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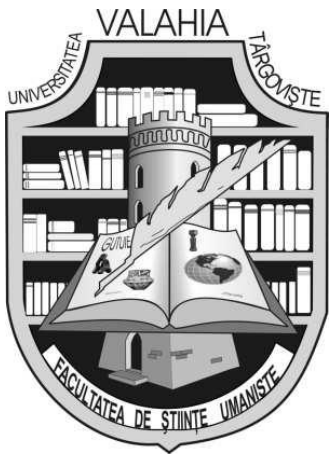

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Theories and Ideas ahead of their Time: Márton Roska and the Paleolithic Archeology in Romania

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Abstract. The beginnings of the systematic Paleolithic research in Transylvania were represented by the complex activity of the researcher Márton Roska. This paper is the result of some preliminary observations of Marton Roska's work on the archeology of the Paleolithic period. In this respect, we analyze several aspects, such as archeological diggings, stratigraphic identifications, observations on the lithic material, so to create an image of the first decennia of the 20th century archeology in Romania.

Keywords: Paleolithic archaeology, historiography, Romania, Márton Roska research

Introduction

The Romanian archeological historiography unanimously acknowledges the fact that the beginnings of the systematic Paleolithic research in Transylvania were represented by the complex activity of the researcher Márton Roska. Although his activity has always been noticed whenever there has been a description of the archeological research in Transylvania, so far there has been no coherent analysis on his discoveries and theories, and, moreover, some of them have been contested by the Romanian researchers.

More than half a century has passed since the great researcher's demise (1880-1961) and over 100 years have gone to his early research and publications. Since then, the majority of the Paleolithic discoveries in Transylvania have remained unchanged, their existence being due to the research work of Márton Roska. Because a detailed analysis of his activity on the archeology of the Paleolithic in Romania was carried out recently by one of the author (B. Tihamer, 2013), in this study we will relieve only some aspects of his activity.

The researcher Márton Roska was born in 1880 in Cubleşu Someşan (Cluj County). Between 1900 and 1904 he is a student of the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and History in Cluj, becoming after the first year the Béla Pósta's assistant. After his graduation, he was appointed assistant professor at the Chair of Archeology. In 1908, he defends his doctoral thesis on the influence of the Mediterranean regions on the funeral rituals of the Neolithic period in the Carpathian basin, and in 1913 he is promoted in point of position. During this period, he benefited of several scholarships abroad, took part in international conferences etc. (E. Gáll 2010; for more details, see B. Tihamer, 2013).

The particular political situation of Transylvania had a negative bearing on Márton Roska's career as well, so that after the Second World War, in 1944, he is obliged to take refuge in Hungary. His most intense activity can be

associated to the period 1920-1929 when D. M Theodorescu is appointed head of the Institute (E. Gáll 2010). As a whole, Márton Roska has had a decisive influence on several historical periods, starting with the Paleolithic until the Middle Ages and on several domains (archeology, ethnography, paleogeography etc.).

Out of the many sites and paleolithic areas he researched, the most important are related to the researches of Bordul Mare Cave and Cioclovina Cave. Certainly, Bordul Mare Cave can boast with the richest Mousterian lithic industry of all the cave settlements in Romania. Due to the impressive number of toolkits discovered in time (about 7.000), it represents a main pillar when one tries to highlight the peculiarities of the Mousterian culture in the Carpathian Caves. Bordul Mare Cave was noticed for the first time from an archeological viewpoint in 1918 by J. Mallász (I. Gaál, 1928). The archeological diggings from this settlement began only in 1923 under Márton Roska's guidance. The research continued in 1924 as well, along with J. Mallász. In 1925, M. Roska continues to dig together with M. Moldovan, and between 1926 and 1929, he carries out archeological diggings in this cave by himself (M. Roska 1924, 1925a, 1925b, 1930, 1933, 1943). The research work carried out by M. Roska in Bordul Mare Cave are quite ample and complex for the respective period, so we will try to realize a more detailed description of it. Actually, as we were about to note, the richest archeological material from this site was discovered during this period. Cioclovina Cave owes its international recognition to the discovery of the *Homo sapiens* skull (K. Harvati et al., 2007; A. Soficaru et al., 2007; E. Trinkaus et al., 2009). Even though this discovery happened by accident in 1941 (F. Rainer, I. Simionescu, 1942), Márton Roska remains the first archeologist who carried out research works in this cave.

It is regrettable that in the last synthesis on the evolution of the Romanian archeology (M. Anghelinu 2003), this stage occupies a marginal place, and Márton Roska's activity has been summed up in just a few paragraphs. For this reason, in the following pages we will try to highlight a few aspects which are necessary for a correct presentation of the level of the Paleolithic archeology in Romania at the beginning of the 20th century.

The accuracy of the stratigraphic identifications

Even since the first study on the archaeological excavations from Bordul Mare Cave, M. Roska identifies six levels from a stratigraphic viewpoint, this succession being kept until the end of the campaigns of archeological researches. Out of the six levels described, the researcher numbers just five, the first one being post-Paleolithic. By the end of the archeological diggings, four Mousterian levels have been highlighted, the last level being identified after the diggings of the year 1928.

The archeological diggings of this settlement were resumed later on by a team led by C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopsor (C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopsor et al., 1955). Although there is no mention of this fact, there is an obvious adoption of the Mousterian levels established by M. Roska. Unfortunately, the four Mousterian levels were counted from top to bottom, contrary to the numbering determined by M. Roska, this thing having serious implications on the understanding of the stratigraphy in Bordul Mare Cave (M. Cârciumaru, E.-C. Niţu 2008; E.-C. Nițu, 2012). So, there appeared a conceptual discrepancy between M. Roska's 1-5 levels (1925; 1930; 1933), counted from top to bottom, by means of which the 1st level was attributed to the Aurignacian and the levels 2-5 to the Mousterian, and the Mousterian I, II, III, IV defined by C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor et al. (1955) as culture layers recorded from bottom to top. The confusion was created because between these two numbering systems, only one level coincided in point of number (M. Roska's layer no. 3 = Mousterian III for C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor), while for the others the differences were huge, as one can see in Table 1. At the same time, those coming in touch with the archeological material are put to the test as on the toolkits resulted from Marton Roska's diggings, the layer is indicated only by Roman ciphers, without any other mention, while for those provided by the research work of C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor *et al.* (1955) it appears for the Mousterian layers M I, M II, M III, M IV (Tab. 1).

Definition of levels and their cultural content after M. Roska (1925, 1930, 1933, 1943)	Levels name after C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor *et el*. 1955
Layer I (Aurignacian industry)	Upper Paleolithic
Layer II (Mousterian industry)	Mousterian IV
Layer III (Mousterian industry)	Mousterian III
Layer IV (Mousterian industry)	Mousterian II
Layer V (Mousterian industry)	Mousterian I

Tab. 1 – The discrepancy between the two numbering systems of cultural layers from Bordul Mare Cave (after M. Cârciumaru, E.-C. Niţu 2008)

Yet, the problem of the inverse numbering of the strata would not have been so serious unless, later on, trying to describe the levels established by M. Roska, Al. Păunescu (2001) renumbered once again the cultural layers, this time from top to bottom. In this sense, he makes the following description: 1. Post-Paleolithic layer; 2. Lower Aurignacian layer; 3. Mousterian I layer; 4. Mousterian II layer, considered as representing the richest stratum; 5. Mousterian III layer; 6. Mousterian IV layer. This turns the richest inhabited level, namely layer 3 for M. Roska, into layer 4 and Mousterian II according to Al. Păunescu's misinterpretation (M. Cârciumaru, E.-C. Niţu, 2008; E.-C. Niţu, 2012). The explanation of the way in which this stratigraphic amalgam was attained is that M. Roska does not count the "alluvial" layer, starting his numbering from the Paleolithic levels, while Al. Păunescu (2001) counts the post-Paleolithic level as well, so that the order of the strata identified by M. Roska was shifted.

Much later on, M. Cârciumaru (1973) publishes a synthesis under the form of a paper on the climatic oscillations of the Upper Pleistocene in south-western Transylvania, in which he includes the Bordul Mare Cave as well. The above-mentioned researcher carries out pollinic analyses in the cave's deposit and provides the first detailed stratigraphic description by means of which six geological layers are highlighted, so the same number as the levels count established long before by Marton Roska.

Generally, as far as the archeological materials discovered in older diggings are concerned, there are problems related to their stratigraphic attribution. Actually, M. Roska's material has been neglected in time for the very suspicions of this kind. So, for instance, in his synthesis on the Transylvanian Paleolithic, Al. Păunescu (2001) claims that the toolkits discovered by M. Roska in Bordul Mare Cave are not distributed according to the archeological levels in which they were recovered, and so they are irretrievable for a techno-typological analysis. Maybe this was the reason why the material discovered by M. Roska was no longer taken into account by any study undertaken regarding this cave.

Analyzing the extremely rigorous documentation left by M. Roska along with the lithic material in different Romanian museums as well as the inventory registers filled in by him, we can notice that each item is described and attributed only stratigraphically. Even though no depths or eventual squares are mentioned, a recent analysis of the lithic material discovered by Marton Roska has demonstrated that the fact that the toolkits were collected on strata did not represent an impediment in their study and, although we were tempted to believe that some items could have been incorrectly attributed to a certain level, no disturbances was identified in this sense (E. C. Niţu, 2012). Moreover, some debitage products of a certain layer had the possibility of being refitted with the lithic material discovered by C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopşor in the same layer. Each item benefits of a detailed description realized by M. Roska himself, in which the cultural level it comes from is mentioned as well. This fact can be easily noticed in the old inventory registers of the museums, or in the activity reports made to justify the sums spent. The rigorous recording realized by M. Roska can be checked for the items that are part of the collections of the Museums from Deva, Arad, Oradea and for a part of the collection from Cluj (E. C. Niţu, 2012).

Taking into account the numerical correspondence between the levels identified by M. Roska and those described using modern means by M. Cârciumaru (1973) later on, as well as the rigorous recordings of the Mousterian materials according to the four levels discovered, we consider that M. Roska managed to determine the stratigraphy of the deposit in Bordul Mare Cave quite well for the respective time.

The methodology of archeological excavations

The first detailed observations on the excavations at Bordul Mare Cave were published by M. Roska in 1930. In the report realized for the diggings of 1928, the author sketches the cave's first plan, mentions the dug areas and realizes the longitudinal profile of the cave's "terrace" which, according to the plan, was 9 m long. At the same time, on the sketch he realized one can see that the digging continued inside the cave as well, only at the entrance, along a 4 meter length (M. Roska 1930). The same plan of the diggings is published as well in the synthesis paper dedicated to Bordul Mare Cave. The section from the entrance in the cave was not totally dug. Only the third stratum was researched thoroughly; the fourth stratum was researched on a length of about 2 meters, so only half of the previous length, while the fifth stratum was not dug at all (M. Roska 1943). Unfortunately, from the plan that was published one cannot distinguish the width of the section inside the cave clearly; yet, if we eliminate the lateral parts of the deposit, left for future checkouts, the section's width must have been of around 2 m. In general, M. Roska's diggings during the period 1923-1929, actually the most extended campaign realized in Bordul Mare Cave can be summed up as: the digging of the "terrace" in front of the cave, which, according to the descriptions, was 9 m long, and the digging of a small section of about 8 m^2 inside the cave (E.-C. Niţu 2012).

Sure, it is hard to approximate with accuracy the dimensions of the excavated area, yet we would like to highlight a few aspects. From the analysis realized on the lithic series (E. C. Niţu, 2012), the largest part of the materials discovered in this cave comes from M. Roska's campaigns. Out of a total of about 7.000 debitage products, around 5000 were discovered by him. Certainly, we do not know the total number of the items for sure and it is possible for it to be even larger. The area excavated later on, during the 1954 and 1955 campaigns, inside the cave, is much larger than the one dug by M. Roska, yet the lithic material is much less numerous. The significant duration of the archeological diggings (6 years) doubtlessly involved a more important rigor as well. The existence of a more evolved technique for the archeological diggings is reflected in composition of the lithic material. The very large quantity of debris is impressive; it actually reflects the integral recovery of the material, although it is obvious that at the beginning of the 20th century the selection of the materials was common practice. Another fact that we noticed about the material discovered by M. Roska is the surprisingly small dimension of some debitage products that did not undergo fragmentation after their depositing, which is sometimes of the order of just a few millimeters. Moreover, we noted that even the very small pebble naturally present in the cave's deposit were subject to recovery. The large number of debris, fragmented pebble, micro-flakes, prompts us to believe that M. Roska worked extremely seriously and probably recovered a very large proportion of the material. Some written information on the digging methods used by M. Roska has been highlighted recently (B. Tihamer, 2013). Nevertheless, we need to take into account the stage during which these campaigns took place, namely a period when the Paleolithic archeology was not extremely developed, not even in the Western Europe. The participation to the recent excavations of this settlement by one of the authors (E. C. N.), were we could note the extreme difficulty of recovering the material because of the sediment and of the existence of a large number of limestones, makes us believe that the lithic and fauna series discovered by M. Roska could only be recovered by means of a sieving system (certainly, this hypothesis should be taken into account and demonstrated in the future by means of archive documents).

Openness to interdisciplinary studies

The Bordul Mare Cave is known especially as the only settlement in Romania in which fossil remains of Neanderthals have been found. It is the merit of Márton Roska who, through his openness to interdisciplinary studies, offered the fauna he had discovered for analysis to Istvan Gaál, an important paleontologist of this epoch. He identified in the third layer, among the fauna remains, three phalanxes that he attributed to the

Neanderthal man.

I. Gaál (1928), studying the fauna remains discovered in the years 1923 or 1924, mentions the data concerning the presence of a phalanx from the second toe of a *Homo primigenius neanderthalensis* Schwalbe's foot, this being the first discovery of this kind at that time in Romania. Later on, I. Gaál (1943) publishes an ample synthesis in which he presents the discovery of two more phalanxes from the hand (one from the forefinger, very long and quite thick, the other from the annular, longer and more arched) yielded by the research of the deposit from the Bordul Mare Cave in the year 1929. They all belong to the third Mousterian layer.

Although Bordul Mare Cave is frequently mentioned in the archeological literature through the discovery of these fossil remains of Romania, we should highlight the fact that except I. Gaál no other researcher has ever analyzed these phalanxes, although there has been quite a long time since their discovery. The Romanian and foreign archeology simply took over the information, without improving it in any way. Moreover, Dardu Nicolăescu-Plopşor (1968) doubts the fact that the respective fossil remains might belong to the Neanderthal man, considering that we could be rather dealing with a *Homo sapiens* in a Mousterian environment, just as in the Muierii Cave; yet, he provides no further explanations in this sense. So, the existence of some human remains belonging to the Neanderthal man in the Romanian Paleolithic is due to the study of the faunal remains from the Bordul Mare Cave by I. Gaál and to M. Roska's openness to interdisciplinary studies, which made him provide the fauna material for analysis to the great paleontologist.

Techno-functional observations on the lithic material and cultural determinations

During a period when the studies on lithic materials contented themselves with summary typological determinations and in which the specialized terminology was extremely poor and non-uniform, M. Roska manages to make interesting descriptions on the functionality of the Paleolithic tools. To exemplify, we will provide a few considerations made in 1912 on the items discovered during the first archeological campaign from the Cioclovina Cave in 1911:

„Instrument servant à racler ou à couper en forme de demi-cercle... Matière: jaspe. Il este brisé comme par un coup sec à la hauteur du noyau. La partie antérieure et les dos montrent un travail grossier. La partie postérieure n'est pas travaillée. Sur le tranchant circulaire il y a des traces d'usage de main d'œuvre.

L'instrument est adapté pour l'usage de la main gauche. Dans la main droite ils ne pouvaient se servir que de la partie droite du tranchant.

Manié d'une autre façon, il peut aussi avoir servi de perçoir. La partie indiquée par la direction de la flèche, est spécialement travaillée dans ce but.

Exemplaire massif et épais." (Roska 1912: 241).

The first aspect that should be noticed is the fact that the tool is not considered to belong strictly to a certain typological category, which represented the general tendency in the Paleolithic archeology during that period and which still happens today, unfortunately. As one can notice from the above-mentioned example, for each tool he described, M. Roska presents his suppositions concerning the action that the respective tool may have been used for: cutting, scraping or drilling. At the same time, he notices that a tool could have been used for more than one action, depending on the retouched area. This concept of multifunctionality of the Paleolithic tools appeared much later on in the archeology of the Paleolithic. Moreover, he tries to explain the way the tools may have been held; in the example presented above he supposes that for a total use, it is only in the left hand that it could have been held, because holding it in the right hand would have implied only the use of the right side. The same approach is applied to each tool in turn.

Innovative for that period are the M. Roska's explanations concerning some retouched Aurignacian tools from the Cioclovina Cave, published in 1923. He remarks that not all the retouches were made in strict relation to the use of the tool; some may have facilitated an eventual hafting as well. In this category he includes some blade from which the butt was removed and which have their proximal retouched area.

It is an advanced conception on the Paleolithic cultures that can be noticed, among other things, in the studies on the Cioclovina Cave. Even since 1912, M. Roska debated the term of transition when he tried to explain the attribution to a certain period of the items discovered in this settlement. He describes toolkits as being composed of

Mousterian tools and of materials specific to the Upper Paleolithic. Doubtlessly, he is the first researcher in Romania who uses the term of transition from the Middle to the Upper Paleolithic. The continuation of the excavations in the Cioclovina Cave makes M. Roska (1923) appreciate that the tools belonged to the Aurignacian. Remarkable are his explanations on the difficulty of determining precisely the cultural period of the Paleolithic to which the lithic materials of this cave belonged. He realizes that it is very hard to comply with the Western Europe chronological division and it is hard to clearly highlight a certain culture in the Cioclovina Cave. He explains this thing by the fact that Cioclovina Cave is situated too far from Western Europe and there is a possibility that the cultural phases may not correspond exactly to those of Western Europe (M. Roska, 1923). The conception presented above is very advanced for the respective period, as, in general, even at present, most Paleolithic settlements are attributed to the classical Paleolithic cultures determined mainly in the French settlements. It is only recently that the individualization of certain areas with different peculiarities than those of the classical *facies* has become obvious.

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This paper is the result of some preliminary observations; in the future, we intend to carry out an ampler analysis of Marton Roska's work on the archeology of the Paleolithic period. The rigor of his archeological excavations, reflected both in composition of the lithic material collections and in the stratigraphic determinations which continue to be valid to this day, encourage us to believe that Marton Roska used a quite evolved digging method for the respective period. The analysis of the archeological materials and the advanced ideas on their cultural determinations turn Marton Roska into a forerunner of some modern theories. So, the archeology of the Paleolithic in Romania during the first decades of the 20th century underwent a special evolution due to the complex research work undertaken by the great archeologist Marton Roska.

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