

THE PROJECT “MONASTIC LIFE, ART AND TECHNOLOGY AT BIZERE MONASTERY” (2013-2016)

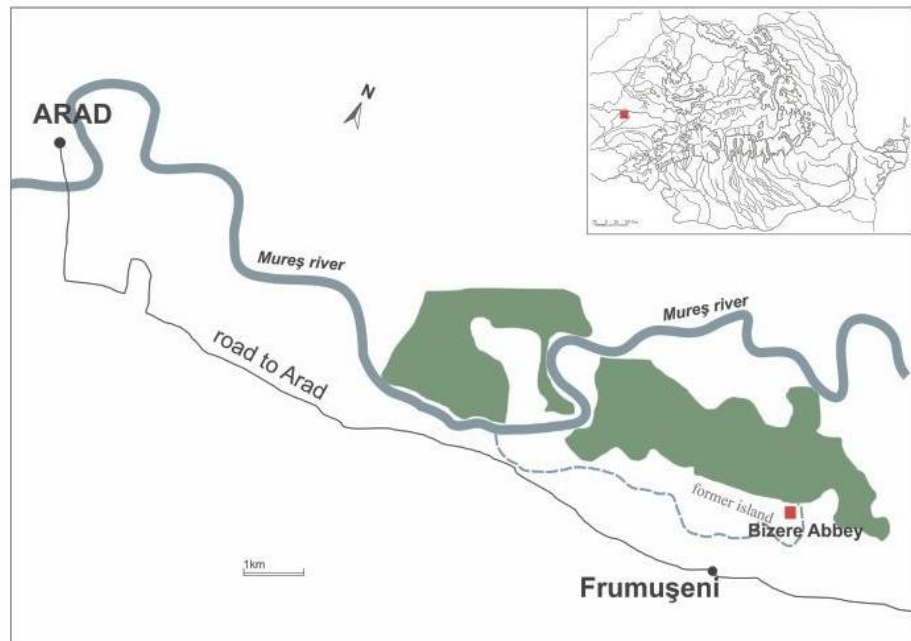
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The project entitled “Monastic Life, Art and Technology at Bizere Monastery” benefits from a research grant obtained following a national competition organized by the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research (UEFISCDI). The research is currently undergoing at the “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia (Department of History, Archaeology and Museology) and its closure is due by the second half of 2016. As stated in the title, the project is envisaging the former Bizere monastery, the archaeological remains of which are located 15 km away from the town of Arad (Arad County, Romania) near the village of Frumușeni, on a former island of the River Mureș.

Bizere merely represents one of a vast series of deserted and completely ruined medieval monasteries of this territory. During the Middle Ages, the Mureș Valley was an important salt route heading from Transylvania towards the West, North and South through the Kingdom of Hungary. One of the specificities of the region accounts for the high density of monastic sites that appeared along this route. Supposedly, these foundations were of either Latin, or of Greek rite. However, many of them are still controversial in this respect, since their rite or order, hierarchical subordination, mission, and patrons are not mentioned in the written records. Some of these, nominated only accidentally in the edited written sources, are still unidentified in the

field. Their material remains have vanished, some of them starting as early as the thirteenth century. Consequently, gathering information and sources, as well as finding answers to the research questions raised in monastic studies depends very much on the progress of archaeology and the association of its results with those of other disciplines. This also entails the thorough publication of all the archaeological data at hand, jointly analysed with the re-evaluated written evidence.

An expansion of this kind of knowledge and a new interrogation of the sources in an adequate, up-to-date approach of monasteriology is now possible in the case of the disappeared Benedictine monastery from Bizere. This monastery certainly belonged to the Benedictines; it was an abbey and functioned, with numerous disruptions, at least from the twelfth century until the sixteenth. There are some unknowns concerning it, such as the exact moment of its foundation, the provenance of the monks that came to populate it, which were the first buildings erected, the area occupied by the complex etc. Between 1183 and 1522, there are approximately 40 documentary mentions of this monastery. It was probably completely abandoned during the Ottoman invasion of Banat (1520-1530) and



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gradually fell into ruin. During the nineteenth century, scholars began to make first attempts at locating the lost monastery. After a number of prospecting and confusions, a first archaeological survey in 1981 (led by Mircea Rusu from the Institute of History in Cluj-Napoca) showed that its place can be located. Excavations on the Bizere site started again in 2001 and, during nine consecutive campaigns, parts of the building foundations that belonged to the monastery were uncovered: significant remains of the rectangular cloister with a refectory and ground floor traces of two Romanesque churches (abbatial church and a chapel), a palace and a water tower were all identified, along with other buildings with yet unknown functions. Within the main church foundation (a three-nave basilica) two decorated surfaces of polychrome pavement mosaics were found *in situ* (measuring 4.50 x 1.50 and 1.60 x 1.50 meters, respectively), together with a few hundred various isolated pieces of floor mosaic. Furthermore, the archaeological excavations brought to light hundreds of sculptures and carved fragments of miscellaneous stones (now hosted by the Arad Museum Complex, Arad County), as well as different categories of artefacts.

This archaeological research was for the most part financed annually by the Arad County Council, which hoped to develop a touristic area at the site of the monastery and in its surroundings and even include it in a durable development project. However, in 2009, due to lack of funding, the research was stopped. The documentation and publication of the rich material unearthed during these nine campaigns was interrupted before the reconstruction of a coherent plan of the monastic complex and determining the functions of all the researched buildings or gathering all the relevant data from the field for an adequate contextualized publication of the artefacts. This is why the archaeological team could only publish concise

archaeological reports, a short monograph and an article about the pavement mosaics¹ and a first collective volume of studies strictly limited to some of the architectural components and installations which benefited from complete datasets: the water tower, the funerary chapel, a bread oven and the boat imprint. In the same volume, first hand documents regarding the monastery were presented, together with the first analyses of building materials.²

The preparation of publications before 2011 has clearly shown the need to restart and supplement through new research the data retrieved in 1981 and between 2001-2009. Therefore, a new multidisciplinary project involving a larger team of specialists, according to a new well-defined research plan was developed.

One of the objectives of the new project is to restore a good part of the ground plan of the monastic complex and to establish the relation between the built complex and its placement – a former island of the Mureş River, 15 km away from the town of Arad.

Other major objectives aim to determine the connections between the monastic complex and its medieval namesake village which disappeared during the sixteenth century, as well as to identify the possible remains or traces of annexes that belonged to the monastery and were located on the former territory of its possessions. Documenting the data collected in the field and recording and cataloguing the earlier data and materials stored in the repository of the Arad Museum (retrieved by previous excavations – 1981 and 2001-2009) also constitutes another objective of this project. This would enable straightforward access for future studies and allow other researchers to handle data with ease. For the same purpose, a digital database was created.³

The third objective sets the framework for the analysis and publication of artefacts, which is

¹ Ileana Burnichioiu and Adrian Andrei Rusu, *Mozaicurile medievale de la Bizere. The Medieval Mosaics from Bizere. Die mittelalterliche Mosaiken von Bizere* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega Publishing House, 2006); Ileana Burnichioiu and Adrian Andrei Rusu, "Medieval Floor Mosaics at Bizere Monastery. A Brief Survey," *Trans R XX*, no. 2 (2011): 3-13.

² Adrian Andrei Rusu and Ileana Burnichioiu, eds., *Mănăstirea Bizere* [Bizere Monastery], vol. I (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2011).

³ The documentation and compilation of the artefact database started in 2014 and can be referred to as it is listed on the project web page, <http://diam.uab.ro/index.php?s=10&p=56> (Bizere Database). The same site is hosting the synthesized annual reports containing a brief outline of activities and publications that represent the project deliverables resulted so far.

The project “Monastic Life, Art and Technology at Bizere Monastery”

Research Project: *Monastic Life, Art and Technology at Bizere Monastery (Arad County, Romania) 2013-2015*

Monastic National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS - UEFISCDI, proiect nr. 2014-10-1-0177

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Cercetare

Căutare

Numar	Nume	Material	Dimensiuni/grutate	Numar bucati	Tehnica	Datare	Foto an	Desen
121	picior cazan	bronz	grutate fragment mic: 0,365 kg; greutate fragment mare: 1,187 kg; fragment mic are baza cu două laturi de 6 cm și una 4 cm; lungime fragment mare: 13 cm; are în partea inferioară: 2,5 cm și în partea superioară: de 4,2 cm.	2	tarnare	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2005	
123	cap dragon	bronz	lungime: 4,1 cm; grosime: 0,6 cm; greutate: 9 gr	1	tarnare	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2002	
129	scoabă	fer	lungime: 5 cm; lățime zonă medială: 8,9 cm; grosime: 0,2 cm;	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2004	
130	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 72x cm; zonă îngustare vârf: 2,2 cm; diametru tub de înfrângere: 1,5 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2008	
137	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 7,4 cm; zonă îngustare vârf: 1,6 cm; diametru tub de înfrângere: 1,4 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2008	
135	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 8,4 cm; zonă îngustare vârf: 1,5 cm; diametru tub de înfrângere: 1,5 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2008	
135	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 6,1 cm; diametru tub de înfrângere: 1,4 cm.	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2001	
134	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 7,5 cm; zonă îngustare vârf: 1,2 cm; diametru tub de înfrângere: 1,5 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2001	
133	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 8,5 cm; zonă îngustare vârf: 1,5 cm; diametru tub de înfrângere: 1,5 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 1981	
112	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 6,8 cm; zonă îngustare vârf: 1,5 cm; diametru tub de înfrângere: 1,4 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2005	
111	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 6,7 cm; cu vârf ascuțit și tub de înfrângere 1,5 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2005	
130	boț atâblă	fer	lungime totală: 5,6 cm; lungime vârf în trei muchii: 1,3 cm; lățime maximă vârf: 1,2 cm; diametru maxim tub: 1,5 cm; lățime maximă vârf: 1,2 cm; diametru maxim tub de înfrângere: 1,5 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2007	
109	vârf săgeată	fer	lungime totală: 5,7 cm; diametru maxim tub de înfrângere: 1,5 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2008	
109	vârf săgeată	fer	lungime totală: 5,6 cm; lungime pătrată vârf electic: 3 cm; lățime maximă vârf: 1,9 cm; diametru maxim tub de înfrângere: 1 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2008	
107	vârf săgeată	fer	lungime totală: 6,3 cm; lungime pătrată vârf electic: 3,5 cm; lățime maximă vârf: 1,8 cm; diametru maxim tub de înfrângere: 1 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2003	
105	vârf săgeată	fer	lungime totală: 5 cm; lungime pătrată vârf electic: 2,5 cm; lățime maximă vârf: 1,6 cm; diametru maxim tub de înfrângere: 0,9 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2006	
105	vârf săgeată	fer	lungime totală: 5,4 cm; lungime pătrată vârf electic: 2,5 cm; diametru vârf: 0,2 cm; lungime tub de înfrângere: 2,9 cm; diametru maxim tub de înfrângere: 1,2 cm	1	batoane la cald	medievală	foto2015/DESCOPELITE 2005	

essential to comparative studies on different topics (from monastic studies to medieval life). The last objective is the analysis of all the previous sources and investigations, together with the new data acquired through this project, in order to answer the following questions during the next years:

-How old is the establishment of the monastic site? What was the primary planimetric configuration? When was it built and in what form? What was the spatial organization of the complex?

-What were the economic and technological means that facilitated the foundation of the monastery, sustained its existence throughout the centuries and the everyday life of the monastic community inside the convent? What were the artefacts used in everyday life in a monastic environment? How did monastic life function between norm and practice? What relationship did the monastery have with the “outside world”, central and local lay authorities, the papal seat, the bishopric from Csanád (Cenad), the provostship of Arad, its villages, with the nobility that possessed land in the monastery’s vicinity and others? Can the patrons – unaccounted for by written sources – be identified through other means?

-What was the decorative heritage of the monastery’s different spaces? What form and what meaning did these have? Can parts of a visual message be reconstructed based on the contents of the mosaics and the sculpted fragments from Bizere? Where did the masters come from? With

what means and materials did they work on the island? What was the provenance of the building materials?

The organization of an international in 2013 (*Old and new research at Bizere monastery Arad, 16-17th October 2013*), along with the international conference *Monastic Life, Art and Technology* (16-18th October 2014), preceded by the present volume, listed and debated some of the aimed questions in a wider scientific context and disseminated the answers based on the interpretation of the data acquired by fulfilling the project objectives. The two events were accompanied by temporary exhibitions set up both in Arad and Alba Iulia.





The exhibitions showcased artefacts retrieved during the old archaeological campaigns along with some pieces unearthed when the field research was resumed, in 2014. Nonetheless, part of the archaeological material that also underwent conservation interventions between 2013 and 2015 at the University “1 Decembrie 1918” of Alba Iulia, were integrated in a small permanent exhibition at the Arad Museum Complex that opened in May 2015.

Some project activities already benefited from the implication of the Arad Museum Complex, along with the support offered by

colleagues from the Department of Medieval Studies of the Central European University, the Institute for Art History, the Institute for Geological and Geochemical Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the Department of Geophysics and Space Science of the Eötvös Loránd University.

A part of the collaboration was designed to produce and disseminate individual results through articles published in journals and papers presented at conferences which are connected to the subjects of the project: monastic studies, Romanesque art, medieval technology, medieval archaeology, landscape archaeology.⁴

This new approach seeks to integrate the topic in the wider European research milieu. In the process, the archaeological sources stored by the local museum will finally become better known and more accessible to researchers worldwide dealing with monasticism, art history and medieval technology.

Through the collected and disseminated data, using different methods and means from various disciplines, the project will offer an essential dataset for a future conservation plan related to aspects pertaining to medieval material culture and for a project essential to the protection of the *in situ* mosaic pavement, followed by a prospective museum development. Moreover, it will underpin the intentions already stated in the years 2003-2009 by the Arad County Council and Arad Museum Complex to devise a conservation project for the Bizere site as part of a regional development plan.

⁴ Ileana Burnichioiu, “Fragments from Bizere monastery (Frumușeni, Arad county): the lavabo of cloister,” *EJST* 9, no. 6 (2013): 211-219; Adrian Andrei Rusu, “On a possible abbatial crosier from Bizere Monastery (Frumușeni, Arad County),” *EJST* 9, no. 6 (2013): 221-232; Ileana Burnichioiu, “Lavatorium-ul abației Bizere - de la arheologie la reconstituire” [The lavatorium of Bizere abbey – from archaeology to reconstruction], *AUA hist.* 17, no. 2 (2013): 101-121; Adrian Andrei Rusu, “Religios și non-religios în cultura materială a mănăstirii Bizere (Frumușeni, jud. Arad) (I)” [Religious and non-religious in material culture of Bizere abbey (Frumușeni, Arad county) (I)], *AUA hist.* 17, no. 2 (2013): 123-154; Erika Nemes Feketics, Ileana Burnichioiu, “Analyze ale fragmentelor de frescă descoperite la Bizere în anii 2001-2009 (I)” [Analysis of the fresco fragments

discovered at Bizere between 2001 and 2009 (I)], *AUA hist.* 17, no. 2 (2013): 223-226; Adrian Andrei Rusu et al., “Frumușeni, jud. Arad. Mănăstirea Bizere” [Frumușeni, Arad county. Bizere Monastery], *CCA. Campania 2014* (2015): 71-73; Adrian Andrei Rusu and Oana Toda, “Archaeological Evidence for Historical Navigation the Mureș (Maros) River. Enquiries Based on a Medieval Boat Imprint from Bizere Abbey (Romania),” *AAASH* 65, no. 1 (2014): 139-154; Adrian Andrei Rusu, “Manifestations of Violence in the Benedictine Abbey in Bizere (Frumușeni, Dép. Arad),” *eClassica 2: Violência no mundo antigo e medieval* (in print); Adrian Andrei Rusu, “Medieval stili from Romania,” *Marisia XXXIV-XXXV* (2014-2015): 107-116. See also several studies in this volume.

Monastic landscape

