

The beginnings of the first museum(s) of Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár) in the 19th century

Csaba Szabó

*University of Szeged
Department of Religious Studies
szabo.csaba@szte.hu*

Béla Cserni (1842–1916) is considered the founder of urban archaeology in Transylvania and the first systematic researcher of the ancient Roman city of Apulum, one of the most important conurbations of the Danubian provinces (for a detailed biography of Béla Cserni and the history of museology in Alba Iulia see: SZABÓ 2016). Cserni had a long-lasting impact in the history of archaeological fieldwork, but also in local and regional museology and public education. The most important heritage of Béla Cserni is the museum of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), known as today National Museum of Unification from Alba Iulia (**Fig. 1.**). Considered today as one of the most visited and most prestigious museums and public institutions in contemporary Romania with around 100–120.000 visitors in a year¹, the core and main

- **Fig. 1.**
The National Museum
of Unification
from Alba Iulia
(photo after SZABÓ 2016,
151, Fig. 121)



attraction of the museum's material is still consisted by the heritage collected and organised by Béla Cserni in the first three decades of the institution. His activity between 1887 and 1916 focused mostly on the organisation and proper presentation of the archaeological collection. In this sense, one of the main cores of his activity and personal heritage is strictly related to the museum of Alba Iulia and the beginnings of professional museology in Transylvania at the end of the 19th century.

This study focuses on the impact of the museal collections of the Batthyaneum in the 19th century and the context of the foundation of the museum and Cserni's struggle as keeper and, later, director of the collection with local and national authorities and personalities in maintaining the museum and positioning it on the map of the successful public institutions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (See also: SZABÓ 2016, 151–179.).

¹ Verbal confirmation of Gabriel Rustoiu, the current director of the museum.

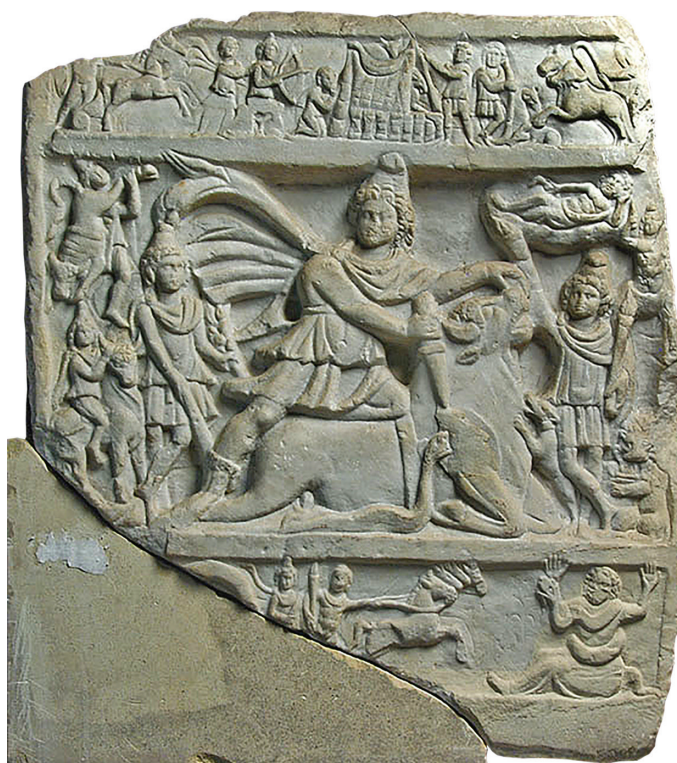
Archaeological collections in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) in the first half of the 19th century

The architectural landscape of Gyulafehérvár (Karlsburg, Alba Iulia) in the 18th century changed radically. The construction of the Vauban fort-complex and the Baroque imperial architecture in the Habsburg era had a destructive impact on the archaeological heritage of the Roman and Medieval periods (SZABÓ 2014). In the second half of the 18th century numerous major archaeological discoveries occurred especially on the territory of the *colonia Aurelia Apulensis* (Marospartos, Portus) (SZABÓ 2013). These played a crucial role in the foundation of the Batthyaneum Library and its archaeological collection, the most important cultural and scientific institution of the city founded by Ignác Batthány, the Roman Catholic bishop of Transylvania (on his life see: BIRO–HENDRE 2011. On the archaeological collection of the institution: MOGA 2011). The library had also an important archaeological collection, consisting mostly of the discoveries and Roman artifacts from Apulum, but also few pieces from other regions, such as Alburnus Maior or the Middle East. The Mithraic finds from the Batthyaneum became European attractions, numerous visitors of Transylvania and the earliest researchers of the Roman cult of Mithras studied the pieces kept in the custody of the library (SZABÓ 2022) (Figs. 2–3.).

In the first half of the 19th century, the large number of Roman epigraphic and statuary material discovered in the ruins of Roman Apulum surpassed the spatial capability of the Batthyaneum, which became too small for the new finds. Many of the materials discovered between 1820 and 1886 were transported in the museums or antiquarian collections of Aiud (Nagyenyed) and Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben), where another important archaeological collection was formed in the Brukenthal Museum. Even in 1860s when Béla Cserni was already in Alba Iulia, numerous



• Fig. 2. • Mithraic relief discovered in the ruins of Apulum in the 18th century, originally in the collection of the Batthyaneum (lupa 19256. Photo: Ortoľ Harl)



• Fig. 3. • Mithraic relief discovered in the ruins of Apulum in the 18th century, originally in the collection of the Batthyaneum (lupa 19314, photo: Ortoľ Harl)

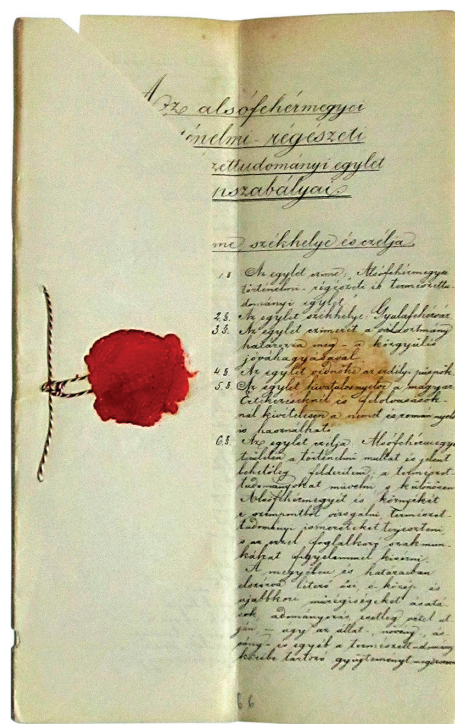
important artifacts discovered in the Marospartos (the territory of the colonia Aurelia Apulensis) were transported to Sibiu (SZABÓ 2016, 106–113.).

The foundation of the Association and the museum²

The first meeting of the founding group took place in the Jericho building (today the museum) in Alba Iulia on 5th September 1886. At the event a part of the intellectual elite of the county were present³, representing a small group of 23 personalities (JÁKÓ 1888, 11.), among them Károly Veszely, Sándor Mohay, the parliamentary deputy, Ferencz Novák, the major of the city, Zsigmond Reiner, the chief-medic of the city, Ignác Rajnay, Ávéd Jakó and Béla Cserni (named as Cserny there) (CM 1886, 13). In his opening speech, Zsigmond Reiner, founder and most important personality of the association, pronounced their programme and the main aims of the association: finding, keeping, and restoring the historical and cultural heritage of the county, “which is one of the richest in archaeological monuments in Hungary” (CM 1886, 13). The protocol of the meeting reveals, that the Association of History, Archaeology and Natural Sciences of Alsófehér County (*Alsó-Fehér Vármegyei történelmi, régészeti és természettudományi Társulat*) had been founded earlier. In the whole text, Reiner mentions the association as an existing one complete with an effective regulation and constitution. The recent document is the oldest known one owned by the Archive of the Museum of Unification which is related to the activity of the Association (MOGA – MÍRZA 1993, 418). We can presume, that the “founding” act also took place during the year of 1886. Reiner had already mentioned the idea of an association in his own journal (*Politikai Szemle*) (JÁKÓ 1888, 11. See also: NAGY 2016) but without a clear idea of the later constitution and main aims. One of the most urgent problems of Reiner in organising the association was finding human resources and willing intellectuals for this.

The first meeting was followed by another on 22nd September in the same year, when the final version of the founding constitution of the Association was accepted (Fig. 4).⁴ Ignác Rajnay was elected as the president of the Association, while Zsigmond Reiner – probably keeping a modest attitude towards the senior members – was elected as the chief-secretary of the Association. The meeting decided that until they settled on the

• Fig. 4. • The founding constitution of the Museum of Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár). (Photo: SZABÓ 2016, 155, Fig. 123.)
With the kind permission of prof. dr. Adrian Cioroianu, general director of the National Library of Romania.



² There are no studies or a comprehensive work which focus on the overall activity of the Association. This chapter intends only to present the foundation of the museum, although their activity was far more diverse.

³ It is important to mention that Jákó is very critical about the ignorance and missing of some prominent members of the social and intellectual life of Alba county: JÁKÓ 1888, 11–12.

⁴ The original and probably first manuscript of the protocol and the first version of the constitution is in the custody of the National Museum of Unification: CM 1886, 2. The first, official release of the constitution with the later seal of the minister of culture from 14th July 1887 is in the custody of the Batthyaneum: fond IX. nr. 36238, 66 ff.

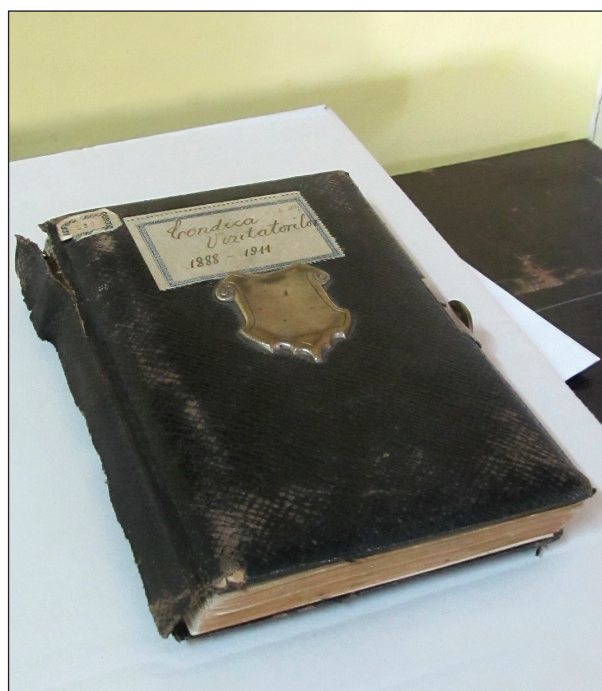
location and place of the first museum, two preliminary places would be dedicated for the collection of the archaeological material, one in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) and one in Nagyenyed (Aiud) (JÁKÓ 1888, 12.). The protector of the Association became Ferenc Lönhárt, bishop of Transylvania. The Association began its work on 26th September 1886 with 9 members. All events and official announcements were published in the *Politikai Szemle*, which became the journal and main medium of the group until the 15th August 1887, when the last issue was published. The foundation of the Association was welcomed by the Hungarian intellectual elite and other similar groups and societies with great enthusiasm: among the personalities who personally expressed their congratulations and will for collaboration we find Géza Kuún, Ágost Trefort, Albin Csáky and Kálmán Kemény, all of them illustrious personalities of the political and cultural life of Hungary.

The 6th paragraph of the constitution of the Association accepted on 22nd September 1886 and sealed with ministerial approve on 14th July 1887 affirms the main aims of the group: “*the aim of the association is to discover the historical past and present of the Alsófehér county, practicing the natural sciences, with special focus on the territory of the county, popularising the results of the natural sciences and monitoring the scholars specialised in these fields. Collecting the antiquities (“műrégiségeket”) of the prehistoric, antique, Medieval or early modern ages through excavations, private collections or even commercial routes, similarly to the zoological or botanic collections*” (M.b.B.fond IX. nr. 36238, 66). This manuscript, and the date 22nd September 1886, must be considered the “birth certificate” and the birth date of the museum’s collection. The nature of the initial collection, the quantity of the objects and the origins of the artefacts are unknown, however, we can presume that most of them came from private collections, discovered much earlier in the territory of the county. The first source which mentions the existence of the archaeological collection already in the first year of the Association comes from Cserni himself. As a deputy notary of the Association, Cserni took the chance at the general meeting from 6th March 1887, and mentioned the importance of the small epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological collection, kept in the house of Reiner (CM 1887, 57–62.). Cserni mentions that the collection is so small that it easily fits in a room of the house, however, it’s constantly increasing, and a separate space would be useful for housing it. Among the first artefacts owned by the museum, Cserni mentions in 1887 a coin from the time of Ptolemy and Alexander the Great, some coins from the age of Saint Stephan of Hungary, Roman stamped bricks and altars dedicated to Diana, Venus, Aesculapius, Hygeia and Nemesis⁵. The founding of this collection needs to be analysed in a wider context of the urban archaeology of the city of Alba Iulia (the Roman Apulum). Since the 1860s, the remains of the *colonia Aurelia Apulensis* were increasingly looted, especially after the building of the railway system in the Marospartos. It is not surprising that Béla Cserni, who was a personal witness of the destruction of the Roman ruins of the Colonia and a great passionate of history, saw a great opportunity to serve his beloved discipline and to save what is left from the Roman past of the city. His passion and interest toward history was probably well known by Reiner and the other members of the Association too, which legitimised his intention and militant proposal and fight to find a proper museum for the collection. At the general meeting from 2nd October 1887, Cserni was named for the first time as keeper of the museum (*múzeumőr*) (CM 1887, 87 and 104.). In the same document, Reiner mentions that the collection – which remained in his own, personal custody at that moment – counts almost 2000 objects and around 1000 books (JÁKÓ 1888, 25.). Although the protocols between 1886 and 1888 mentioned numerous times the existence and richness of the collection, they were never inventoried and catalogued in this period, as Ávéd Jákó already observed in his first report on the history of the Association (JÁKÓ 1888, 31.). From his report we can presume a high tension and internal conflict

⁵ It is hard to identify which these altars are, but some of them, such as the IDR III/5, 31, were part of the museum already in 1894.

between two main groups of the founders of the Association between October and December 1887. Reiner himself sent numerous letters to the president and vice-president of the Association, complaining that he couldn't take the responsibility of the collection anymore, which grew significantly in the last year and it was also now kept on the corridors of his house (JÁKÓ 1888, 31–33.). The internal conflicts within the Association were resolved on 4th November 1887, when János Csató was elected as new president and numerous titles were also redistributed. From the protocol of this meeting, we know that Ferenc Novák, major of the city already accepted the request of Reiner and offered two rooms in the nursery of the city, near the Orthodox Church from Lipoveni (MOGA – MÍRZA 1993, 426. The area today is severely modified and rebuilt). The transportation of the collection from the house of Reiner to the new place took place between 4th December 1887 and April 1888⁶. Considering the great number of the objects (almost 2000), these rooms could hardly be considered as a “museum”, so they served as a warehouse or deposit for keeping the collection in the same place. Kóródi mentions that Reiner also founded a small committee of three people (György Popp, Jenő Szentmiklósy, Béla Cserni) and a minimal budget of 115 forint for the furniture (KÓRÓDI 1902, 70.). We can get a short glimpse of the conditions from the report of the Association from 1888, when they described numerous problems: “*the doors and the windows are not closing properly, there is no heating in the place, moreover there are no facilities for lighting and writing*” (KÓRÓDI 1902, 71.). Even if the conditions were extremely poor and inefficient for serving as a proper museum⁷, the existence of the collection in a single place already represented an important step for creating the first modern museum of the city.

On 5th November 1888 the first catalogue and inventory of the collection and the library was published, which means that in a year, Cserni examined all the monuments in the small rooms of the nursery. The manuscript was completed just a month before the general meeting of the Association from 28th December 1888, when they accepted the proposal of István Pál to begin the systematic excavations in the garden of the widow of Ferencz Rhemann, where numerous stamped bricks, quadrate stones and walls of a monumental Roman building were found (CSERNI 1890, 22.). The excavation, which marked the life of Cserni in the following 25 years, was also an important motor for establishing a proper place for the museum. This did not happen, however, until 1900, when his excavation was already in the 10th season and the number of the finds from the black market and from the territory of the *Colonia Aurelia Apulensis* had increased extremely quickly. This means that between 1888 and 1900



• Fig. 5. • The first book of visitors of the museum. (Photo after SZABÓ 2016, 171, Fig. 129)

⁶ MOGA – MÍRZA 1993, 423 mentions, that the opening of the nursery as a museum happened in December 1888, however, Cserni's report from 12th April 1888 claims that they only recently finished the transportation of the collection. See also: KÓRÓDI 1902, 70–71.

⁷ On the definition of the „museum” and the main aim of their existence in the end of the 19th century, see: Pallas Nagy Lexikona, 1893, „Muzeum” and HAMPEL 1899, 1–5.

the rapidly increasing archaeological heritage was kept in two small rooms, without a great number of visitors or interest from the local community. A unique source for this early phase of the museum is represented by the book of visitors (**Fig. 5.**). On 9th November 1888, the two small rooms crowded with hundreds of artefacts were visited by an illustrious group of dignities: János Csató, president of the Association and vice-count (*alispán*) of the county, Ferenc Novák, major of Gyulafehérvár, Sándor Mohay parliamentary deputy, Jakab Halász, royal notary, József Roska, police chief, Miklós Kádár, city councilor, János Bőjthe, royal veterinary physician. Among the visitors between 1888 and 1900 we find: Pál Király (19th April 1889), Julius Jung⁸, Henrik Finály and Zsófia Torma (5th September, 1890), Gábor Téglás (24th August 1891), Conrad Cichorius (9th April 1892)⁹, Grigore Tocilescu and his wife (19th September 1891), Lajos Kardoss-Szádeczky with students from Kolozsvár (2-5th November 1893), Alois Riegl and Friedrich Drexel (July 1911)(MOGA – MÁRZA 1993, 434–435.). In the most “crowded” years, the museum was visited by less than ten people. Between 1888 and 1918 the museum had approximately 10,000 visitors, most of them from the city itself, but numerous foreign travelers too (MOGA – MÁRZA, 438–439.)¹⁰. Among the curious visitors we can find American and British tourists too. The famous journalist, Egon Erwin Kisch (1885–1948) also visited the museum on 11th July 1911 and later on 23rd August of the same year.

Cserni and the few members of the Association interested in the future of the museum faced four urgent problems: the rapid increase and doubling of the number of artefacts and the library¹¹ in the 11 years that the collection was kept in two small rooms, the struggle for financial support for a new museum, the tendency of monopolising the cultural and archaeological heritage of the county and the conflicts with local and national institutions.

Monopolising the cultural heritage: the struggle of Cserni with local and national institutions

Although the new excavations and their materiality increased rapidly the number of artefacts stored in the two small room of the first museum, the Association decided that, following the general rules of other similar counties, they would monopolise the cultural and archaeological heritage of Alsófehér county. The main aim was to avoid the formation and maintenance of new private collections and the rich, antiquarian black market, which was a prosperous business already in the 19th century in Europe and beyond. Similarly, by controlling the archaeological heritage through systematic excavations, the Association tried to avoid or, at least, reduce the number of illegal excavators and the amount of looting of the archaeological sites. This tendency for monopoly, however created a conflict with numerous personalities and some institutions, most notably, with the Batthyaneum.

The intention of the Association concerning the deposition of the archaeological collection of the Batthyaneum in the new museum must have been formulated already in 1892. The letter of provost Ferenc Barta and Simon Kovács from 16th January 1893 suggests that the conflict between the Association and the Roman Catholic Church persisted and even worsened (M.b.B.1887–1895, fond IX. Nr. 36238.).

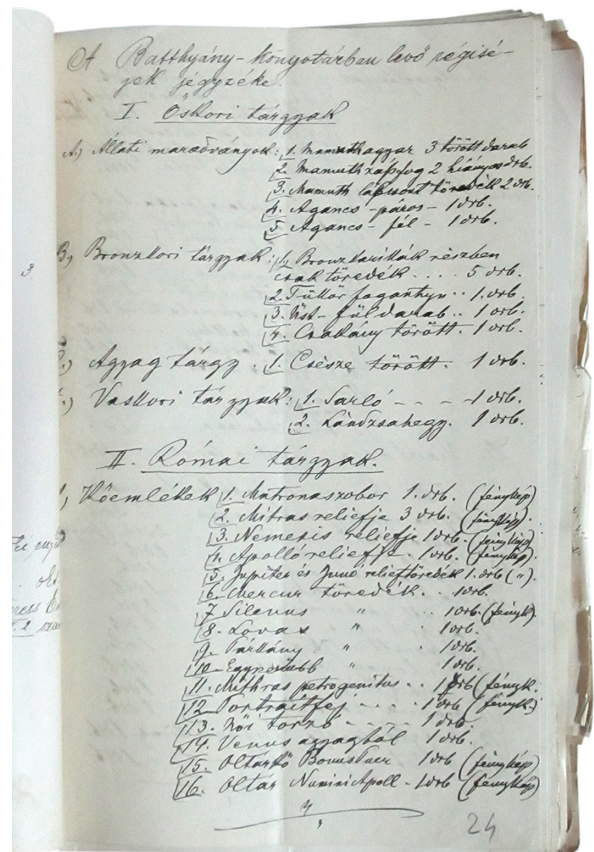
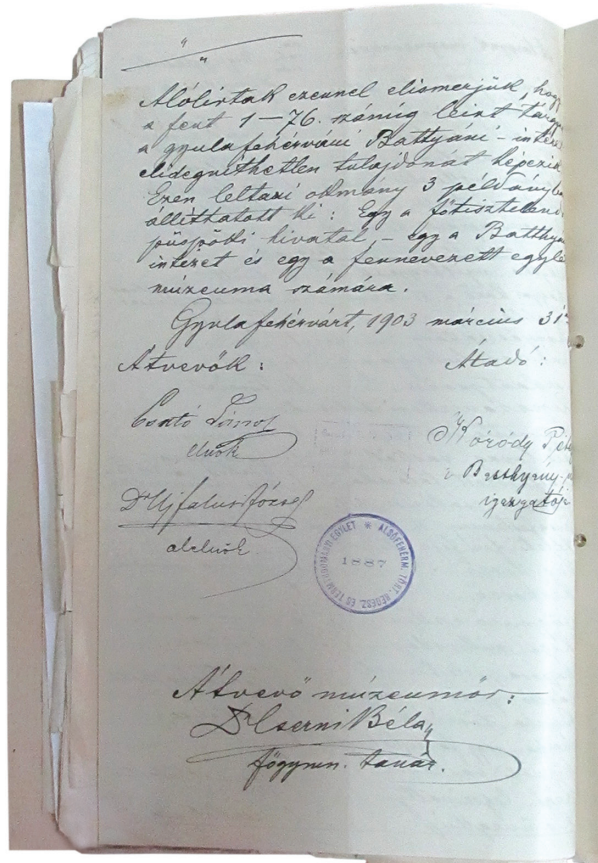
⁸ He also visited the museum in 1892.

⁹ His name appears incorrectly as Rudolf Chikorius.

¹⁰ The two authors gave the number without mentioning their sources. The book of visitors between 1888 and 1911 shows a flow of aprox. 100 persons per year. If we presume, that these are just the “celebrities” or those who find it interesting to mention their name in the book, still, the number of 10,000 seems exaggerated.

¹¹ The number of the books increased significantly after the donation of Ferenc Szabó and János Balogh.

Cserni, as a faithful Catholic, member of numerous local clerical associations and good friend of Péter Kóródi and the bishop Majláth himself, played an important role in negotiating between the two institutions¹². His humble nature and personal connections helped the two institutions to re-establish



• Fig. 6a-b. • Fragment from the contract between the new museum and the Batthyaneum. Photo after M.B.B. 1887–1895, fond IX. nr. 36238, 26. With the kind permission of prof. dr. Adrian Cioroianu, general director of the National Library of Romania.

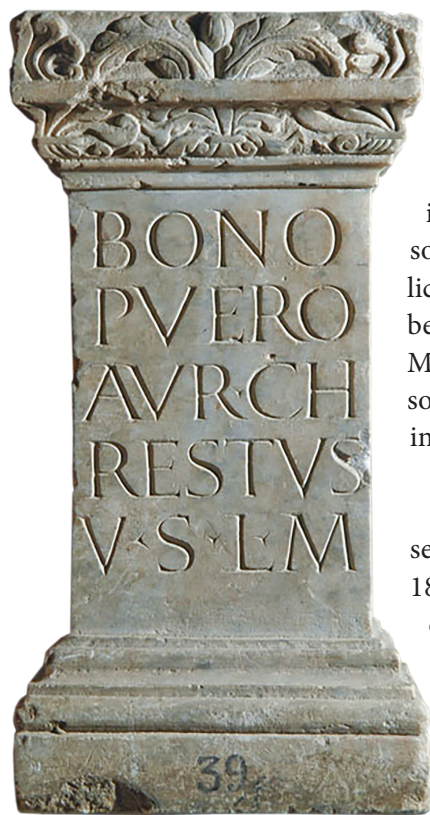
a collaboration, serving the safety and protection of the archaeological heritage of the city. Béla Cserni was one of a few people who had the right of examining personally and even remove from the Batthyaneum for a short period some of the artefacts on 11th September 1901. This was the first step for establishing a contract between the museum and the Batthyaneum in 1902, which stated clearly that a large part of the archaeological collection (not the complete one) was to enter the new museum as a deposition (“lerakat”)¹³. The decision was accepted by the ordinance Nr. 3316 of Gusztáv Majláth, bishop of Transylvania. The contract was signed by four people on 31st March 1903 (Fig. 6a-b.). The fact, that the contract was signed and the conflict between the two institutions stabilised must be explained by the diplomatic role of Cserni and the opening of the new museum building in 1900, which created a more prestigious and safer place for the artefacts. Cserni’s first catalogue and inventory of the 76 deposited artefacts was

¹² It is important to mention that Wosinsky and Pósta played also an important role in the negotiation between the Association and the Batthyaneum: VINCZE 2014, 331, footnote Nr. 1447.

¹³ The exact date of the deposition is not sure. A letter of Cserni sent to Gusztáv Majláth, bishop of Transylvania in 16th June 1902 already mentions that the artefacts are in the new museum.

finished in 20th April 1903. With this contract, the museum was honoured with some of the most valuable pieces of art ever discovered in Apulum (**Fig. 7.**): the beautifully carved and probably exported altar of Bonus Puer (IDR III/5, 301), the Europe wide known Mithraic finds (IDR III/5, 274, CIMRM 1972, 1973)¹⁴, altars (IDR III/5, 30) and reliefs (IDR III/5, 33). Beside the artefacts from Apulum, the deposited collection was rich also in prehistoric and medieval objects. The text of the contract clearly states that the 76 artefacts¹⁵ represent the “*inalienable property of the Battyáni-Institute*” (M.b.B.1887-1895, fond IX. nr. 36238, 26.) and that the museum took the artefacts as the right institute for deposition. The contract neglects to mention the number of those archaeological artefacts, which remained in the Batthyaneum and are still owned by the institution¹⁶.

The growth of the collection urged Cserni and the Association to take serious actions and put pressure on local authorities regarding the establishment of a new, proper museum. After a long debate between the Association and the Town Hall on 22nd January 1893 the foundation of a committee was suggested, which would focus on the establishment of a new museum (KÓRÓDI 1902, 71.).



The committee comprised of Ferenc Novák, major of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), who was elected as the president of the group, Áron Tamási, Adolf Jónás and Cserni himself. Their proposal became more urgent and accepted as a necessity by the city council at 30th June 1895, when the report of the Inspectorate mentioned that a large part of the epigraphic and statuary material was crowded in the garden of the nursery (KÓRÓDI 1902, 72.). The situation was so severe that the museum itself closed in 1896 for the greater public (CSERNI 1897, 37.). Many of the most significant finds discovered between 1880 and 1900 (IDR III/5, 317-319) were transported to the Museum of Deva, which indicates that the small museum of the Association had severe problems and still struggled with the influential institution from Deva.

A military building near the “excavation site” proposed for serving as the new museum, was already occupied by the army in 1895, which made the situation more difficult and forced them to continue searching a proper space for the collection. The problem became urgent and with the pressure of the Inspectorate, Cserni and the Association were finally successful in their struggle. In

• **Fig. 7.** • One of the most beautiful altars discovered in Apulum dedicated to Bonus Puer (lupa 19200. Photo by Ortoľ Harľ)

¹⁴ Some of the Mithraic monuments of Apulum – especially those found by Franciscus Kastal – were also in the Batthyaneum for a short period, however they were transported in the Brukenthal Museum before the foundation of the Association. Others, such as CIMRM 2185 could be part at a certain moment of the collection from the Batthyaneum.

¹⁵ The identification of each of these objects would be very hard today, the description of them is very short and not always clear. No representations of photographs were made about their original deposition and placement in the Batthyaneum.

¹⁶ A complete list of these artefacts was never published. Some of the finest pieces were briefly mentioned in: MOGA 2007. About the recently identified Pósta heritage, see: BIRO-HENDRE 2014.

this process Ferenc Novák, major of Gyulafehérvár, also played an extremely important role, as probably one of the most respected politicians of his age in the city¹⁷. His compassion and personal interest in establishing a museum was clearly visible from his activity in the local council. Novák – with the help of Cserni, who knew the major on a personal level– probably realised the economic benefits of a successful and proper museum in a city, which was slightly growing and became a touristic attraction for the middle class of the Belle Époque of the Monarchy. On 18th July 1900, the city council decided that they would provide the new building of the kindergarten on Mátyás square (today str. Moldovei Nr. 2.). Their decision was officially announced in a letter sent by Ferenc Novák to the Association on 3rd August 1900. The contract was signed by both parties (the city of Gyulafehérvár and the Association) on 8th November 1900. The new building of the museum was officially inaugurated at 10 a.m. on 12th December 1900 in the presence of Ferenc Novák, József Roska, János Csató and Béla Cserni. The Association also established the visiting hours (between 15 and 18 p.m.) although this was never respected strictly by the authorities (MOGA – MÁRZA 1993, 427.). The transportation of the artefacts probably took days or even weeks. The importance of the museum and its impact can be detected in the numerous articles appeared in the local press and in other Transylvanian journals too.

Cserni and the new museum: possibilities and perspectives

The newly rented building of the museum was a modest one (218 m²), built in bricks and stone in Neo-classicist style (Fig. 8.). It was divided in five rooms and a chamber, heated by three iron stoves and an oven. The largest room was dedicated to the permanent exhibition, one for the library, two used as deposits for the newly arrived artefacts and one as an office of the keeper of the museum (MOGA – MÁRZA 1993, 426). The porch had board facilities and surrounded with a great courtyard, used later as the lapidarium. The first description of the building mentions the great condition of the windows and doors – a phenomenon which will change very soon, when the museum was used and visited by numerous people.

• **Fig. 8.**
The new building
of the museum
in the beginning
of the 20th century.
(Photo after SZABÓ 2016,
168, Fig. 127)



¹⁷ One of the main squares of the city was posthumously named after him.

The photographic documentation of the interior proves that the museum was painted in a Pompeian style, imitating the interior of the well-known Roman villas from Pompeii. The pictures probably were taken after 1910, however their exact dating is unsure. Similarly, we don't know exactly the name of the artists who worked on the interior of the museum. One can presume, however, that all these works were conducted and supervised by Cserni himself, who visited Pompeii personally and had access to a bibliography, which helped him to develop his skills as museologist. His visits in more than 45 museums in all over Europe – especially in the leading archaeological museums and collections from Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, Mainz, Rome and Naples – influenced Cserni in organising the space and the interior of the new building, however, the local facilities and financial possibilities limited his ideas and perspectives. From numerous documents preserved in the collection of the Batthyaneum we know that Cserni already planned the extension of the museum after 1902 (M.b.B. 1887–1895, fond IX. Nr. 36235, for the years 1902–1905). The number of the artefacts increased exponentially every year, due to the excavations in the palace of the governors and after 1911 in the territory of the *Colonia Aurelia Apulensis* too. The transportation of the material from the Batthyaneum urged the transformation of the building too, with a much more prestigious and elegant look. Although, the members of the Association were happy with the new building, Cserni already knew in 1902, only two years after the inauguration, that the building will be far too small for such a cultural heritage and large number of artefacts. The photographic documentation attests the status of the museum only after the major modifications and the extension from the spring of 1905. Before that, the building was much smaller and had a much modest and crowded aspect and space for the artefacts¹⁸. Cserni planned not only the spatial organisation of the artefacts, the colours and paintings of the walls, but even the furniture and the cabinets of the exhibition already in 1904. He wrote on 9th October 1904 that the big room for the permanent exhibition is suitable only for a library, but definitely too small for the great number of reliefs, statues and stelae of Apulum. The extension of the building was finally accepted by the local council in the spring of 1905 and the works and modifications could begin.

The new museum interior was financed mostly by the Inspectorate (with 8000 corona) and the local council, but the Association also got important financial support from the German Community of the Fort (*Német Várközösség*), mostly because of Cserni's role as the secretary of the society. Numerous bills prove the intense collaboration between the two associations: there was an important 200 corona donation in 14th March 1901 and a second one on 19th January 1902 too. There were also numerous personal donations and financial support from some local notables and aristocrats (CM 1909, Nr.185 about the donation of Arnold Baumann). Despite of the exceptional collection – which was without doubt, one of the biggest Roman collections of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – the Inspectorate financed the museum yearly with 700-800 corona, which positioned the museum of Alba Iulia in a middle-rank status in the Empire (CM 1908, Nr. 58.).

The first extension of the building was made between 1905 and 1906. It consisted of the reorganisation of the rooms and the extension of the exhibition area in the main room, which now became more monumental and accessible for visitors. The photos showing the central room present the plastic reconstruction model of the palace of the governors, the well organised stone monuments (in the lower level, the reliefs, Mithraic monuments, funeral monuments and fragmentary statues) and the various coronae and capitals of Roman columns, published later also by József Hampel (HAMPEL 1911). The

¹⁸ The description of the museum before 1905 from the article of Valer Moga and Eva Mârza is not accurate in every detail, because the donation of Endre Orosz entered into the collection after 1905 while the dating of the pictures is not always clear.

walls – painted in bright colors of the Pompeian villas – were decorated with the portraits of the Roman emperors, garlands and Corinthian columns. The museum was also later extended with a three-storeyed wooden porch, where the latest stelae and stone monuments of Apulum were exposed, similarly to the *lapidarium* of Aquincum.

The extension of the museum in 1905-6 however wasn't enough for the rapidly expanding quantity of the artefacts stored there. The archaeological heritage of Endre Bakk consisted of 5465 prehistoric artefacts from Turda Gorge (*tordai hasadék*) and Vizakna¹⁹, while the donation of Zsigmond Reiner before his death also increased the collection significantly. As the report of 1910 shows, in almost every year there were small, personal donations of artefacts or former private collections for the museum: in that year alone, Albert Gyulaffy donated his numismatic collection and Onciu Constantin his archaeological one (ATÉ 16, 1911, 8). The number of the donated or newly discovered artefacts increased in every year. As an average we can count at least 300 new monuments and new items for each season. While in 1910 the collection of the museum had 25,231 items (3954 books, 14,822 archaeological artefacts) (ATÉ 16, 1911, 10), in the year of Cserni's death the collection consisted of 28,547 items (4634 books, 17,887 archaeological artefacts) (MOGA – MÁRZA 1993, 423.). This means that the archaeological collection of the museum increased every year between 1910 and 1916 with an annual average of 600 items²⁰. The enormous increase in artefacts, visitors and the library urged also some new administrative rules introduced by the Association. While between 1886 and 1888, Cserni was named as keeper of the collection, after 1888 his function was changed to keeper of the museum and library (*múzeum és könyvtárőr*). In 1910 the Association gave him the official title of "director of the museum", recognising his outstanding contribution and personal devotion towards his beloved institution²¹. These changes however did not affect Cserni's work that much. The reports highlight that he worked without salary since his election as keeper of the collection in 1886, dedicating his free time for the institution. His work was supported after 1907 by the deputy-keeper of the museum (*múzeumi segédőr*) Márton Barts, a teacher in the elementary school and a museum-personnel and guardian (*múzeumszolga*), Mihály Lajos, who, as a pensioned railway porter, was paid annually by the Association with 192 corona and hosted in the museum. After the death of Mihály Lajos, the new guardian was János Czeglédi. In the protocol from 28th June 1915, József Lestyán also appears as a keeper of the museum (*múzeumőr*). He served in this period as the future successor of Cserni, although he probably hadn't trained or prepared consciously for his future role (VINCZE 2014, 331.).

About the role of the keepers of the museum and their relationship with Cserni we can have a very kind and rarely attested, personal account from the letters of Márton Barts from the summer of 1905. In three letters, Barts gives a short report for Cserni, who spent his summertime in Budapest and in different Hungarian museums. Barts mentioned in his letter from 20th July 1905, that he bought the capitol of a Roman column from the Marospartos and give a detailed description of an excavation from the city (CM 1905, Nr. 6969.). The letter shows also, that Cserni was not present at all of the excavations, which gives a more important role to his colleagues. Similarly, in his vacancy, Barts and subsequent keepers of the museum were also responsible for the antiquarian market of Alba Iulia, which was growing significantly from the end of the 19th century. In another letter from 27th July, Barts mentions the visit of

¹⁹ A preliminary catalogue was established by Cserni on 6th July 1906. See also: ATÉ 16, 1911, 6-7.

²⁰ Although the number of the artefacts entered in the museum must have been even higher between 1911-12, when Cserni still had excavations in the territory of the *Colonia Aurelia Apulensis*.

²¹ MOGA – MÁRZA 1993, 421. In the annual report of the Association from 1911 Cserni still named as keeper of the museum (*múzeum és könyvtárőr*): ATÉ 16, 1911, 21.

a large group of pupils from Constanța, Kingdom of Romania (CM 1905, Nr. 6970.). The presence of a keeper to help Cserni was a necessity after the collection was moved in the new building in 1900, mostly because of the increasing number of visitors, as the visiting lists and the letter of Barts proves too. Their relationship – after a long and fruitful collaboration – passed the phase of the professionalism and also became a friendship. The letter from 3rd August 1905 reveals a very personal tone, where Barts explains not only details about the current excavation but gives a melancholic summary of the city of Alba Iulia in the very hot summer, where “*the streets are empty and there are almost no visitors in the fort*” (CM 1905, Nr. 6971.).

The only known visitors’ book ends in 1911, although the Association published their yearbook until 1917 and held their annual meeting and report until 1929. In many of these publications, the lists of the visitors are also preserved. This suggests that the museum kept functioning even after 1914, when the Great War began. From the reports of 1915–1917 we know that the war and its consequences affected severely not only the financial condition of the Association – and therefore, the museum – but also the general atmosphere of the city. The number of visitors declined radically, and the museum faced one of the most severe financial crisis of its existence. Cserni, whose health was also affected by the lethargy of the war and as well as his age, still continued to plan to extend the museum and to change and enlarge the outdoor part of the *lapidarium*. His sketches dated to 1912 and preserved in the collection of the Batthyaneum show not only his constant struggle and perseverance dedicated to his beloved institution, but also his artistic skills as a graphic designer. Cserni’s aim was to extend the wooden structure and steps annexed to the outside wall of the museum for the insupportable quantity of new monuments that arrived in the collection between 1900 and 1912. From his late photos we observe that many of the stone monuments – especially the fragmentary altars and funerary stelai – were crowded in front of the museum, without any possibility for a proper examination for visitors. His work and his small museum were already so well known in 1911 in Hungary and in the whole of Europe that József Mihalik affirmed: “*this man is a real treasure here, an irreplaceable apostle of the discipline*” (VINCZE 2014, 330).

His plans from 1912 were probably never realised. The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 and his death in 1916 buried the possibility and the opportunity for the museum to become a proper home for the enormous quantity of monuments discovered in the largest Roman city of Transylvania. Fortunately, most of the most prestigious artefacts saved and collected by Cserni still represent the core of the recent museum collection and keeps attracting more and more tourists from across the country and abroad.

The Museum after Cserni

The death of Béla Cserni in 1916 marked not only the end of the first important, historical phase of the museum, but also the slow end of the Austro-Hungarian museological traditions in Transylvania. After the political and administrative changes occurred in 1918–1920, Alba Iulia became part of the newly established Greater Romania. The history of the museum and the collection of Cserni in the period of 1918–1948 is marked by uncertainty and institutional crisis (BERCIU 1973), while the communist period is marked with institutional stability, expansion of the archaeological collection, the formation of the recent museal spaces and the political-ideological metahistories used in museology (URSU 2021). The museum had a slow, but certain revival after 1990, especially in the last two decades, when it was integrated in the international scientific and museological communities and became one of the most visited cultural institutions of Romania. The memory of Béla Cserni – known in Romanian literature as

Adalbert Cserni – was rediscovered in the last decade, celebrated in 2016 in the year marking a centenary of his death. Despite his long-lasting and living impact on the history of this institution and the city and the relative openness of local authorities on national or ethnical issues, there is still no commemorative plaque, statue or street in Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár) dedicated to Cserni. Such a symbolic, but essential act will mark the historical reconciliation of the past and presence of the museum from the former capital of Transylvania.

Abbreviations

- ATÉ** – Az Alsó-Fehér Vármegyei történelmi, régészeti és természettudományi Társulat Évkönyve
CIMRM – Vermaseren, M. J., *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae I–II*. The Hague, 1956–1960.
CM – Corespondența Muzeului Național al Unirii (inedit).
Lupa – Ubi Erat Lupa Bilddatenbank zu antiken Steindenkmälern (lupa.at)
M.b.B – Manuscris al Bibliotecii Batthyaneum

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