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Studies

NUMISMATICS

AN ANCIENT COIN HOARD DISCOVERED, FORGOTTEN, REDISCOVERED AND RECOVERED. THE *JIDVEI* HOARD CASE

Abstract: This study deals with an unusual case of a coin hoard discovered by a metal detectorist in Jidvei, Alba County, recovered with judicial implications. The discoverer (a metal detector owner) approached the find thoughtfully, sparing it and proceeding with all the necessary legal and ethical steps, thus ensuring a scientific documentation and complete recovery of the hoard and the context details. This story had a happy ending, although initial circumstances did not suggest such an outcome, especially since the responsible public institution for taking initial protective measures for the context, perimeter, and contents of the find completely ignored its legal obligations. This case highlights the potential for responsible metal detecting to contribute positively to archaeological discovery and heritage preservation when conducted in accordance with legal and ethical guidelines. Thus, 115 silver coins: 57 tetradrachms dating from the 3rd to 1st centuries BC (*Macedonia Prima* type - 2nd century BC); 51 Dacian drachms of the *Rădulești-Hunedoara* type (3rd-2nd century BC) and 7 roman denarii (*Antoninianus* type, 3rd century AD), were recovered and eventually became part of the collection of the Museum in Alba Iulia. The context of their origin was documented as efficiently as possible within a legal framework. This case highlights the risks to cultural heritage when the responsibilities stipulated by normative acts (such as OG 43/2000) are knowingly ignored by state institutions. It underscores the importance of adhering to legal and ethical standards in the handling of archaeological finds to protect and preserve cultural heritage. This situation emphasizes the need for updated legislation and strategies to effectively manage and regulate metal detecting activities in line with contemporary realities and technological advancements.

Keywords: *Jidvei*, antique coin hoards, metal detecting, *Macedonia Prima* type, *Rădulești-Hunedoara* type.

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of conducting geophysical detections by metal detector owners in areas not registered as archaeological sites or not part of *protected zones* - in the sense of current normative acts¹ - has become increasingly common in the last 10 years². This phenomenon tends to assume

¹ CIUȚĂ 2021. In this study, the methods of defining protected archaeological areas in Romania have been analyzed, with a focus on highlighting the weaknesses in the text of the regulatory act.

² CIUȚĂ 2023.



Fig. 1. Image posted on the social media page, showing the artifacts handed over to the Jidvei commune town hall, on August 16, 2022. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/detectiemetal>

dimensions that far exceed the vision of the legislator who, 23 years ago (!), tried to set certain coordinates for regulating activities involving the use of these devices.

In the majority of cases, metal detectorists do not react in the most appropriate ways, either due to a lack of necessary training, not being instructed in this regard, or simply not being interested in doing so. However, in recent years, there have been several instances where, through self-education, good faith, and interest, metal detectorists have sought information beforehand or have sought advice from competent sources. As a result, they manage, through their own efforts, to make the best decisions for the archaeological

contexts/artifacts they encounter. The case presented in the current study is an example of this positive trend.

On September 14th, during a routine investigation on the social media group “*DetețieMetal. Comunitatea arheologilor amatori din România*”³ (Metal Detection. The Community of Amateur Archaeologists in Romania), a post by a metal detector enthusiast from Mureș County drew attention because it mentioned a discovery made in Alba County, specifically near the locality of Jidvei. The

³ One of the professional duties of a police officer specialized in the protection of cultural heritage is monitoring the social media pages of metal detector owners.

post was about the detectorist expressing dissatisfaction with the fact that after discovering a coin hoard, which he partially excavated but mostly left *in situ*, and reporting it to the mayor of the locality, no one contacted him for a month to request his support. He suspected that in the meantime, archaeologists from the museum in Alba Iulia had gone to the forest he had indicated (when he handed over the treasure) and had recovered the hoard without him. To clarify the nature of the treasure he discovered, his post included a photograph of the pieces he had collected and handed over to the Jidvei town hall (Fig. 1). The coins of the tetradrachm from *Macedonia Prima type* (the first two rows and the first position in the third row - 13 pieces) could be easily recognized from the image, followed by 9 coins of the *Rădulești-Hunedoara type* (two were stuck together), and by 7 fragmentary *Antoninianus type* roman denarii, mostly fragmented, an iron tinderbox, and an iron fibula (Fig. 1).

Following contact with the individual who posted these details and images⁴, it was revealed that he is an authorized owner of a metal detector. On August 15, 2022, he conducted a prospecting operation in the forest southwest of Jidvei. There, he initially found a small hoard of Roman *antoninianus type* coins (7 pieces), and at a certain distance, he discovered several scattered ancient silver coins on a slope. In the upper dispersion area of these coins, he also found the context from which they originated. He decided to stop the digging operation, cleaned the area, photographed how the coins appeared *in situ*, associated with a green-colored metal fragment that he interpreted as a fibula (Fig. 2). He then covered the complex with a plastic sheet and then with soil and dry leaves, taking reference points to easily identify the pit later. Subsequently, on August 16, the discoverer returned to Jidvei commune, to the town hall, where he handed over the batch of discovered items, informing the Mayor that, according to the special legislation, the items should be passed over with the Alba County Directorate for Culture.

In the presence of the discoverer, the Mayor of Jidvei contacted the director of the Alba County Directorate for Culture by phone. The director requested that the discovery site be shown to a representative of the town hall and that the items left at the Jidvei Town Hall - recorded in an official report - be handed over the next day to the institution's headquarters in Alba Iulia. A representative designated by the Mayor of Jidvei commune then traveled to the forest southwest of the locality, towards the village of Bălcaciu, where the discoverer accurately indicated the exact location of the finds. After this episode, the discoverer went home, convinced that he would soon be contacted by representatives of public institutions to revisit the site and provide details about the discovery for scientific and legal investigation of the complex. He even had the good sense not to publicize the details of the discovery, the artifacts, or the exact location. Based on the photographs, he researched the age and cultural affiliation of the artifacts he handed over. Regrettably, for a month, he received no communication from the institutions⁵ (!), leading him to make the social media post.

⁴ The conversation took place directly on the *Messenger* account associated with *Facebook*, with the participant openly revealing their identity without any hesitation.

⁵ This situation reflects a gap in the follow-up and engagement by the



Fig. 2. The manner of outlining the upper part of the archaeological context in which the coin hoard was located (source: Szakács Jozsef).

Due to the information obtained indicating an imminent danger to the coin hoard left *in situ*, and as a consequence of resuming legal measures for protecting cultural heritage, a criminal investigation was initiated concerning the circumstances under which archaeological goods were left in the forest of Jidvei for more than a month after their discovery. Simultaneously, an investigation at the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia revealed that no one from the institution was informed of the events mentioned above (!). Meanwhile, the police chief in Jidvei, following the received orders, confirmed that the archaeological items handed over to the town hall on August 16, 2022, were still there, in the metal safe in the mayor's office.

On the same day, the officers specialized in the protection of national cultural heritage went to Jidvei to continue the judicial investigations. The batch of archaeological artifacts was identified, compared, photographed, and collected from the town hall office. The circumstances were clarified regarding why, despite the phone agreement on August 16th between the Mayor and the director of the Alba County Directorate for Culture (DJC Alba), the artifacts were not deposited at the institution's headquarters on the next day (17 August). After the town hall representative traveled to Alba Iulia, he found the institution closed. Only after insisting on contacting the director by phone was, it

relevant authorities in such cases, which is crucial for the proper handling and documentation of archaeological discoveries.

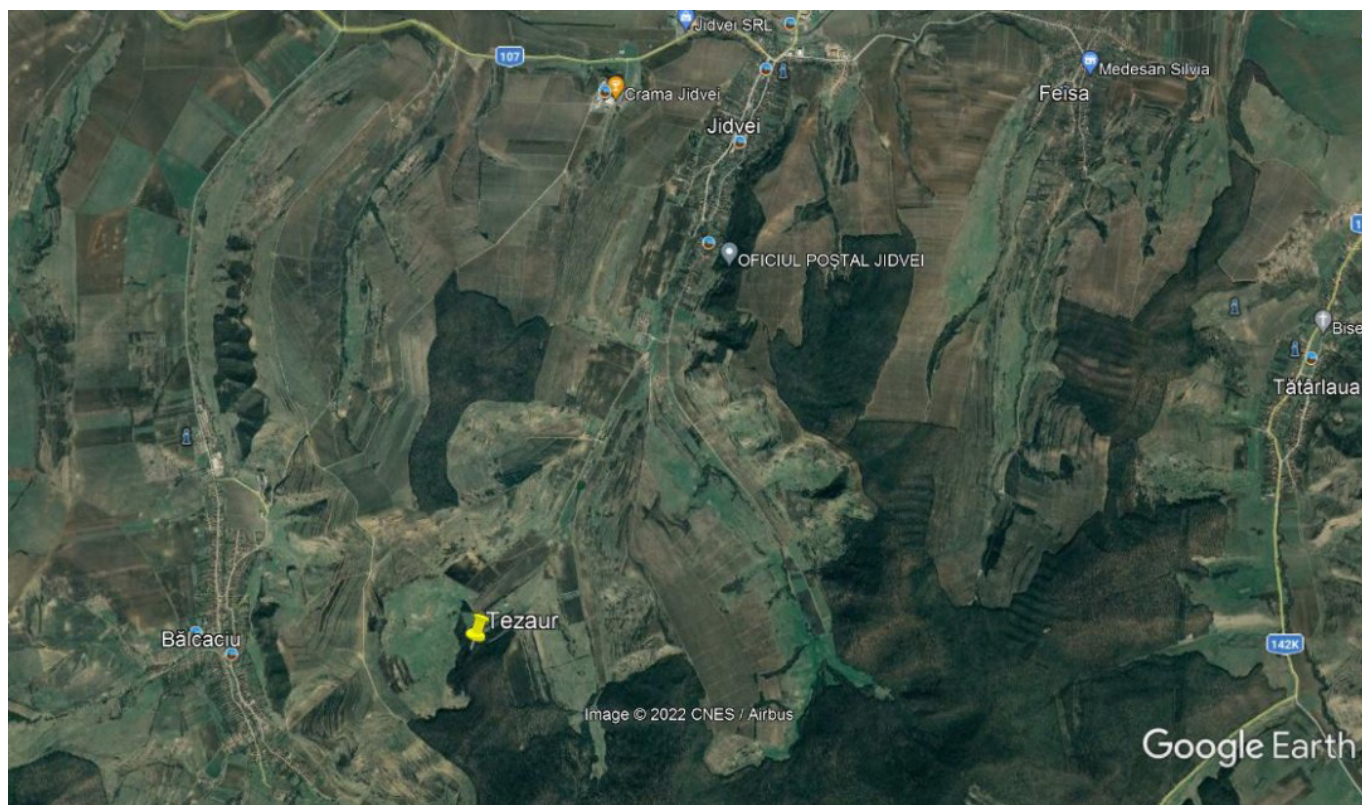


Fig. 3. Satellite image capture, indicating the location of the discovery (yellow pushpin) within the administrative-territorial unit (UAT) Jidvei. (Source: *Google Earth*).

explained that the director was unable to receive the group of artifacts: „because the building was undergoing pest control” (!?). Without receiving any further instructions, the representative returned to the Jidvei office, where the mayor decided that the artifacts should be stored in the safe in his office, placed inside a plastic bag.

Between August 17 and September 17, 2022, the Alba County Directorate for Culture did not contact the Jidvei Town Hall in any way regarding the fate of the batch of artifacts kept at the town hall or about the archaeological context of the coin hoard.

At the request of the judicial officer, an urgent trip was made to the discovery site, along with the representative of the Jidvei Town Hall and the local police chief. The site was identified, and preliminary investigations were conducted, which revealed that the discovery site showed no signs of recent disturbance, with no indications that anyone had searched for the coin deposit in the last 30 days. The local police chief was asked to monitor the area and people passing through the forest until the necessary judicial procedures for conducting an on-site investigation could be carried out. This proactive approach helped ensure the site’s protection and integrity during the ongoing legal and archaeological processes.

Following the issuance of an *Order for on-site investigation*, which requested the presence of an expert archaeologist from the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia, and after obtaining the *Field Evaluation Authorization*⁶ issued by the Ministry of Culture to legalize

the archaeological activities, the prescribed activities took place on September 19, 2022. The discoverer of the treasure was also invited to participate in these activities to clarify all the circumstances related to the discovery of the coin hoards.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The research aimed to gather maximum information regarding the archaeological context of the monetary treasure discovered exactly a month earlier (on 15.08.2022), partially extracted and delivered in accordance with legal provisions (on 16.08.2022). Simultaneously with the on-site documentation of the context in which the monetary treasure was reported, on-site judicial activity was also conducted, an action ordered by ordinance within the criminal case, under the conditions where it was necessary to ascertain the truth regarding the circumstances of the discovery. The field activity was attended by the scientific supervisor designated by the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia for conducting an archaeological assessment, the judicial officer, and representatives of local authorities.

The discovery site was identified in the valley of the Jidvei stream, a left tributary of the Târnava Mică River, in the Bleș Forest, located in the administrative-territorial unit (UAT) Jidvei, at approximately 3.5-4 km southwest of the locality, on a secondary road connecting to the village of Băcaci (located about 1 km to the west) (Fig. 3). From the

Jidvei. Point: *Pădurea Bleș*, The RAN Code 5112.03. Responsible of the archaeological research: George Bounegru (Union Museum Alba Iulia) and member of the research team: Marius-Mihai Ciută (Lucian Blaga University Sibiu)

⁶ *Field Evaluation Authorization* no. 600/19.09.2022. Name of the locality:



Fig. 4. Cleaning the perimeter where the indicated complexes were identified. View from the north.

northeastern edge of the Bleş Forest, above an artificial dam on the Jidvei Valley and in front of a meadow, after an ascent of about 8-10 minutes (290-300 m), heading southwest on a gentle slope near a forest road, the metal detectorist accurately pointed out the location of the discovery.

After the discoverer confirmed that the appearance of the terrain showed no recent signs of disturbance post-discovery on August 15, he precisely indicated the points where he discovered the artifacts handed over⁷. After documenting and confirming the existence of two distinct and different archaeological contexts, attention was focused on documenting the second context, the one containing the tetradrachms. He described in detail how some coins appeared right on the surface, on the slope, while others were at depths ranging from 5-15 cm. Their position, scattered down the slope, demonstrated the scattered and disturbed nature of a monetary treasure kept in a recessed complex positioned higher up on the slope. This resulted in a perimeter with a relatively rectangular shape, with the long sides (6-7 m) oriented north-south and the short sides (3 m) (Fig. 4).

Under the coordination of the archaeologists, the next step involved clearing the perimeter of the layer of dry leaves, simultaneously with the removal (scraping) of the superficial soil layer from the surface, aiming to outline possible contexts (Fig. 4). Following the cleaning and scraping of the ground surface, both the main pit, located at the upper limit of the perimeter, and the pits dug by the metal detectorist for extracting the coins removed from their original context were identified. After outlining

⁷ He precisely indicated the locations of the discoveries of the *Antoninianus*-type coins and the tetradrachms, specifying that they were at a considerable distance from each other, approximately 20 meters, and that they formed two distinct complexes.

the pit, the documentation of the context was carried out by excavation using the cross-section technique and subsequent emptying (Fig. 5). Several groups of coins were observed in different positions, indicating that it was a compact monetary treasure made of silver coins, associated with small fragments of bronze or copper, characterized by the green color of the oxide, interpreted as the metallic remnants of a container (possibly a small money box?) where they were collected at the time of deposition.

After outlining the pit, the documentation of the context was carried out by excavation using the cross-section technique and subsequent emptying (Fig. 5). Several groups of coins were observed in different positions, indicating that it was a compact monetary treasure made of silver coins, associated with small fragments of bronze or copper, characterized by the green color of the oxide, interpreted as the metallic remnants of a container (possibly a small money box?) where they were collected at the time of deposition.

The scientific documentation of the pit was carried out, and the coins contained within it were lifted in layers and strata. The oval-shaped pit had a final depth of approximately 27 cm, with an opening of 28-30 cm at the top, and it was dug into the yellow, sandy soil characteristic of deciduous forest soils (Fig. 6). The coins documented in



Fig. 5. Outlining and investigating the archaeological context.

the pit exhibited the same characteristics as those handed over by the Jidvei Town Hall: a first type, "Macedonia Prima" actually Macedonian tetradrachms from the 2nd century BCE, featuring Artemis on the obverse framed by the Macedonian shield and on the reverse, the club of Hercules, with the inscription MAKEΔONΩN ΠΡΩΤΗΣ – and the workshop monogram of Amphipolis circa 167-149 BC (Fig. 8); and the second type, Dacian drachms of the Răduleşti-



Fig. 6. Detail during the documentation of the context.



Fig. 7. Detail with the items (coins, bronze fragments) extracted from the context, during the documentation.

Hunedoara type, with the stylized obverse of Philip II and the stylized reverse of a horseman. (Fig. 7-8).

After emptying and documenting the pit, geophysical probing was carried out in the area below the pit, where possible natural interventions (roots, rodents, etc.) that disturbed the original context were outlined. In response to signals from the metal detector, a comprehensive investigation

of the perimeter was conducted, recovering several additional similar pieces, affected by the aforementioned factors (slope erosion and animals). In total, 44 pieces of *Macedonia Prima* and 42 pieces of *Rădulești-Hunedoara* were extracted from the context and its vicinity⁸. All the pieces were well-

⁸ In total, the treasure contained 57 Macedonia Prima coins and 51 Rădulești-Hunedoara coins. In addition to these, a Roman coin hoard was



Fig. 8. Macedonian tetradrachms *Macedonia Prima* type (a-b) and *Rădulești-Hunedoara* type Tetradrachms (c-d).



Fig. 9. All artifacts resulting from the documentation in Bleș Forest, during the handover to the Museum in Alba Iulia.

preserved and intact, with only one *Macedonia Prima* coin slightly affected on the edge during the extraction operation. It is noteworthy that during this operation, at a certain distance, a caliga hobnail of Roman origin, made of iron, was also reported (Fig. 9). All the data observed during the documentation of the context fully confirmed the statements made by the discoverer, validating his good faith.

Subsequently, the discovery locations of the other artifacts handed over to the Town Hall (Roman coin hoard, iron fibula, also of Roman origin, iron candlestick, iron sickle bent and left in situ by the metal detectorist - Fig. 9) were identified and documented. All recovered artifacts were photographed, initially cleaned of soil, and handed over to the National Museum of Union in Alba Iulia, where they underwent the natural stages of cleaning and conservation while initially being held in custody.

CONCLUSIONS

Specialized investigations were conducted on the forest area, including its morphology, which frequently showed terracing, possibly anthropogenic (Fig. 10). The

included, consisting of 7 denarii (antoninian type), documented on the same occasion.

morphology of the slope covered by the forest (documented at the end of the context research), revealing signs of anthropogenic origin, and the network of roads that traverse the entire forest are some of the arguments that formed the basis for interpreting this area as belonging to a perimeter with archaeological deposits of interest.

Following the exhaustive documentation of previous archaeological discoveries within the administrative territory of Jidvei, including those from the Roman period in the area of Bălcaciu village (Jidvei commune), a proposal was made for the establishment of a protection zone covering the entire area of the Bleș Forest. Considering the existence of multiple discoveries from the La Tène period, Roman period (late 2nd century BCE - first half of the 1st century BCE), and the 2nd-3rd centuries CE associated with both the treasure deposition and potential Dacian civilian settlements or Roman-era structures/settlements, an archaeological site was delimited with Stereo 70 coordinates, listed in both the National Archaeological Repertoire (RAN) and the Cartographic Server for the National Cultural Heritage (Fig. 11).

The case of Jidvei-Bleș, and not only this one⁹, is likely to raise a series of questions regarding the responsibilities that

⁹ The years 2021-2023 have represented, we believe, a good start in terms of communication regarding the scientific "extraction" of data and information



Fig. 10. Documentation of the possibly anthropogenic terraces in the area of Bleș Forest.

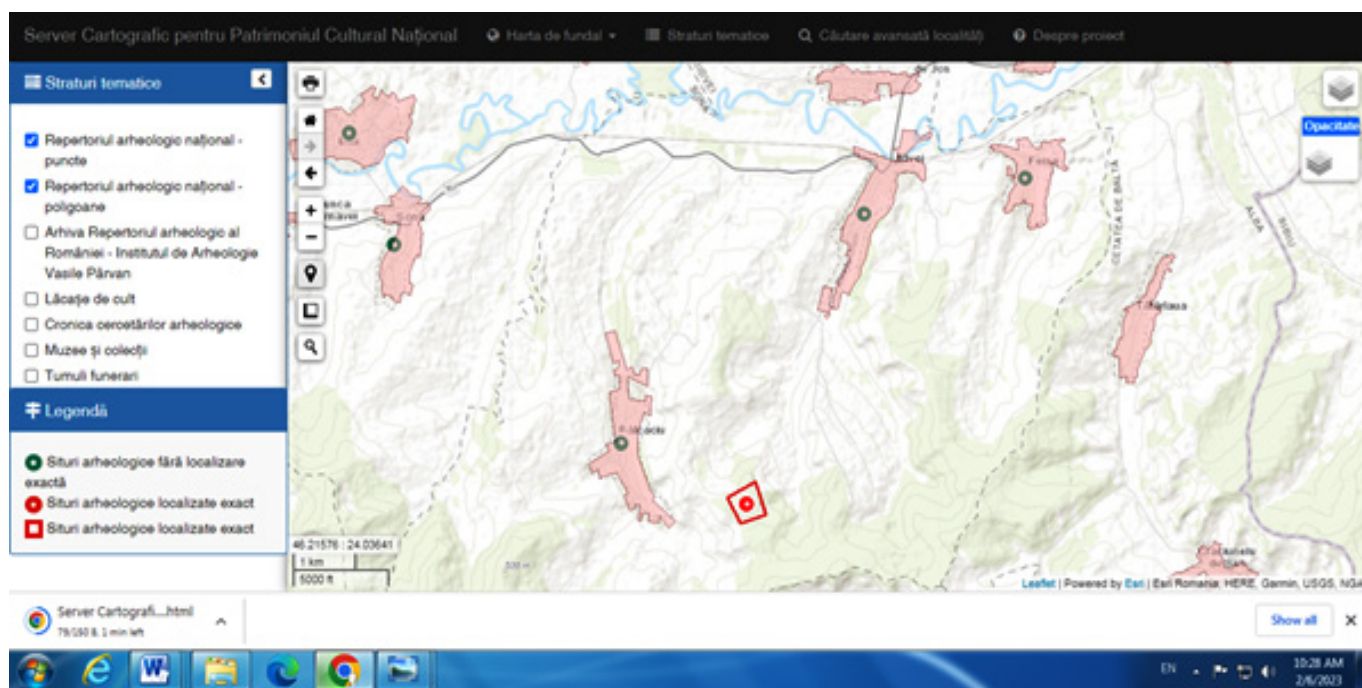


Fig. 11. The delineation of the protected area of the archaeological site Jidvei-Bleș within the Cartographic Server for National Cultural Heritage.

inherently arise according to the law and professional codes of ethics, especially for representatives of public institutions, including those of the Ministry of Culture. Even if there is a legislative gap and a “deafening silence” from entities that should have regulated the activity of metal detectorists in Romania, it is necessary, in our belief, to redefine the place and role of experts and specialists in the field of archaeology and the preservation of national cultural heritage. This should be done in a way that prioritizes the interest of cultural goods and monuments.

about cultural goods discovered by well-intentioned metal detectorists. Such cases have been reported in the counties of Bihor, Mureș, and Alba (GĂZDAC/GHEMIȘ 2023; CIUTĂ/MATEI-POPESCU 2022; CIUTĂ/TOTOIANU 2020; CIUTĂ/TOTOIANU 2023; CIUTĂ/PURECE 2018; PURECE/CIUTĂ 2023).

It is evident that the proportions reached in the field of metal detecting have not been (and could not have been) anticipated by anyone¹⁰. It is clear that we are witnessing a true “explosion” in the number of people requesting

¹⁰ About the phenomenon of metal detecting in Romania: CIUTĂ 2016; CIUTĂ 2016a; CIUTĂ 2023; CIUTĂ/TOTOIANU 2023. The current number of metal detectorists, which exceeds 27.000 (!) in December 2023, the gaps in legal documents aimed at regulating this activity, the dysfunctions reported in the management systems of the national archaeological repertoire, the lack of interest with which public institutions address this issue, and, finally, the extremely low number of police officers allocated to the protection of cultural heritage, contribute to an unfortunate “alignment of the planets” in terms of the increasingly clear danger hovering over archaeological heritage.



Fig. 12. Monetary treasure from the second documented complex, after cleaning.

permission to own a metal detector (or more!). Once they acquire the device, these individuals are faced with major dilemmas: “Where can I use the metal detector?”; “Is it enough to consult the National Archaeological Repertoire (RAN)?”; “What should I do when I find something?”; “How do I know if an object is part of the cultural heritage or not?”; “What should I do after extracting the object(s) from the ground?”; “Since the procedure is contradictory and identifying the administrative-territorial unit (UAT) is difficult, and there is even the risk that the mayor may not want to accept the items, wouldn’t it be better not to hand them over anywhere, claiming that I had no way of knowing they should be handed over?”

In this specific case, on Jidvei-Bleş, the metal detectorist proved to be a person of very good faith who took the necessary steps not to disturb the archaeological context. They handed over the findings in accordance with legal provisions, took the necessary references for identifying the contexts in the field, and acted appropriately in reporting the discovery on the Facebook social platform, specifically in the *DetectieMetal* group. The community of amateur archaeologists in Romania <https://www.facebook.com/groups/detectiemetal>.

The same cannot be said about the Alba County Directorate for Culture, which, although informed about the discovery, did not take any of the measures provided by law¹¹ (on-site verification, documentation regarding the protection regime of the area, taking over cultural goods, taking initial measures to protect the context, notifying judicial authorities in case of suspicions regarding the legality of the discovery, taking the necessary steps for the protection and classification of the discovery area as a site etc., exactly how the article 13 of the OG 43/2000 provide!).

¹¹ In the *Government Ordinance 43/2000*, in the article 3 it is provided that: “(2) *The Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs is the central public administration authority responsible for developing strategies and specific norms for research aimed at protecting archaeological heritage and ensuring their implementation. (4) Central public administration authorities of expertise, their subordinate specialized institutions, and local public administration authorities collaborate and are responsible, according to the law, for the activity of protecting archaeological heritage*”. Finally, the article 5 provided that (1) “*By protecting archaeological heritage assets and lands in the areas defined in Article 2, paragraph (1), letters j) and k), it is understood the adoption of scientific, administrative, and technical measures aimed at preserving accidentally discovered vestiges or those resulting from archaeological research until the classification of the respective assets or until the completion of archaeological research, by imposing obligations on the owners, administrators, or holders of other real rights over the lands containing or having contained the respective archaeological heritage assets, as well as by regulating or prohibiting any human activities, including those previously authorized.*” <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/77109>.

Unfortunately, the director of this institution, although a government official of the Romanian State and listed as an archaeologist in the *Register of Archaeologists in Romania* (1)¹², has not taken any measures, even though the status of a *public employee* obliges him, in case of any suspicion regarding the legal circumstances of the discovery of treasures and their handover, to notify the judicial authorities; otherwise, he could be liable for the offense provided by Article 267 of the Penal Code: "failure to report a crime to judicial authorities".

Thus, for more than a month, an extremely important ancient coin hoard remained *in situ* without anyone knowing about it, with only the discretion and good faith of the discoverer being the guarantee of its integrity.

It is symptomatic that the situation recorded the attention of the local and national mass-media¹³, which presented this case as a disappointing failure of the institution that should have been fully involved in managing the issues generated by the accidental discovery of treasures.

The archaeological research had an emergency and rescue character, given that it was the subject of the activities carried out in a criminal case. Archaeological research led to the identification of the context, its full documentation and the recovery of both archaeological data and information and the monetary hoard, composed of over 110 silver coins. Following the investigation of the context and perimeter of the discovery, the experts of the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia requested the registration of the archaeological site in the National Archaeological Repertory.

The discovery of the monetary treasures in Jidvei is not an unprecedented event. In the last 10 years, on the Târnava Mica and Târnava Mare valleys, several deposits of artifacts and monetary treasures from both the second Iron Age and the Roman period have been discovered by metal detector users. These findings contribute to supplementing the known historical data and information from the specialized literature regarding this specific area. The archaeological repertoires of Alba, Sibiu, and Mureș counties have thus been effectively enriched by these new discoveries, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the place and role played by this area between the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD.

¹² According to the *Deontological Code of Archaeologists in Romania*: (1) "The entire professional activity of the archaeologist is exclusively dedicated to the identification, research, conservation, protection, and valorization of cultural and natural heritage. (2) The activity of archaeologists expressly and prioritarily concerns archaeological heritage, namely archaeological sites, movable assets, and the context from which they originate". <https://lege5.ro/gratuit/gezdknrygyqdg/codul-deontologic-al-arheologilor-din-romania-din-19082022>.

¹³ <https://www.g4media.ro/tezaurul-dacic-de-la-jidvei-uitat-de-autoritati-in-padure-timp-de-o-luna-dupa-ce-dosarul-s-a-ratacit-intre-institutiipolitia-a-deschis-un-dosar-penal.html>, <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/alba-iulia/tezaur-monetar-dacic-abandonat-in-padure-2208849.html>, <https://click.ro/actualitate/national/cum-a-fost-lasat-de-izbeliste-un-tezaur-monetar-2207271.html>, <https://alba24.ro/tezaurul-dacic-de-la-jidvei-lasat-in-padure-aproape-o-luna-de-la-descoperire-politia-a-deschis-dosar-penal-dupa-o-postare-online-943611.html>, <https://www.agerpres.ro/cultura/2022/11/10/alba-doua-tezaure-cu-monedede-antice-foarte-valorose-descoperite-de-detectoristi-autorizati-galerie-foto--1011672>, all of this accessed at 21.12.2023.

The steps related to the thorough investigation of the discovery area at Jidvei-Bleş, the detailed analysis of coins and other associated artifacts, continued by correlating them with existing data and information in specialized literature, as well as with known data regarding recent discoveries, will be the subject of a separate volume to be published later this year.

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We express here our gratitude to Mr. Szakacs Josef, the discoverer of the coin hoard for the way he reacted to revealing the context that preserved the treasure, for the manner in which he handed over the artifacts to the institution specified by legal documents, and for the way they understood the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the discovery. Finally, we thank for how he brought attention to the situation in the public space, and for his direct implication in gathering the information regarding many aspects of the discovery, also for providing us with references and information on various aspects regarding the archaeological contexts from the site Jidvei-Bleş.

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