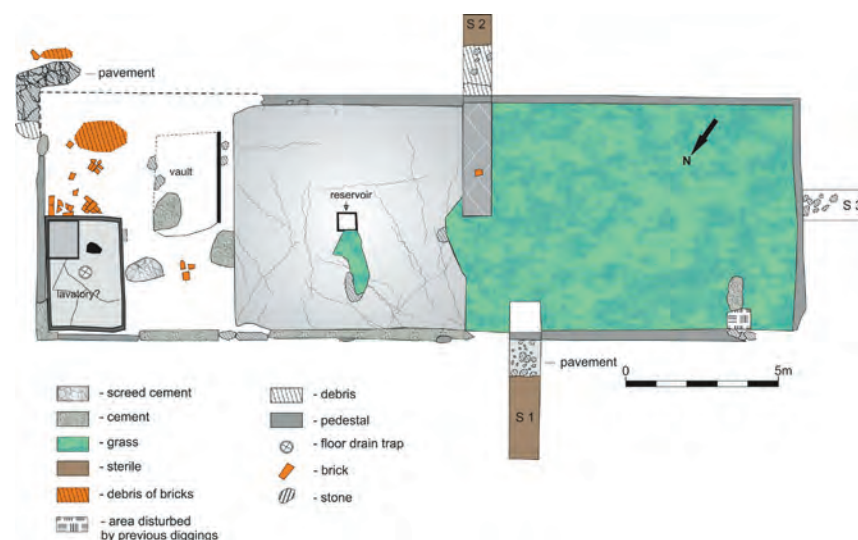


Fig. 15. Plan of building C20 (Sorin Oanță-Marghitu and Tiberiu Vasilescu).

present day. Through three perpendicular trenches on the north, south and west sides and by removing the layer of vegetation in the north-eastern corner, we have defined the way the construction was built. First the terrain was levelled by adding red clay soil with black lenses; this layer is thicker in the northern part and thinner in the southern and follows the descending line of the slope. After that the ditch of the foundation walls was dug, about 0.30 – 0.35 m wide, and deeper in the northern part (0.50 m) (Fig. 16). The ditch was filled with limestone boulders and stones, and on top of the entire perimeter a cement slab was cast (Fig. 17). The cement dried out through the cavities between the boulders in the upper layer of the filling. Over this part a thin



Fig. 16. C20: foundation trench.



Fig. 17. C20: eastern wall; base-screed relation.



Fig. 18. C20: boulders under the screed.

cement curb was added, with an edge 2 cm taller than the base. Because of the slope, the base of the northern wall is slightly lifted (with about 10 cm) from the ground. The structure of the wreckage could indicate that the walls were built from bricks bound with mortar and plastered with a thin layer of cement. The interior space had various purposes. At the moment of the research, on two thirds of the uncovered surface there was a 5 cm thick screed cast over a layer of boulders (Fig. 18). In the north-eastern corner of the building a round metallic cover from a floor drain was set in the screed (Fig. 19). Immediately to the east, agglutinated to the screed, cement marks could be observed which kept imprints of bricks laid out in a square, suggesting a base for a washing fixture, a sink, bathtub or shower. In some places fragments of mill board were preserved stuck in the flooring screed. In the south-east corner, the screed was interrupted; here, the mostly destroyed floor was made of whole bricks mixed with others that were cut in triangle or trapezoidal shapes and alternately arranged in order to form a patterned design (Fig. 20). West from these areas, the screed was destroyed

by the levelling works for the monastery's grounds; just one fragment remained in its place, another of larger dimensions was moved where in 2012 a cellar had been recognized, which was later filled with fragments of cement, bricks, plaster, and earth (Fig. 21). Its western wall was still noticeable, made from a layer of cement cast over boulders representing the foundation base onto which the other screed layers were added. West from this cellar, a square pit 0.50 x 0.50 m in size and 1.00 m deep was found, with walls of cement cast on boulders and bricks bound with mortar (Fig. 22). The bottom of the hole

is made of cement, which would indicate its role as a small water reservoir. The west side of the building was covered by grass. The three sondages indicated that screed was also cast here but directly onto the earth brought for levelling the ground. Because of the lack of the boulders used on the other side of the building, especially for arranging the cellar and the reservoir, the screed decayed in time and appears as a friable layer of cement and sand in the



Fig. 19. C20: space with floor drain and washing installation.



Fig. 20. C20: space with brick flooring.



Fig. 21. C20: cellar.



Fig. 22. C20: space with reservoir.

sondages, which is pierced by the roots of grass and is mixed with fragments of plaster and, here and there, with fragments of bricks from the collapsed walls. The area around the building was arranged on a width of about 1.00 m with boulders and stones of different sizes, attentively set as to form a pavement (Fig. 23). Particularly on the south side, the arrangement was in some part covered by fragments from the fallen walls. Over the ruined screed layer, in the north-west corner, with the occasion of building the monastery's constructions, cement was cast and a board was attached to it with wire, on which there is written in green paint on both sides: *Scară 6* (Entrance 6) and *Chilii Galeșu* (Galeșu Monastic Cells).

In 2015 a structure (C9) from the eastern sector of the site was documented (Figs. 24,25). At the surface there were two stairs with cement steps attached to the long northern wall, a tall base in the south-western

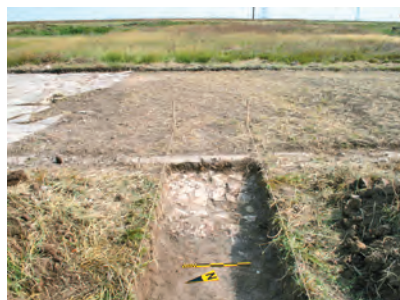


Fig. 23. C20: stone pavement.



Fig. 24. Ensemble view with C9.



Fig. 26. C9: base of the south-western wall.



Fig. 27. C9: base of the southern wall and of one of the interior walls (Tiberiu Vasilescu).



Fig. 28. 1. C9: plastered brick wall.



Fig. 28. 2. C9: brick prints.

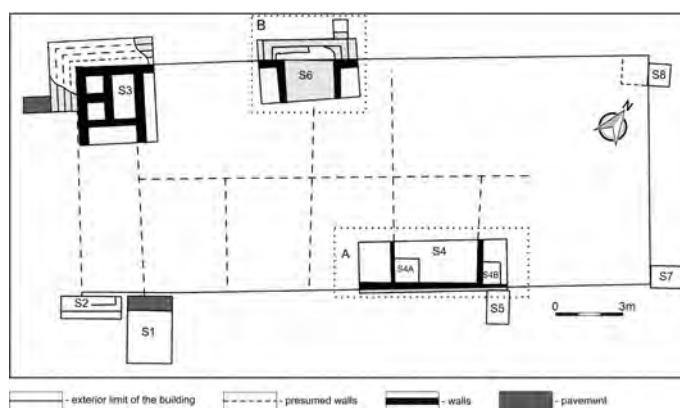


Fig. 25. 1. Building plan of C9 (Tiberiu Vasilescu).

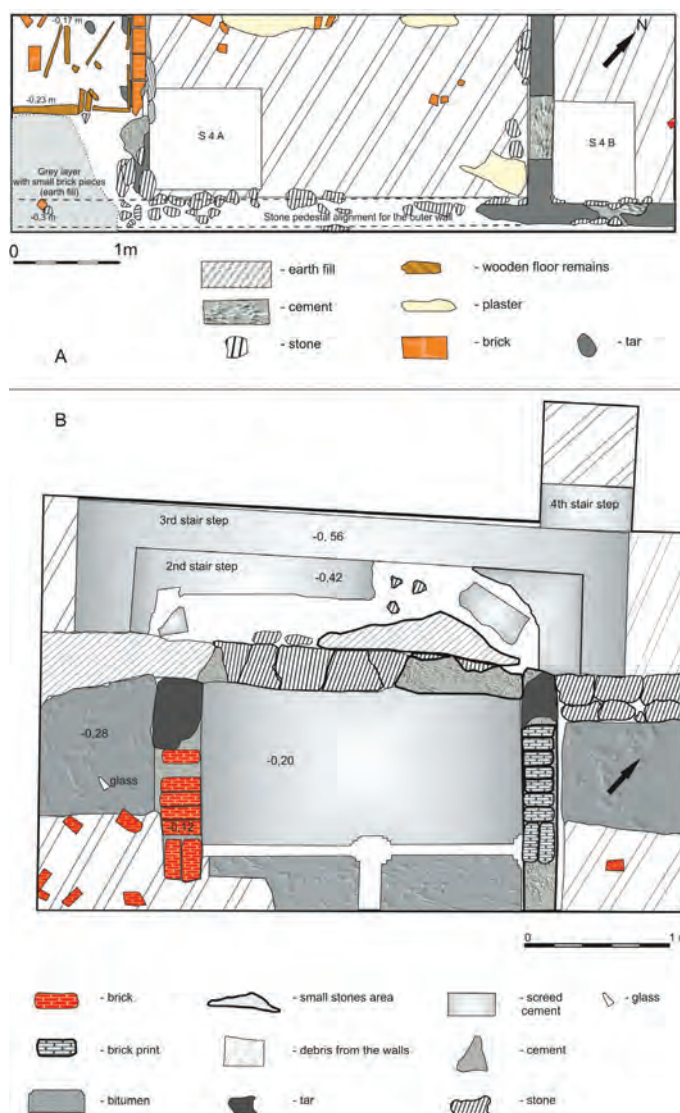


Fig. 25. 2. Detail of sondages S4 and S6 (Tiberiu Vasilescu).

Fig. 29. C9: glass sherds *in situ*.

Fig. 30. C9: steps with consolidation role, in the north-western corner.



Fig. 31. C9: floor and wall foundations covered in bitumen.

corner, and some parts from the cement foundation of the southern wall. Through sondage S6 we unearthed the stairs from the west side, made of four cement steps that had been poured on a boulders and stones structure. The building was surrounded by a ditch, with a width (measured at the surface, on the northern side) of 1.20 m. On the surface of the building stripes of dried grass were visible, which seems to indicate the existence of interior walls. Sondages S4 and S6 have confirmed these observations. The building has a rectangular shape (25 x 9 m) and is oriented east-west. In the south-eastern side, the wall was built on a thin layer of cement cast directly onto the massive stones from the foundation's ditch. Towards the west, the builders had to build a base from stones, which would rise proportionally with the accentuation of the slope. In the eastern part of S4, the base of the southern wall was 0.30 m high. In the south-western corner of the building, the base was made from large chiselled and shaped stones bound with mortar and covered in a thin layer of cement and mill board reaching a height of 0.60 m (Fig. 26). As sondage S4A, made at the intersection of the southern wall with a wall that separated two of the rooms, revealed, the foundation ditch of the exterior wall was dug until 0.90 m depth, and the foundation ditch of the interior wall was 0.55 m deep (Fig. 27). Both ditches were filled with cement mixed with stones. Over the ditches, the foundations of the wall were built from boulders of different dimensions, covered by a thin layer of cement and on top a mill board. The wall that separated the two rooms was built on a base of boulders with a height of 0.40 m. On this foundation (with a width of 0.30–0.35 m) the brick walls were built, bound with mortar and plastered with cement – as the layer of debris covering the building shows, and also the few portions of walls kept *in situ*, noticed in the S3 and S6 sondages; the foundation of some walls kept prints of cement plaster, probably covered by a layer of white-yellow lime (Fig. 28). The interior of the building was levelled by laying a layer of brown earth containing pieces of bricks. Numerous glass sherds discovered in the rubble came from the windows (Fig. 29), the fragments of mill board (in the rubble that covered the floors of the various rooms in sondage S4) suggest that the roof was covered in this material. In three corners of the structure there were stairs that acted rather as a horizontal consolidation for the building in these zones made most vulnerable due to the slopes (Fig. 30). Three stairs were found in the south-western corner (noticed in sondage S2), the north-western corner was supported by four stairs (S3), and a system of stairs was also identified in the north-eastern corner (in sondage S8). The stairs, having a width of 0.30 m and a height of 0.14 m, were cast in framing over layers of stones that were added successively until the “stairs” reached the top of the base. Each of them was polished with a thin cement coat, which had, at 2 cm from its edge, an engraved continuous line, and the corners of the stairs were not in a straight angle but were “cut”.

The fragments of the built space that were unearthed by the archaeological excavations point towards a great diversity of styles in the design of the “floor”: (1) a layer of bitumen, with a thickness of 1–2 cm, cast over pieces of bricks, covered in a layer of pebbles (in the western part of the building and in the rooms west of the access in the building; as was revealed by sondages S3 and S6, the bitumen that was directly overlapped by the bricks, fragments of plaster and glass sherds, all from the debris, covered the wall foundations of the various rooms; therefore, this material, besides ensuring the hydro-insulation of the building, stood for the “floor” itself) (Fig. 31); (2) the 3 cm thick cement screed, neatly cast over a layer of stones (in the area of the



Fig. 32. C9: cement screed.



Fig. 33. C9: wooden flooring.



Fig. 34. Probe in structure C19.

entrances to the building, continuing to the two access stairs) (Fig. 32); (3) the decking from planks fixed with nails on beams arranged on the earth that was brought for levelling the ground (in one room in S4) (Fig. 33). In the other two rooms in S4, the bricks and pieces of plaster from the collapsed walls directly overlapped the earth layer that was placed for the ground levelling. It is possible that in these spaces a thin mortar screed was cast and got destroyed in time.

Other three small sondages were made in the area of a structure (C19) situated right to the north from C9 (Fig. 34). The prints that were researched belonged to a destroyed construction, with a decayed screed cast directly on the ground. Some isolated boulders probably came from a base or the foundation trench of a wall, and in their immediate proximity the debris from a cement arrangement margined by mortar bound bricks was preserved. Here and there, on the surface of the structure, fragments of mill board were found.

The discovered objects come from the structure of the buildings: nails, clamps, screws and elements from the electric installation, window glass sherds, an aluminium discoid piece (in building C20), pieces from windows and mill board, nails and a type of “bricks” made of cement covered with a kind of white or blue enamel (in building C9). Only a coin issued in 1951, discovered on the pedestal of the eastern wall of building C20, covered in broken fragments of screed, might have belonged to the period when the labour camp was in use (Fig. 35). Other objects, discovered in the rubble, are less likely to belong to the functioning stage or to that of abandonment, yet trace the long biography of the ruins. In C20: some fragments from an enamelled vessel, decorated with engraved horizontal parallel lines (discovered in the layer of rubble – of brick and plaster cement parts – which was over the flooring drain), the button of a shirt (found in the same area, a little bit further the east), and a coin issued in the period of the Socialist Republic of Romania (found in the debris layer on top of the brick flooring). In the rubble of structure C19 a copper piece and the tube of a cartouche were found, and in C9, the fragments of dishes made on a potter’s wheel (in a room and in the layer of debris from the bottom of the stairs in S3), the bottom and a faceted edge which originate from some glass containers.



Fig. 35. Coins discovered in the area of building C20 (Dan Pop).

space and the inefficiency of manual work in the official discourse, overcome by the standardized, automated and systematized progress of technology.³⁴ Along the diversity of styles in interior design, the archaeological excavations in the three buildings also captured certain discrepancies in the grand effort made to build the load-

³⁴ For the significance of bricks and concrete in the communist discourse see Ioan 2000, pp. 76-77; Hannemann 2004.

bearing elements of the buildings (deep foundation trenches, bases from large boulders, layers of stone placed as screed foundations or for casting the steps in the formwork), and those traces of the “negligence” of the act of construction. There is a contrast, between the thick screed, scrupulously placed with the level, that covers a layer of stones on two thirds of the surface of building C20, the flooring from neatly arranged bricks, and the stone paving around the construction, on the one hand, and the rest of the “flooring”, with the screed cast directly on the earth deposited for the ground levelling, on the other hand. Also in building C9 we can see the tension between the quantity of work (for the digging of the deep foundation trenches, their filling, the construction of



Fig. 36. Bricks from the debris of building C9.



Fig. 37. Earth under building C20 brought for levelling.



Fig. 38. Earth dumps from the Galeşu site area (Florina Pop).

the base from boulders, the care in their cutting them and trimming, the “esthetical” manner of supporting the wall with stairs in the corners of the building – these material expressions of the desire for durability) and the difficulty to identify in field the “floorings” of two of the rooms or the rapid way of arranging the area in vicinity of the building, where instead of stones (as is the case of building C20) mill board was used and placed directly onto the earth (situation noticed in all the sondages made at the exterior of this building: S1, S3, S5, S6, S7, S8). The entrance to the building is marked by the casting of a high quality screed, covered with the same polish as the steps, in discordance with the mill board and bitumen that cover the floors of the nearby rooms. And the passing of time has enhanced this contrast. In the sondages made in structure C19, those few massive boulders (probably from the foundation’s trench or the base on which the walls were built) further enhance the thin layer of cement transformed into dust of the former screed, with a frail debris merged with the vegetal web. The act of building evokes gestures and tensions, dosages of effort and skilfulness as well as economy on materials, all oriented towards the durability of the building and the purpose of the various spaces.

The materiality of a modernist project

The space attributed to the former forced labour camp has an inclination on the south-north direction. Depending on the season, vegetation or snow dress the inclined landscape in the clothes of the natural. Nevertheless, this image is just an appearance. In the two sondages on the long sides of building C20 it was possible to observe that the first moment of the biography of this space is not represented by the actual erecting of the construction from the ground level, but by the bringing of earth (Fig. 37). The artificial earth deposits are not only present in the area of this structure, but in the entire surrounding landscape, the most impressive of them (“the ziggurat”) being terraced, with a prolonged silhouette which is parallel to the Canal, with dimensions of approximately 550 x 230 m and a height exceeding 15 m (Fig. 38). In the given context, the most likely origin of the earth dumps is the



Fig. 39. The Canal viewed from *Deposit 1*.

Canal, the central element of this space (Fig. 39), to which a series of smaller canals are added. The landscape in Galeșu is actually a palimpsest, being sprinkled with ruins and dumps that date from the times of both Canal plans. By clearing the vegetation and sondaging the deposits, the archaeological excavations bring to the present the memories of the beginnings of a modernist project that radically altered the original landscape, creating a new geography, with new main rivers, “affluents”, and new landforms, some monumental. As can be noticed in one of the poems of a former political prisoner, the Canal itself becomes the fourth arm of the Danube, a hybrid between nature and culture:

“History that now flows backward,
Will remember and pass forward,
In its pages Danube’s tale,
That, of its most tragic wail:
Once its three arms were spilling water,
And a fourth, blood of the brother.”³⁵

In other words we are faced with an anthropocentric creation, a secularized “Genesis” that rummages the sediments of the biblical Genesis, with the help of technology:

“Through reed and rushes,
Through hills and bushes,
Tractors carry on their way:
Sand, snails and the banks fray.
They dig deep the empty valley
Waiting for the water alley.”³⁶

Within this new “Genesis”, cement and concrete, symbols of modernity, progress and endurance that were used in the construction of the identified and researched buildings were called to bring resistance and durability to the communist project (Fig. 40). Archaeology opens however a new perspective. Following some testimonies, in 1952 the labour camp was still in construction, even the administrative building being raised from planks.³⁷ Practically, “only in the summer of 1953, the camp from the Galeș Coast was completely organized by finishing the construction of the barracks and getting access to running water.”³⁸ In July 1953, the works at the Canal are suspended, and until autumn, the camp is abandoned.³⁹ Therefore, archaeological research brings tension between, on the one hand, the shortlived existence of the camp (certified by the testimonies and documents), and on the other hand, the aspiration of the communist project towards sedentarisation, stability, durability and eternity, read from the effort to build a sewage system, from the successive construction operations of the buildings, and the effort that was made: bringing and depositing a large quantity of soil in order to level the ground; digging the foundation trenches; transporting and laying down the boulders; the care given to the horizontal line of the foundation screed by using the straight edge, revealed from the parallel straight lines or waves imprinted in the cement (Fig. 41); the way the surrounding environment was arranged and the care of matching the boulders and stones to form a kind of pavement; the relatively long time dedicated to building the walls and the quantity of bricks that were used not only for these building but also for the others, disposed on a big surface of land; the railways and the trolleys and the deposits lingered in the memory of the witnesses and passed on to

³⁵ Ciurunga 2010, p. 162; translated by Claudia Sădean.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

³⁷ Dumitrescu 1994, pp. 18-19; Bălănescu, Buchet 2011, p. 322.

³⁸ Bălănescu, Buchet 2011, p. 322.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 321; Stănescu 2012, pp. 339-347.



Fig. 40. Communist-era ruins placed along the Canal, near the site of Galeșu (Radu-Alexandru Dragoman and Sorin Oanță-Marghitu).

some locals. All these tensions for founding this complex space for suffering – “which, day and night, boiled like a huge boiler”⁴⁰ –, on which the economic geography of communism was built, took place during a short time of the project.

After interrupting the works at the Canal, in the Galeșu camp there only remained only a few brigades of inmates that worked in the mechanical workshops or to transport the machines and removing the railways, lockers and barracks.⁴¹ According to some locals, the buildings of the camp were guarded for another year, after which they were abandoned. Starting from 1954, the camp was labelled “Unit 0609”.⁴² After its abandonment, the buildings only resisted for a while, sheltering the shepherds or becoming a playing ground for the children. One local remembers that while he was in school “around the year 1962”, he was lodged together with his peers in the former dormitories in the prisoners’ barracks.⁴³ After some time, the land of the camp became the communal grassland, the buildings ruined gradually, and the bricks were extracted by the locals. According to the memories of Constantin Lupușoru, a 49 years old local who owned a piece of land near the researched area, the walls of the buildings were still in place, reaching 1-1.50 m in height between the years 1978-1979. Another local says that, on the contrary, in his childhood only “the foundations and prints of the stairs” were still visible.⁴⁴ The period of the ruins is longer than the functioning period of the camp, and from the desire of eternity

⁴⁰ Gurău 1999, p. 491.

⁴¹ Mărzanca 1997, pp. 74-75; Gurău 1999, p. 491; Stănescu 2012, p. 344.

⁴² Bălănescu, Buchet 2011, p. 321.

⁴³ Romanov, Petre 2013, p. 121.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 114.



Fig. 41. C20: screed levelling marks.



Fig. 42. C20: screed degradation.



Fig. 43. Layering: high tension pole over structure C1.

and that “deaf and permanent noise, as an uninterrupted roar, a continuous sound of engines, gnashing of excavators, jackhammers explosions, creaking iron wheels, puffing and whistling of locomotives”⁴⁵ remained only broken bricks, a handful of nails and clamps, 20 lei coins, sherds, broken screeds that continuously peel off their cement (Fig. 42).

Right next to the northern edge of the monastery’s property, at the crossroads between the gravel road and the country road, there is an electricity pole built directly on the ruins of a structure (C1) (Fig. 43). This overlapping is the image of continuity, in which the construction period and the

functioning period of the former camp become a prophetic time of the communist landscape that followed. From this space are born the buildings in minimalist angles of the CAP (Agricultural Production Cooperation), the artificiality of the flowing of the Canal’s waves, the long summits of the excavated earth dumps, the exclamation signs and the towers that bring secularity to the blue of the sky (the water towers, the silos, the utility poles), the metallic buzzing sound from high tension poles amongst which the shepherds from nearby villages walk their sheep, goats, and dogs. From the space of the Canal the essential traits that will draw communism’s face are born: the large-scale dislocation of people, of households and cemeteries that stood in the way of the Project; the general mobilization in the production sector, living together on the construction sites or in the patriotic work camps or in those where the pupils did their agricultural internships; the norm that had to be met; the sleeping in common dormitories and the eating at the canteen.

The grass netting clumsily covers the ruins of the former camp as well as the ones that followed, the small earth mounds and the “ziggurat” summits. The vanity of the utopia is noticed in the immense dump of earth excavated from the Canal, whose monumentality reveals itself to sight, not from the distance, but only by the ascent of the steep slopes, through the amazement springing from observing the length and width of the ramp (a road that is generous, oblique and trodden by the trucks and dumpers that transported the earth), through contemplating the ridge of the hill, so flat in its boundlessness, that it seems an area entirely pulled from the ground and artificially lifted. At the same time, the ruins in the space of the camp were transformed in the prophetic time of the ruination that followed after 1989. The footprints of the researched buildings harmonize with the ruins of the buildings belonging to the CAP, the structures assigned to the “second Canal” with the empty terraces, deprived of trees or vineyards. In all the horizons, the vegetation or snow cyclically cover the whole technological ascent; in the ruins one can indistinctly guess both the handmade debut of the construction of communism through building with bricks, and the phase of squaring the desire for efficiency and durability by combining concrete-breeze blocks, which failed today as collapsed columns – the innards of industrial temples poured in earth; and the passing of time pulls the iron bars out of the grey dust of the cement. Thrown here and there in the avant-garde drawing of nature, the ruins of the buildings also exhibit – in the sunlight and moonlight and starlight sent to the mirror of the screed – the partition walls and the roof fallen on to the foundation, the stairs that no longer take anywhere, the traps of the square cemented wells, and the openings

⁴⁵ Gurău 1999, p. 491.

of the reservoirs cut in circle out of square plank rows that gape into the earth's bowels.

At first sight, it could be said that the ruined structures and artificial deposits reclaimed by nature, from which earth for other arrangements is extracted today, draw attention to the unfulfilled dimension of the project and the abandonment, despite the soaring of the forces mobilized, technology or involved materials. Actually the futility – measured through the grinding of the technological straining inside the time machine (the rapid “archaeologisation” of utopia) –, far from being an expression of failure, it is an image of mass mobilization of people and works for building the new geography and the abandonment of this conglomerate when the purpose had been reached, like the rocket that in order to reach its destination has to gradually consume all its propellant. At the base of the dumps, the “Canal” crosses in a straight, functionalist and banal manner the artificial barren of symbols of the newly created landscape and laid down as forgetfulness over this abandoned stage of production and suffering, over these used “supplies”, spent, wasted, over these throw-outs necessary for the incarnation of the Project.

As the urban communist landscape is continued and brought closer by the screen of advertising, so the ruins continue to attract the remains of communism and destruction, accumulations of debris over some structures (C1, C4, N2), porcelain cups, rags, breeze blocks, plastic bottles thrown here and there through concrete fragments and piles of sherds, transparent mounds that reflect the impure light of the seasons. The communist concrete spread around in the landscape and the contemporary rubbish brought to the surface by archaeological excavation (were found fragments of bricks, mortar, wires, 2 litre plastic bottles, rags, pieces of plastic bags, fragments of tin and rubber, cellophane packaging, bolts, fragments of plastic-aluminium pipes, bicycle spokes, one foil of *Panidină* antibiotics, jar lids, batteries in a spot near the southern limit of the monastery's property, where, after some testimonies, the “commandment headquarters” might have existed) form a uniform continuity covered by grass, snow, rain and hoar-frost that continue to fight in order to naturalize the artificial. The archaeological excavations reveal a landscape without fractures, as the sites are still named *Depozitul 1* (Deposit 1), *Depozitul 2* (Deposit 2) or *La Concasorul de Piatră* (At the Stone Breakers). From far away, through precise red flickers, the wind turbines announce that there is no time for regrets and seductively send into the night the promise of another utopia, sprung now towards the sky out of the ruins of communism, quietly placed into the quarantine of time.

Modernity celebrates the final stage and dreams of the utopia's crystal, but archaeology reveals the destruction and reconstruction and, again, destruction, the transformation into artificial of the roots and the stirring of the earth, the mingling of soils, and the painting of the black earth with yellow and red striped and layers of cement and rubbish. It exposes the untold things from the official speeches: the ruin of the complete mass mobilization of the anonymous in the state of exception, the mobilization of suffering and death in order to edify the vanity that periodically promises that it will last forever.⁴⁶ Archaeology brings to the surface the stage bereft of its scenery and on which it is desired to build through work and re-education, the New Man, who became a cogwheel in the project forever happening, collapsing or being reborn from the debris. Archaeology reveals this new nature continuously forged by modernity, creation without harmony, deprived of spirit, wave-shaped eternity, tall grass in broken lines, shadows in straight angles, oblique placement, and imperfect merging, profane, of nature with ruins and the artificial.

On the material memory of the political prisoners from Galeșu

The materiality of the ruins assigned to the former forced labour camp from Galeșu cannot be associated directly with the political prisoners. The objects connected with the daily suffering of the detainees, “the personal items” (the uniforms, canteens, spoons) and the other tools used at the work places on the Canal's trail (shovel, spade, wheelbarrow, pickaxe, pinch bar, sledge-hammer and the hammer for stone breaking, the saw and the adze of the carpenter) are lacking. According to the testimony of Valeria Lungu, a local from Galeșu who during the functioning period of the camp was about 17-18 years old, building C20 would have been the warehouse of the “Army”, and the interior structure of the building, with cellar and water reservoir could indicate this function. From the words of the same witness most of the buildings had the same role, only three barracks accommodated the political prisoners. Regarding the other researched structures through the

⁴⁶ About total mobilization and the state of exception as features of modernity: Koslowski 2000; Benjamin 2002, p. 197; Agamben 2008.

archaeological excavations or the ones identified by archaeological surveys, there is no defining element for the material identity of the political prisoners. The buildings vaguely emanate an industrial look (especially through the images evoked by the exposing of cement and bitumen that chase away the ruin's melancholy), with powerful touches of the domestic: warm materials, manually manoeuvred with craft (wood and brick, cement plaster, wooden plinths and hardwood planks), as well as contexts that suggest domestic activities (washing, water and food storage in reservoirs or cellars). Other touches paint a soldierly landscape of the community living deprived of the domestic, familial intimacy, in military units or patriotic work camps, in the dormitories of the *nefamiliști* (the unmarried) or in factories: space built in straight angles; aligned buildings, placed in parallel rows; the standardized dimensions; the standardization of different construction elements (e.g. the 0.30–0.35 height of the base on which the walls were built, as it was possible to be measured in several structures: C2, C3, C7, C8, C9, C20); the repetition of the sequence of operations and gestures of the construction process; oversizing the activities and functions; the standardized plan of the interior of some structures (C6, C7, C9). The industrial images, soldierly and “domestic” of the researched buildings do not unmask the repression, suffering and trauma, but actually hide them. The difficulty or even the impossibility to regain the memory of their suffering in the materiality of the Canal was tragically sensed even by some of the political prisoners:

“Tomorrow when ships will carry the fruits in their wombs,
Harvested from fields covered by flowers and blues,
In the dark evenings' light an echo will chant:
How many then, will know that,
Your clay and your stone,
Yesterday, I have dug.”⁴⁷

The suffering and identity of the political prisoners gained their materiality only after the monastery was built (Fig. 44) – a configuration of the Liturgical Time in the ruin assigned to the camp. From the emergence of the materiality of the veneration of the new martyrs a new understanding of the whole landscape is stimulated. The artificial earth dumps cease to be simple material witnesses of the communist modernity's ideology and become, in an equal measure, witnesses of the backbreaking labour the people were forced to undergo. The mixed earth lenses evoke the consecutive moments of layering the excavated sediment, the alienable chronology of the working days, the repetition of the gestures of digging, loading, transporting and unloading:

“Earth,
I am tired and pull from ditches deep clay,
I throw it in the cups of the brae.
Yellow, it sticks on the shovel's blade.
Then the trolleys carry it on their way,
Through ravines, thorn-bushes on the levee.
With the wheelbarrow on planks, I take it away,
There, high-up in the blue of the sky,
My knees tremble, lungs hurt as if I die,
I barely breathe, feel cold and shiver and cough,
Slowly I go up and down, to falloff.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Giurgeca 2010, p. 223; translated by Claudia Sădean.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 221.

“The marks of blood from the hands”⁴⁹ from the earth deposits and the Canal itself thus become present.

Instead of conclusions

According to documents and testimonies, the former forced labour camp of Galeșu had only an ephemeral existence. Built to ensure a part of the administrative staff and of the labour required for the construction of one portion of the Canal, it was abandoned shortly after the project was stopped, and it entered a gradual ruining process. Similarly, other buildings, built on the occasion of the restarting of the project, also ended up in ruins. The ephemeral character of the camp and of the ruins assigned to the projects of the Canal could be interpreted as an indicator of the failure of the communist modernity. All these being said, it has to be mentioned that the capitalist development projects, such as, for example, the construction of an international airport, of a harbour or of some hotels on the Corisco island in Equatorial Guinea, leave behind, even before their completion, semi-ruined buildings, in this way announcing the fate their “accomplishments” will have in a not so distant future.⁵⁰ Moreover, the chronology of some of the material elements of the communist modernity is different from the historic or political one. The Canal and the apartment blocks are functional even today, transgressing the symbolic moment of 1989. Therefore, instead of the historical-political narratives about communism versus capitalism, we consider the archaeology of the Danube-Black Sea Canal as a step towards a critical study of modernity.

At the same time, the archaeological research at Galeșu is closely connected with the act of venerating the memory of the new martyrs, which started together with the founding of the Romanian All-Saints Monastery. This research should be the preamble of a more in-depth process that should have as purpose the creation of a museum dedicated to the former political prisoners from the Canal that would harmonize with the landscape of the monastery. The theme of the exhibition (that should avoid manipulating the suffering of the prisoners in order to promote an anti-communist post-communism and the legitimization of neo-liberalism) should refer to: illustrating the quotidian and the dimensions of the repression during the period of works at the Danube-Black Sea Canal, the honouring of the memory of the prisoners by exposing their material universe, expression of faith and beliefs, the presentation of the biography of the places and the landscapes of the forced labour camps, from their abandonment to the present day. The museum should include buildings unearthed through archaeological excavations, others as preserved ruins, images from the landscape that would trace the biography of the site. The barracks of the political prisoners



Fig. 44. Galeșu, September 2014. The materiality of the honouring of the new martyrs and confessors from the communist prisons; (a) the chapel; (b) icons and holy relics from Aiud in the interior of the chapel; (c) bell with inscription in the Romanian language, but with Cyrillic lettering, dedicated to the new martyrs.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

⁵⁰ González-Ruibal, Sánchez-Elipe 2012.

should be reconstructed based on the information given by the witnesses, where also objects made during the detention period should be exhibited. To achieve such objectives, we consider that it is necessary to have a complex combination of different approaches: archaeological excavations and extensive surveys on the Canal's trail, oral and archive historic research, sociological and anthropological studies within the communities around the former labour camps in order to analyse the memory of repression, a visual anthropology for the study of the landscape, actions of conservation and restoration, curatorial approaches.

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