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NEW EVIDENCE CONCERNING THE *ALA ILLYRICORUM* FROM BRÂNCOVENEȘTI / MAROSVÉCS*

Katalin SIDÓ** – Szilamér-Péter PÁNCZÉL***

This paper presents four newly discovered Roman military tile and brick stamps from Brâncovenesti / Marosvécs. One belongs to a type already known as belonging to the Ala numeri Illyricorum, the other two represent a new type and can be read as Ala Illyricorum.

Keywords: military stamps, auxiliary unit, Illyrians, *ala*, *numerus*, *limes*.

Cuvinte-cheie: șampilă militară, unitate auxiliară, illiri, *ala*, *numerus*, *limes*.

The Roman fort at Brâncovenesti / Marosvécs (Mureș / Maros County, Romania) is located on the right bank of the Mureș River and it was one of the most important fortifications on the eastern *limes* of Roman Dacia and subsequently Dacia superior, later Dacia Apulensis (Fig. 1).

The archaeological site has been known since the 19th century,¹ tackled and researched later by I. Paulovics, who highlighted its position and strategic importance² and the existence of a single military stamp with *al(ae) n(umeri) Il(l)yr(icorum)* set in a die with *tabula ansata* (Cat. 1; Pl. I/1a–b).³

The first archaeological excavations were carried out between 1970 and 1987 by D. Protase and A. Zrínyi. They were focused on the defensive structures of the fort, determining its exact dimensions and location, and on different parts of the nearby civil settlement.⁴ Since then, studies have been published on the internal organisation of the fort,⁵ geophysical and topographical surveys⁶ or the archaeological material.⁷

The shortage of military tile and brick stamps from Brâncovenesti is rather unusual, even though large areas of the site have been excavated in the 20th century, and large amounts of inscriptions have been recovered in the area of the *porta decumana* and the western precinct wall.⁸ I. I. Russu studied the history of the auxiliary unit and the funerary inscriptions, which can be linked to a presumed Illyrian ancestry.⁹ Ever since, these inscriptions have been tackled on several occasions.¹⁰

* We would like to thank Florian Matei-Popescu for his advice and help during our research and Krisztina Csibi for her help with the illustrations.

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¹ NEIGEBEUR 1851.

² PAULOVICS 1944, 23–27.

³ See mainly: SZABÓ 1865, 79–80; CIL III 6284 = 8075/7; SZILÁGYI 1946, 51, Tábla XIV/200; RUSSU 1957, 361; PROTASE–ZRINYI 1975, 62, Pl. XXVII/1–2; PROTASE 1977, 384–386, Fig. 4, Pl. 37/1; RUSSU 1977, 94, Fig. 1, 99; PROTASE–ZRINYI 1992, 101, nr. 15, Pl. VIII/1a; AE 1992, 1474; PETOLESCU 1993, 394–395, nr. 607; PROTASE–ZRINYI 1994, 41, Pl. XLVI; SPAUL 1994, 150–151; LAZĂR 1995, 87; GUDEA 1997, 57; PETOLESCU 2002a, 132; KURZMANN 2006, 126; ILD 454; GREC 2010, 103, Fig. 56; MATEI-POPESCU 2014, 207; MATEI-POPESCU–ȚENEA 2016, 9–10; PISO–MARCUS 2016, 73–74.

⁴ PROTASE–ZRINYI 1975; PROTASE 1977; PROTASE–ZRINYI 1978; PROTASE–ZRINYI 1992; PROTASE–ZRINYI 1993; PROTASE–ZRINYI 1994.

⁵ MARCU 2009, 119–120.

⁶ POPA ET AL. 2010; PÁNCZÉL ET AL. 2012.

⁷ SIDÓ 2018; SIDÓ 2020.

⁸ PROTASE–ZRINYI 1975; PROTASE–ZRINYI 1992.

⁹ RUSSU 1977.

¹⁰ See mainly: PETOLESCU 2021, 214; DANA 2010, 204.

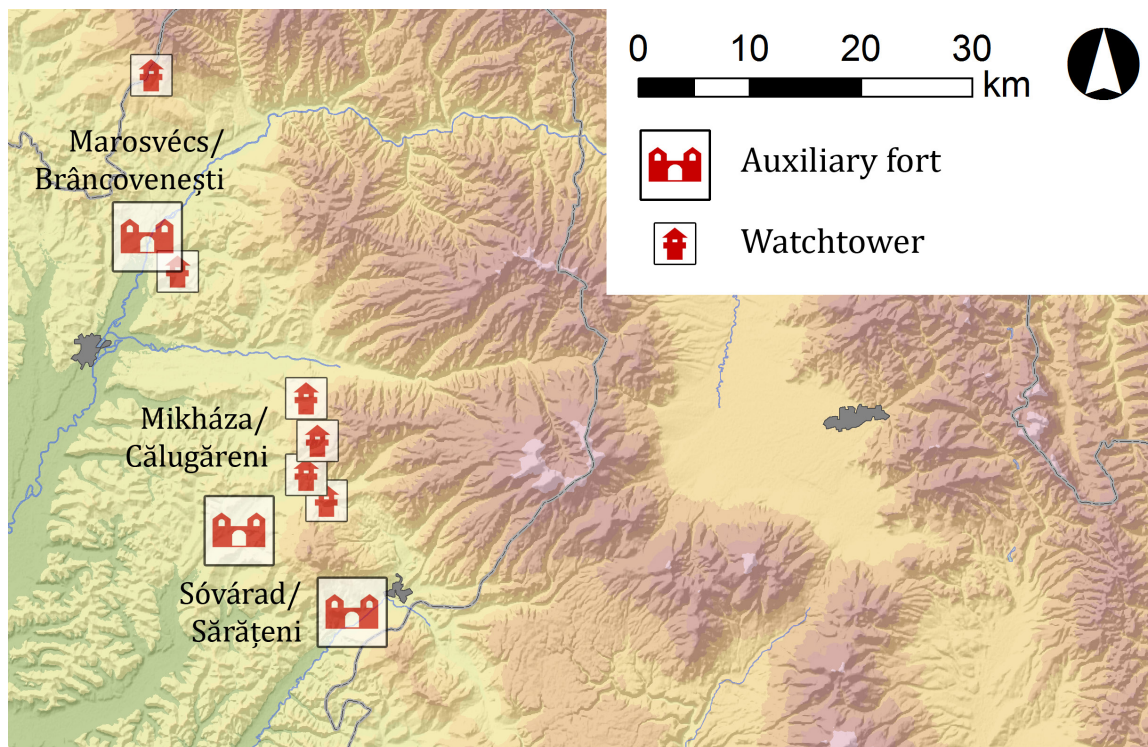


Fig. 1. Map of the eastern *limes* between the Mureș and Târnava Mică valleys (Made by M. Szabó)

The discussion regarding the chronology and the different name variants of the auxiliary unit from Brâncovenești relies on a few written sources.

J. Spaul dates the creation of the unit to the 2nd century AD as *vexillatio equitum Illyricorum*.¹¹ In a more recent study, C. C. Petolescu points out that the *vexillatio*, probably *miliaria*, was created by Trajan, of *equites* chosen (*electi*) from Illyricum (Illyricum superius). The *vexillatio* was brought to Dacia by Hadrian, and divided into two *quingenariae* units.¹² By the end of his reign, the units were transformed into *numeri*.¹³ F. Matei-Popescu¹⁴ and F. Matei-Popescu with O. Țentea¹⁵ support the idea that the unit from Brâncovenești was different from the one stationed at Hoghiz, and starting from the 3rd century it became an *ala*.¹⁶ Refer-

ring to a funerary inscription from Ratiaria,¹⁷ C. C. Petolescu pointed out that in Dacia there were two units with a similar name, the *ala numeri Illyricorum* stationed at Brâncovenești in Dacia superior, from where the veteran of Ratiaria originates, and another unit, *numerus equitum Illyricorum*, probably stationed at Hoghiz in Dacia Inferior.¹⁸

I. Piso and F. Marcu enlist all the previous readings of the stamp and suggest a dating to the second part of the 2nd or 3rd century AD.¹⁹

The name of the Illyrian cavalry units appears between 125–140 as *vexillatio equitum Illyricorum*,²⁰ and after 140 as *numerus equitum Illyricorum*.²¹ The *ala* is mentioned mainly in

¹¹ SPAUL 1994, 150.

¹² In a yet unpublished diploma from 124 AD, the unit appears as *vexillatio equitum electorum Illyricorum* (information from F. Matei-Popescu).

¹³ PETOLESCU 2021, 213–214.

¹⁴ MATEI-POPESCU 2014, 206–207.

¹⁵ MATEI-POPESCU-ȚENTEA 2016, 9–10;

¹⁶ For the stamp of the *n(umerus) I(llyricorum)* from Hoghiz (CIL III, 8075 = IDR III/4, 243 = AE 1974, 561), see: MATEI-POPESCU-ȚENTEA 2016, 10.

¹⁷ AE 2011, 1103b = AE 2014, 1121

¹⁸ PETOLESCU 2018, 282, no. 1949.

¹⁹ PISO-MARCU 2016, 74.

²⁰ AE 2009, 1035; CIL XVI, 75 = IDR I/10 = DANA 2020, 164; RMD V, 376 = PETOLESCU 2002B, 317–318 = ILKIĆ 2009, 59–73; AE, 1920, 45 = IDRE II, 42.

²¹ AE 2002, 1223 = RMD V, 384; RMD I, 39 = IDR I/13; WEISS 2012, 192; ECK-PANGERL 2011, 230; RMD IV, 269; ECK-PANGERL 2008, 192–193; IDR III/5, 585 = CIL III, 1197; CIL VIII, 9358 = ILS 2738 = AE 1987, 827 = IDRE II, 464; CIL XI, 393 = ILS 2739 = IDRE I, 132; GREGORI-MATEI-POPESCU 2025.

the sources from the 3rd century,²² excepting a funerary inscription from Apulum, where the connection with the unit can be questioned due to its fragmentary state and which is dated to the 2nd half of the 2nd century AD.²³

The aim of this paper is to present four recently discovered stamped bricks and a tile. Due to infrastructural developments in Brâncovenești, a rescue excavation took place in 2023 and 2024, changing our understanding of the civil settlement, which turned out to be considerably larger than previously assumed, extending also to the first and the second terraces of the Mureș River.

One of the newly discovered brick stamps (Cat. 2; Pl. I/2, II/1–2) is identical to the previously known one, bearing the *[al(ae)] n(umeri) Il(l)yr(icorum)* stamp. Discovered as a reused building material in the *vicus* (Pl. II/2), it was found on the clay floor of a building with a stone foundation, located east of the military fort on the first terrace of the Mureș River. The floor can be dated by the archaeological material to the 2nd century AD. The brick was stamped erroneously, therefore only the letters *NILYR* in a die and the upper part and the right ear of the *tabula ansata* are visible.

The second new stamp (Cat. 3; Pl. III) bears the letters *ALE ILLYR* in a die with *tabula ansata*, the letters *ALE*, *IL* and *YR* are in ligature, so the stamp can be read as *al(a)e Illyr[(icorum)]*. Even though the stamp is fragmentary and the right ear of the *tabula ansata* is missing, the inscription does not seem to be affected. The tile was discovered in the area of the *vicus*, in the fill of a modern building pit.

The third new stamp (Cat. 4; Pl. IV) is similar to the previous one with the text *Al(a)e · Il[lyr(icorum)]*, but only the letters *ALE* and *IL* in ligature are preserved and the rest, together with the right ear of the *tabula ansata*, is missing. The brick was discovered in the *vicus*, in

a layer related to the destruction of a building with a stone foundation and clay floor, dated to the last phase of the Roman settlement. Even if the dating based on the archaeological material is not conclusive enough, it does support the dating to the wider 3rd century AD.

The fourth new stamp (Cat. 5; Pl. V) also bears also the *[al(a)e] Illyr(icorum)* stamp, only the letters *ILLYR* are preserved, *IL* and *YR* in ligature, and the right side of the *tabula ansata*. On the left side of the fragment, the lower right part of a hasta from probably *LE* in ligature is visible, the rest with the right ear of the *tabula ansata*, is missing. The brick was discovered in the *vicus*, in the fill of a posthole, which belonged to a structure from the latest Roman phase of the settlement, so the second–third quarter of the 3rd century AD. The stamped tile was possibly used as a packing of the posthole.

Since all the finds were recovered in the *vicus* as reused building material or as part of a destruction layer, the dating of their use, based on the context of discovery has to be treated with a certain amount of scepticism. Even though we can postulate that the *al(ae) n(umeri) Il(l)yr(icorum)* stamp shall be dated to the second part of the 2nd century AD, and the *al(a)e Illyr(icorum)* stamps belong rather to the 3rd century AD, we can't exclude the possibility that they could have been produced and used earlier. The fact that the stamps with *al(a)e Illyr(icorum)* show different variants (eg. shape and size of the *tabula ansata*, shape and size of the letters and appear on bricks and tiles as well), could indicate that this name was used for a longer time span. In conclusion, the Brâncovenești unit probably changed its name from *ala numeri Illyricorum* to *ala Illyricorum*. Regarding the renaming of the unit, the stamps from a 3rd century context can be used only as *terminus ante quem*.

CATALOGUE

Cat. 1.

Brick with the *Al(ae) n(umeri) Il(l)yr(icorum)* stamp in *tabula ansata*. The letters *AL* in ligature (Pl. I/1a–b).

Dimensions of the die 3.2 × 17 cm; letters of 1.8 cm.

²² AE 1988, 947 = IDR III/5, 631; IDR III/5, 475 = AE 1987, 829; PROTASE –ZRINYI 1992, 96–98, nr.1, Pl. II/1a; ILD 440 = AE 1992, 1472; CIL VI, 3234^o = ILS 2209 = IDRE I, 54 (*ala I Illyricorum*, perhaps the official name of the unit in the first half of the 3rd century); AE 2011, 1103b = AE 2014, 1121.

²³ AE 1988, 957 = IDR III/5, 631.

Discovered in 1847.

Collections of the National Museum of Transylvanian History, Inv. no. MIC 19 = V 12896.

Cat. 2.

Brick with the *[Al(ae)] n(umeri) Il(l)yr(icorum)* stamp in *tabula ansata* (Pl. I/2, II/1–2).

Dimensions 39.8 × 28.2 cm, thickness 5.7 cm, dimensions of the die 12.5 × 3 cm; letters of 1.9 cm.

Discovered in Trench CR 214, Context 247, Small find no. 553.

Archaeological collections of the Mureș County Museum, Inv. no. 17273.

Cat. 3.

Tegula with the *Al(a)e · Illyr[(icorum)]* stamp in *tabula ansata*. *ALE*, *IL* and *YR* in ligature (Pl. III).

Dimensions 11 × 8 cm, thickness 3.1 cm, dimensions of the die 9.9 × 3.6 cm; letters of 2 cm.

Discovered in Trench CR 211, Context 234, Small find no. 287.

Archaeological collections of the Mureș County Museum, Inv. no. 17274.

Cat. 4.

Brick with the *Al(a)e · Il[lyr(icorum)]* stamp in *tabula ansata*. *ALE* and *IL* in ligature (Pl. IV).

Dimensions 22 × 18 cm, thickness 5.8 cm, dimensions of the die 6.7 × 4.1 cm; letters of 2.1 cm.

Discovered in Trench CV 88.16–17, Context 126, Small find no. 244.

Archaeological collections of the Mureș County Museum, Inv. no. 17275.

Cat. 5.

Brick with the *[Al(a)e] · Illyr(icorum)* stamp in *tabula ansata*. *IL* and *YR* in ligature. On the left side of the fragment, the lower right part of a hasta from probably *LE* in ligature is visible (Pl. V).

Dimensions 21 × 12 cm, thickness 4.9 cm, dimensions of the die 9.5 × 3.7 cm; letters of 2.7 cm.

Discovered in Trench CV 89.1.7.2-A, Context 867, Small find no. 1072.

Archaeological collections of the Mureș County Museum, Inv. no. 18271.

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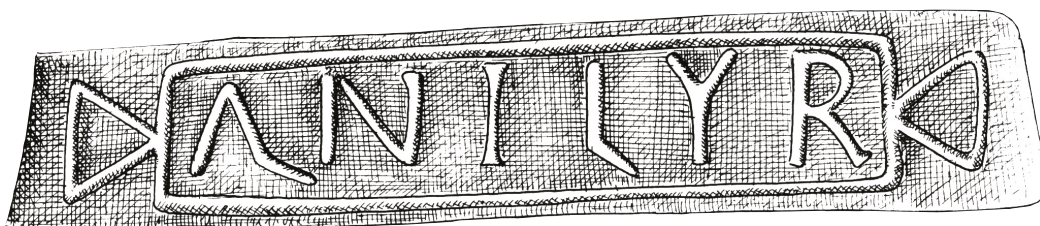
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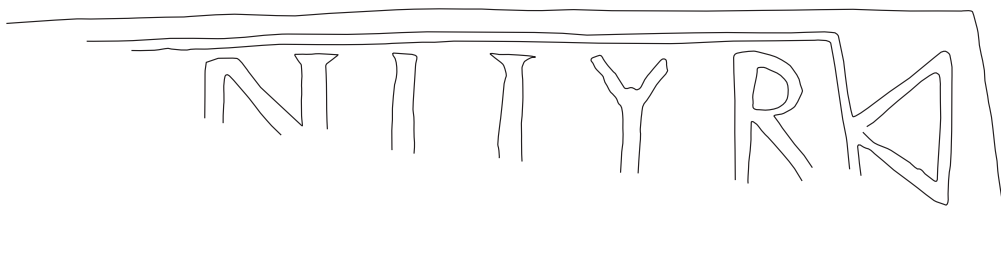
1a.



1b.



2.



0 5 cm

Plate I. 1. Cat. 1 (1a. PISO–MARCUS 2016, 73–74, XCVIII;
1b. PROTASE–ZRÍNYI 1994, 116, Pl. XLVI/1a); 2. Cat. 2.

1.



2.



Plate II. 1. Cat. 2; 2. *In situ* photo of Cat. 2.

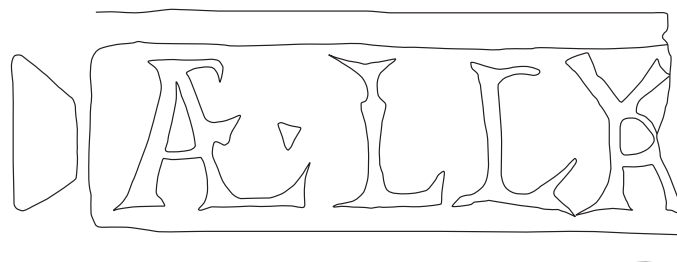
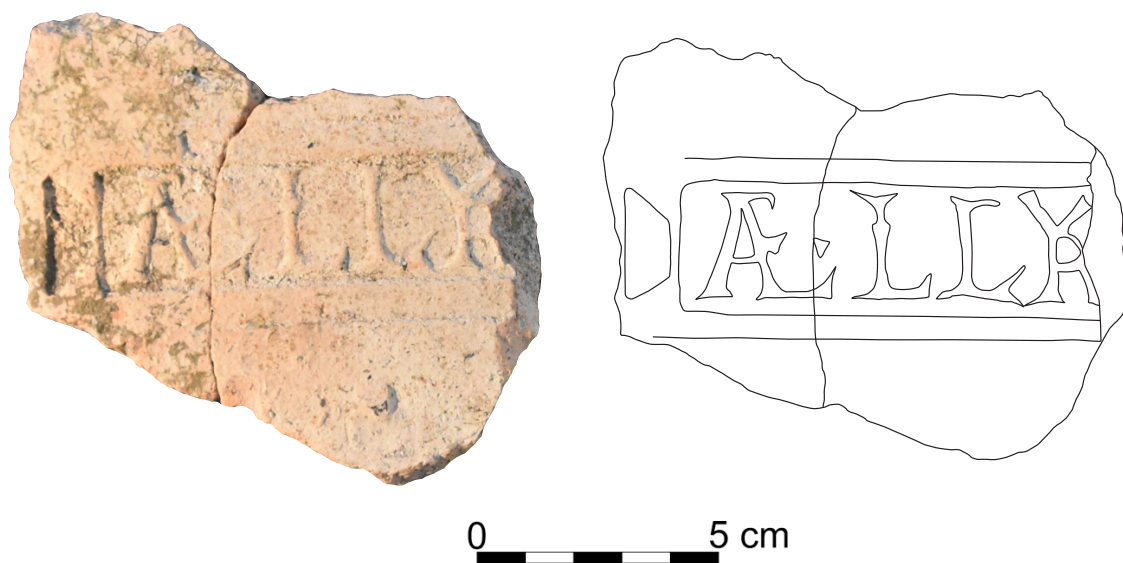
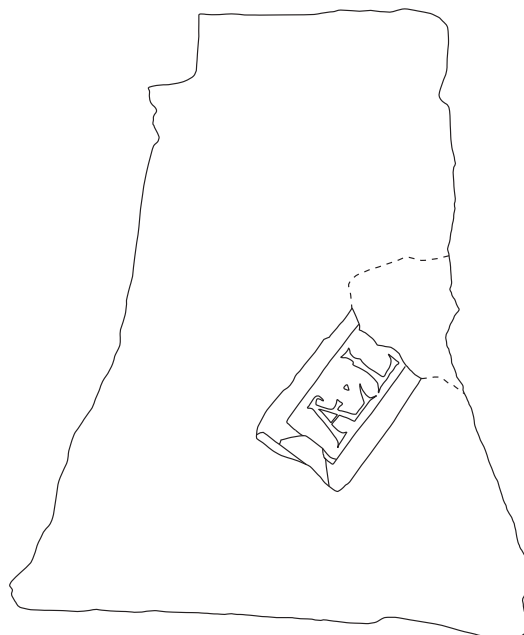


Plate III. Cat. 3.



0 5 cm

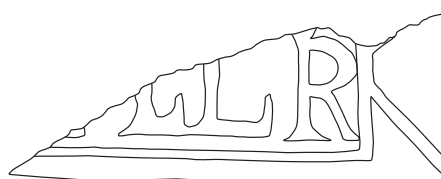


0 5 cm

Plate IV. Cat. 4.



0 5 cm



0 5 cm

Plate V. Cat. 5.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ActaAntHung</i>	Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapest
<i>ActaArchHung</i>	Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapest
<i>ActaMilMed</i>	Acta Militaria Mediaevalia
<i>ActaMN</i>	Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca
<i>ActaMP</i>	Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău
<i>ActaPraehistA</i>	Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica
<i>AnB</i>	Analele Banatului
<i>Angustia</i>	Angustia. Muzeul Carpaților Răsăriteni, Sfântu Gheorghe
<i>Antiquity</i>	Antiquity. A Quarterly Review of Archaeology
<i>Apulum</i>	Apulum. Acta Musei Apulensis, Alba Iulia
<i>ArchÉrt</i>	Archaeologiai Értesítő, Budapest
<i>ArchKorr</i>	Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt, Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum Mainz
<i>ArhMold</i>	Arheologia Moldovei
<i>Banatica</i>	Banatica, Muzeul Banatului Montan, Reșița
<i>BAR (I.S./B.S.)</i>	British Archaeological Reports, International Series / British Series, Oxford
<i>BayVgBl</i>	Bayerische Vorgeschichtsblätter
<i>BerRGK</i>	Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission
<i>BHAUT</i>	Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Universitatis Timisiensis
<i>BMA</i>	Bibliotheca Musei Apulensis
<i>BMusBrux</i>	Bulletin des Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Bruxelles
<i>CA</i>	Cercetări Arheologice
<i>CommArchHung</i>	Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae, Budapest
<i>Complutum</i>	Complutum. Publicaciones del Departamento de prehistoria de la Universidad complutense de Madrid
<i>Crisia</i>	Crisia. Muzeul Țării Crișurilor, Oradea
<i>Dacia (N. S.)</i>	Dacia. Recherches et découvertes archéologiques en Roumanie, I–XII (1924–1948), București; Nouvelle série (N. S.): Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne, București
<i>DissArch</i>	Dissertationes Archaeologicae ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös Nominatae, Budapest
<i>EphemNap</i>	Ephemeris Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca
<i>EurAnt</i>	Eurasia Antiqua
<i>FI</i>	File de Istorie. Muzeul de Istorie al Județului Bistrița-Năsăud, Bistrița
<i>FolArch</i>	Folia Archaeologica, Budapest
<i>Germania</i>	Germania. Anzeiger der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts
<i>HOMÉ</i>	A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve, Miskolc
<i>JAHA</i>	Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology
<i>JAMÉ</i>	A Nyíregyházi Jós András Múzeum Évkönyve, Nyíregyháza
<i>JASc</i>	Journal of Archaeological Science
<i>JbRGZM</i>	Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, Mainz
<i>JRA</i>	Journal of Roman Archaeology

<i>JRomMilSt</i>	Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies
<i>JRS</i>	The Journal of Roman Studies
<i>KuBA</i>	Kölner und Bonner Archaeologica
<i>Marisia</i>	Marisia (V–), Studii și Materiale, Târgu Mureș
<i>Marisia-AHP</i>	Marisia: Archaeologia, Historia, Patrimonium, Târgu Mureș
<i>MCA</i>	Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice, București
<i>MFME</i>	A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve, Szeged
<i>Oltenia</i>	Oltenia. Studii și comunicări. Istorie-Arheologie
<i>OxfJA</i>	Oxford Journal of Archaeology
<i>PBF</i>	Prähistorische Bronzefunde, Stuttgart
<i>ProcPrehistSoc</i>	Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society
<i>PZ</i>	Praehistorische Zeitschrift
<i>RA</i>	Revue archéologique
<i>RadMV</i>	Rad vojvođanskih muzeja (1994- Rad Muzeja Vojvodine)
<i>ReiCretActa</i>	Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautorum Acta, Tongeren
<i>RevBis</i>	Revista Bistriței, Complexul Județean Muzeal Bistrița-Năsăud
<i>SaalbJb</i>	Saalburg-Jahrbuch. Bericht des Saalburg-Museums
<i>Sargetia (S.N.)</i>	Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis, Deva
<i>SCIV(A)</i>	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche (și Arheologie 1974–), București
<i>SlovArch</i>	Slovenská Archeológia, Bratislava
<i>SMIM</i>	Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie
<i>StComBrukenthal</i>	Studii și comunicări – Muzeul Brukenthal
<i>SUBB-Historia</i>	Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, series Historia, Cluj-Napoca
<i>Századok</i>	Századok, A Magyar Történelmi Társulat Folyóíráta, Budapest
<i>Tibiscum</i>	Tibiscum. Studii și comunicări. Muzeul Județean Caransebeș
<i>Tisicum</i>	A Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megyei Múzeumok Évkönyve
<i>Tyragetia</i>	Tyragetia. The National Museum of History of Moldova, Chișinău
<i>UPA</i>	Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie, Bonn
<i>Ziridava</i>	Ziridava (–2012 Studia Archaeologica)
<i>ZMúz</i>	Zalai Múzeum. Közlemények Zala Megye Múzeumaiból
<i>ZPE</i>	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik

MARISIA. ARCHAEOLOGIA, HISTORIA, PATRIMONIUM

With a publishing tradition since 1965, in 2019 the annual of the Mureș County Museum initiated a new series entitled: *Marisia. Archaeologia, Historia, Patrimonium*. The publication provides a panel for new research results in archeology, architecture and material heritage of the history of arts and culture. The studies mainly focus on the inner Transylvanian region that encompasses also Mureș County. Beyond local valuable contributions, the annual aims at a regional and global concern that is relevant for the whole of Transylvania. Among the annual's missions is to provide mutual interpretation of the research results produced by the Romanian and Hungarian scientific workshops. Therefore, the annual articles are mainly in English but based on the field of research and the approached topic studies in German, Romanian or Hungarian are also accepted.

Cu o tradiție din anul 1965, anuarul Muzeului Județean Mureș s-a relansat în 2019 sub titlul *Marisia. Archaeologia, Historia, Patrimonium*. Această publicație se descrie ca o platformă științifică care cuprinde rezultatele cercetărilor în domenii precum: arheologia, arhitectura și patrimoniul material din zona istoriei artelor și a culturii, studii localizate în regiunea centrală a Transilvaniei, din care face parte județul Mureș. In extenso, anuarul își propune să ofere un spațiu unitar contribuțiilor științifice valoroase, relevante din perspectiva geografică a ceea ce înseamnă întreaga regiune a Transilvaniei. Una dintre misiunile publicației este aceea de a oferi tuturor celor interesați spațiul de schimb pentru cele mai noi rezultate din atelierele științifice românești și maghiare. Articolele anuarului sunt scrise în general în limba engleză, existând totodată articole scrise în germană, română și maghiară, în funcție de specificul domeniului și a temei abordate.

A Maros Megyei Múzeum 1965 óta megjelenő évkönyvének 2019-ben útjára bocsátott új sorozata, a *Marisia. Archaeologia, Historia, Patrimonium* elsősorban a mai Maros megyét is magába foglaló belső-erdélyi régió régészeti, épített és tárgyi örökségére, nemkülönben az ezekhez kapcsolódó művészettörténeti, művelődéstörténeti kérdésekre vonatkozó újabb kutatások tudományos fóruma. A lokális perspektíván túl igyekszik kitekinteni a regionális és univerzális összefüggésekre, így a tágan értelmezett Erdély területére nézve is közöl kiemelkedő értékkel bíró tanulmányokat. Küldetésének tekinti a hazai román és magyar tudományos műhelyekben született eredmények kölcsönös tolmácsolását. A dolgozatok nyelve főként az angol, de szakterülettől és témától függően német, román vagy magyar nyelven is közöl írásokat.