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IN MEMORIAM BARBARA DEPPERT-LIPPITZ. A DESTINY UNDER THE SIGN OF TREASURES

*If you have a garden and a library
you have everything you need (Cicero)*

Born on October 3, 1939, in the town of Kublitz/Stolp in the Pomerania region (more precisely in the Historic Voivodeship of Pomerania), Barbara Deppert-Lippitz spent the early years of her childhood in a multicultural environment with both German and Polish influences, as well as strong Nordic influences that would shape her intellectual openness throughout her life. Passionate about history, she studied classical and provincial Roman archaeology at the Faculty of Ancient History at the University of Frankfurt/Main from 1961 to 1968. In 1969, she defended her doctoral thesis at the same university on the topic: *Römischer Goldschmuck des ersten und zweiten Jahrhunderts n. Chr. nach datierten Funden* (Roman Gold Jewelry from the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD Based on Dated Finds). The work was published in 1970 by the prestigious Philipp von Zabern publisher in Mainz and quickly became a useful reference tool, highly regarded by all interested in the subject. Notably, this work is still relevant today and is used by those who want to specialize in Roman goldsmithing. After graduation, she lived in Turkey for several years.

Between 1969 and 1972, she was a fellow of the German Scientific Foundation, honing her scientific preparation in classical studies, with a focus on ancient goldsmithing. In 1972, she married art dealer and appraiser ÖBV Dr. Kurt Deppert (deceased in 1994). On this occasion, scientific researcher Barbara Deppert-Lippitz came into direct contact with the fascinating, exotic, and largely inaccessible world of collectors, dealers, and antiquity traders—a world she adapted to perfectly, given her exceptional academic preparation. As an accredited expert from 1972 to 1992, she developed several scientific works and expertise for various antique firms, auction houses, and numismatic collections: Kunsthalmung Dr. Kurt Deppert, Frankfurt/M; Münzhalmung Frank Sternberg AG, Zurich; Herbert A.Cahn, Basel; Artemis AG London; Robert Haber and Company, Ancient Art, New York.

In 1985, she published the monograph *Die Münzprägung Milets vom vierten bis ersten Jahrhundert V. Chr.* (Silver Coins of Miletus from the 4th to 1st Centuries BC), a new manual *Griechischer Goldschmuck* (Greek Gold Jewelry), and a catalog *Goldschmuck der Römerzeit* (Gold Jewelry of the Roman Era) under the auspices of the Central Romano-German Museum in Mainz. That same year, she received a study grant in the USA from the German Archaeological Institute, becoming a corresponding member shortly after.

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On March 15, 1991, she was accredited as an *expert in classical antiquities* by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IHK) in Frankfurt am Main. That same year, she became a member of the organizing committee of the “Ancient” conference, contributing in 1992 to the elaboration of the work “Jewelry and Archaeology” during the event at the Art Museum of Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA.

Between 1992 and 1994, in collaboration with the Museum of Prehistory and Ancient History in Frankfurt am Main (Museum of Archaeology), as a member of the organizing committee, she became co-editor and co-author of the catalogue for the exhibition “Goldhelm Schwert und Silberschätze. Reichtümer aus 6000 Jahren rumänischer Vergangenheit” (Gold helmets, swords, and silver treasures. Treasures from 6000 years of Romanian past).

We note, both now and here, the substantial study by the researcher focusing on *Thracian-Getae Silver Treasures*. During this exhibition, she became more familiar with the richness and diversity of discoveries of gold and silver artefacts in Romania and also became close friends with Lucia Marinescu-Țeposu, the General Director of the National History Museum of Romania. The friendship led to nuanced scientific dialogues that lasted until the end of their lives. Who could have foreseen that in less than six years, fate would offer her the unique chance to see, for the first time, the gold variants of the multi-spiral bracelets from Coadă Malului and Herastrau, presented in the catalogue¹?

From 1992, in recognition of her high level of expertise in ancient artefacts, Barbara Deppert-Lippitz was designated as an expert for American museums, particularly focusing on determining the real value of artworks, especially those related to ancient goldsmithing and coinage. She collaborated with the U.S. tax authorities, particularly in criminal and civil cases.

In 1993, she became a member of the organizing committee and co-author of the exhibition “The Screw Between Power and Splendor: Threads in Antiquity,” hosted by the Würth Museum in Künzelsau and the Regional Archaeological Museum of Baden-Württemberg in Konstanz. She was also a co-author of the exhibition’s catalogue (1993).

In 1996, she became a research assistant at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, where she participated in publishing a catalogue for the Dallas Museum, “Ancient Gold Jewelry at the Dallas Museum of Art” (1996). In 2000, she participated as an expert in the research and publication of scientific essays and art history for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Her scientific works became landmarks for those engaged in identifying, determining, and evaluating artefacts of gold and silver from the Greco-Roman era and antiquity in general. Her works included overwhelming bibliographies and scientifically erudite notes, enriched with indexes and registers, and exceptional illustrative material in both black and white and colour, adding cultural and scientific attractiveness to the work as a whole.

The year 2000 marked a turning point for Barbara Deppert-Lippitz. That summer, at her expert office in

Frankfurt am Main, a young man from Romania presented her with an artefact that immediately caught her attention: a gold multi-spiral bracelet with zoomorphic ends. Although she had in front of her what seemed like a “unicorn” of ancient goldsmithing, she did not lose her composure. Her investigative spirit led her to gather as much scientific and other relevant information as possible. She found out that the young man had a similar item and that these items were discovered with a metal detector by his brother in the Orăștie Mountains. Even though her detailed examination confirmed that the item was an authentic, ancient gold bracelet, she did not issue the requested certificate of authenticity², urging the young man to not alienate it and to return it to Romania, as it belonged to Romania’s national cultural heritage. Moreover, she informed her friend Lucia Marinescu-Țeposu about the event, who then alerted the Romanian judicial authorities.

It was the beginning of a fabulous adventure, a partnership in which Barbara Deppert-Lippitz got involved with complete determination, dominating the next 15 years of her life. Requested by the judicial authorities in Romania³, searching for any clues related to Dacian gold multi-spiral bracelets - as they still seemed to be a sort of “mirage” during the years 2005-2006 - she decided to unconditionally support this endeavour, for personal reasons and rationales known only to her, even when this association had potential unpleasantness. From the start of the collaboration, through the clues provided and the statements made, she managed to clarify a large part of the unknowns that made the judicial investigation quite cumbersome. She voluntarily revealed to investigators a series of data of interest, including, for example, the fact that *a similar piece from the same typological category was auctioned on December 8, 1999, by Christie’s auction house in New York*.

Based on international legislation concerning the repatriation of illegally exported artefacts, Barbara Deppert-Lippitz took the necessary steps to identify collectors in the USA and EU member states, who may have acquired such pieces as good faith buyers. Following these leads, between 2006 and 2012, the Romanian State managed to repatriate, using the provisions of the Unidroit Convention and other international legal instruments, 12 gold multi-spiral bracelets⁴ from various good faith collectors.

Her support did not stop there. Because during the investigations, initially focused on the Dacian gold bracelets, multiple other situations of unknown initially treasures and artifacts discovered by archaeological poachers and trafficked through various channels to Europe and the United States were revealed, she managed to identify many such objects and mediate their repatriation. We’re talking here about the gold jewellery set from Căpâlna, Alba Couty⁵ (the necklace

¹ DEPPERT-LIPPITZ 1994, 85-89, 176, Fig. 59/3, 179, 60/3.

² The individual was identified as being part of the group of poachers involved in the theft and trafficking of gold spirals, originating from contexts located near the *Sacred Zone* of the Dacian fortress at Sarmizegetusa Regia.

³ Criminal cases investigating the circumstances under which the Dacian multi-spiral bracelets were stolen began in 2005, when specialized judicial structures dedicated to the protection of the national cultural heritage started to operate

⁴ OBERLÄNDER-TÎRNOVEANU 2014, 73-136.

⁵ CIUȚĂ 2018, 87-12.



Fig. 1. Barbara Deppert-Lippitz, in the *Muchia Cetății* sector, identifying the location where the treasure composed of two golden bracelets, 200 Lysimach-type gold coins and 500 Tetradrachm-type coins was discovered in 1999 (photo by M.-M. Ciută, June 2, 2008)

with biconical pendants and a pair of gold earrings), the two bronze tablets containing the *Constitution of the Municipality of Troesmis*⁶, and many other artifacts that belong to the category of National Cultural Heritage Treasures, which have been repatriated.

Again, the support did not stop there. From the position of an internationally accredited expert, with an incontestable voice and authority, she agreed to conceive pro bono, a series of expert reports in the multiple criminal cases handled by the authorities in Romania, generically known as “The Dacian Gold”. Dozens of reports on bracelets, monetary treasures, gold and silver jewellery, ritual objects, epigraphic goods have become solid evidence in criminal cases aimed at proving illegal theft and trafficking activities of Romania’s cultural heritage. One of the most spectacular expert reports remains the one carried out in 2014, at the request of the Romanian judicial structures, regarding the circulation of gold “Kosons” in the international numismatic market between 1902-2013 (*Gutachten zur den Ursachen der Veränderungen im Angebot von “Kosonen” auf dem internationalen Münzmarkt in der Zeit von 1902 bis 2013*, Frankfurt am Main, 25 november 2014⁷). The exhaustive data used and the meticulous analysis carried out in this

report make it easy to understand how, starting in 1996, but especially after the year 2000, the world numismatic market was effectively “invaded” (!) by new Kosons, whose provenance, officially stated as unknown or ambiguous, could only have been recently plundered archaeological sites in the Șureanu Mountains (Sarmizegetusa Regia hinterland).

And again, her support did not stop there. With her fundamental structure as a scientific researcher, Barbara wanted to delve deeper into her investigations and contribute to a more accurate understanding of the initial significance of the artifacts to whose recovery she had contributed decisively. She understood that only through meticulous research of the contexts in which these artifacts were preserved and the specific landscape in which they were deposited could one come closer to an optimal interpretation of their functionality. Therefore, she insisted on participating in multiple expeditions to the Șureanu Mountains in Hunedoara County to see with her own eyes all sectors that proved relevant in the judicial inquiry through the contexts that had been looted and stripped of artifacts: Sarmizegetusa Regia (*Muchia Cetății*, *Căprăreța*, *Șesul Căprăreței*, *Muchia Căprăreței*, *La Zăcătoare*), Fețele Able (*La Arsuri*, *Fagii lui Bodea*, *Culmea Anineșului*), Poiana Omului, Ponorici Cave, Strei Valley, Piatra Roșie fortress etc. She then read in her native language all the writings of the Saxon chroniclers from the 16th to 18th centuries concerning accidental discoveries of treasures in the Orăștie Mountains. Only then did she

⁶ LAZĂR 2020, 421-442.

⁷ The report is part of the evidence in Criminal Case No. 301/P/2012, which is being handled by the Prosecutor’s Office attached to the Court of Appeals in Alba Iulia.

feel she could write about the significance of the multi-spiral gold bracelets, about the Kosoni, Lysimach, Pharnakes, and Asander coin hoards, about votive offerings in the Dacian world, as well as the current structures of the antique trade⁸.

She particularly insisted on visiting Martinuzzi Castle in Vințul de Jos (Alba County), a place with special significance for Barbara, where a significant part of the famous treasure discovered in 1541 in the Strei River⁹ was temporarily held. This treasure first mentioned the existence of a gold bracelet “a golden snake.”

She has been actively involved in the promotion and valuation of special artifacts recovered by the Romanian state, participating in all exhibitions in Romania and other countries, presenting scientific communications at various congresses and international conferences, including involvement in media productions concerning the Dacian gold.

In recognition of her outstanding merits, she became *Doctor Honoris Causa* of the University of Alba Iulia in 2007. Also, in recognition of her extraordinary merits in recovering important cultural assets for the national cultural heritage, by decree no. 252 dated February 11, 2008, the President of Romania, at the proposal of the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs, conferred upon Barbara Deppert-Lippitz the Order of Cultural Merit, in the rank of officer.

In the last years of her life, spent peacefully in the city that adopted her since her youth, her energy was channelled into creating expertise at the request of the Frankfurt am Main Chamber of Industry and Commerce, but especially towards the protection of local cultural and historical heritage, through the “Friends of the City of Frankfurt Association,” which deals with the restoration of monuments and the maintenance of the city’s cultural heritage.

As stated in the press release from the National Museum of History of Romania, issued on July 19, 2023, Barbara Deppert-Lippitz “was one of the strongest voices who spoke about the uniqueness and historical importance of these artefacts and who helped authenticate and reconstruct the complicated history of the bracelets.” In the memory of those who knew her, she remained a strong personality, an encyclopaedic spirit coupled with keen intuition, complemented by a *German precision* in historical analysis. Possessing an incredible work ethic that is difficult to quantify and understand, she stood out for her modesty and perfect goodwill, equalled only by her altruism. She gladly accepted scientific challenges, demonstrating clear decisiveness in front of both colleagues and judges, before whom she was often called to present her expert opinions.

I will always remember the image of the office on Baumwegstrasse, no. 4, with the stoic sobriety of its library as well as the peace and balance of the inner courtyard garden,

bathed in the warm lights of autumn. The announcement of Mrs. Barbara Deppert Lippitz’s passing in this Summer, has left a huge void in the souls of those who knew her in the context of the *Dacian treasure epics*.

She has forever remained a providential friend of Romania and its cultural heritage.

SIT TIBI TERRA LEVIS, Bona Dea!

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⁸ As a result, a series of articles were published: DEPPERT-LIPPITZ 2008, 203-289; DEPPERT-LIPPITZ 2009, 121-172; DEPPERT-LIPPITZ 2013, 137-174.

⁹ Deeply impressed by the personality and fate of Cardinal Georg Martinuzzi (1482-1551), whom she considered a key historical figure with a decisive role in the fate of the Dacian treasures, she organized a memorial service for him at St. Michael's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Alba Iulia.