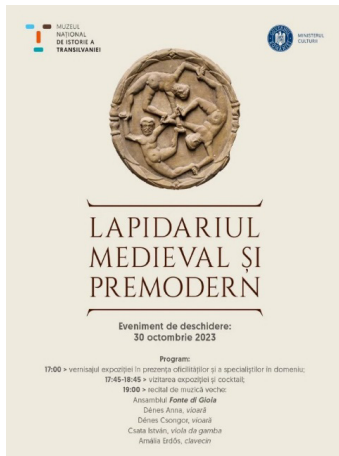


EXHIBITION REVIEW:

The Enfilade of Frames National History Museum of Transylvania



By inaugurating the medieval lapidarium, the National History Museum of Transylvania ends a several decades-long wait, during which we have been deprived of one of Cluj's most admirable exhibitions. A special space of the museum is being reborn, arranged more than a century ago, when the *mise en scene* with the Renaissance frames enriching the space created by the enfilade rooms was a stroke of genius of the respective era. The rhythm of the doors, gates, and windows adorned with various decorations and inscriptions recreated the varnished world of Renaissance Cluj at a tangible distance. The artistic and visual experience in this lapidarium remained for each visitor unique and memorable

in the general context of the museum. The new exhibition maintains the axiality of the old one, yet the thematic grouping of the pieces is much better thought out and presented.

Even though in the case of the museum in Cluj, the architectural elements have had a prominent role, and continue to do so, we cannot help but notice that in museums throughout Europe, the lapidarium represents a marginal, tolerated space. In many cases, the masonry recovered from demolished or restored edifices lays among corridor entrances and sometimes in stuffed courtyards, exposed to the elements. We come across them not only in the context of museums but also within castles and churches all across Europe. They rarely get the privilege of being relocated in special deposits or, at best, being exhibited. Even when they do become part of an exhibition, they take a supporting act in relation to the more traditional museum pieces.



Just as architectural heritage constitutes an important chapter of human creation, its components, even taken out of context, are extremely valuable pieces. These are artistic creations, but also unending historical sources, offering plenty of details regarding the evolution of settlements, the predilection of a community for representative buildings, and the role of the patrons and a series of historical data marked through inscriptions. The Cluj lapidarium reflects, first of all, the graduate economic growth of the town from more timid beginnings in the 14th and 15th centuries towards the prosperous urban development in the following centuries. *Claudiopolis, Transilvaniae civitas primaria* was not just a mere formula of humanistic courtesy but reflected a reality that strikes us in the current exhibition through the numerous Renaissance profiles.

These pieces, whether we encounter them on the roadside or in exhibitions, stand witness to actions of demolition, destruction, or radical modification of historical edifices. Basically, any lapidarium grows from the disappearance of monuments, which is obviously undesirable. The modernizing process that Cluj, like many other cities, has gone through also brought the demolition of many heritage buildings. The recovery and maintenance of decorative fragments started painstakingly in the first half of the 19th century. Up until then, the exception were the Roman inscriptions for which there was a long-standing tradition, dating from the 15th century, of collecting them. In Cluj, many Roman pieces were gathered by the famous antiquary Literati Nemes Sámuel who embedded them in the walls of his house before 1840. Another lapidarium-like edifice was built by the city's architect Lajos Pákei at the end of the same century. The difference between the two collecting efforts of the architectural pieces was due to the latter's preference for medieval and Renaissance architecture, which demonstrates the growing interest in these more recent eras.

Pákei was after all instrumental in saving and collecting medieval and early modern masonry by being the main collector in this field, alongside the archaeologists Henrik Finály and Béla Pósta, the first custodians of the collections of Numismatics and Antiquities of the Transylvanian Museum Society. We should also mention the sculptor Ferenc Kolozsvári Szeszák, the one who installed the majority of the Renaissance pieces in the manner in which we have inherited them to this day. In the decades that followed, the medieval and early modern lapidarium was under the care of several historians and art historians such as Lajos Kelemen, Géza Entz, András Kovács, Nicolae Sabău, and not least Melinda Mihály.

During the 19th century, built heritage became a reference element in the ideology of modern nations. Collections were born that were meant to reflect both the specificity and the grandeur of nations. In the field of architecture, it was impossible to gather all the representative monuments together, therefore casts were made, and gypsum libraries were created. The pieces thus accumulated

also served an educational purpose. Starting from the 20th century such pieces made their way into the collection of Numismatics and Antiquities in Cluj. We are delighted that in the new exhibition of the lapidarium, the last room is dedicated to this genre, which presents us not only with copies of top-notch sculptures, but also bears witness to an exhibition approach that has fallen out of fashion.

Moreover, the lapidarium in Cluj has also contributed to the genesis of the same type of exhibition at the Museum of National History in Bucharest. During the 1970s many pieces representative of Transylvanian Gothic and Renaissance were taken there, thus after the closure of the museum in Cluj there was a consolation in visiting the lapidarium in Bucharest which is undoubtedly the largest one of its kind in the country. Now, through the reopening of the exhibition in Cluj we can observe an interesting parallel between the two museums, as they both built their permanent collection starting from their lapidarium which was open to the public. However, the exhibition in Cluj also has another even more specific task: throughout the 20th century, the need for opening an exhibition dedicated to the history of the city has been repeatedly expressed, yet for various reasons, unfortunately, this desire could not be fulfilled. Through the newly avenged lapidarium, the museum in Cluj has managed to recover some of the important and representative aspects regarding the history of our city and hopefully, the other permanent displays accentuating local history will soon follow suit.

Translated from Romanian by Voica Pușcașiu

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