

ABOUT THE FORTIFIED SETTLEMENTS WITHIN THE AREA OF THE WIETENBERG CULTURE

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The Wietenberg culture is one of the most known cultures of the Bronze Age within the Carpathian Basin. Its evolution, divided in four stages, covers the whole period of the Middle Bronze and the beginning of the Late Bronze. The Wietenberg discoveries cover a large area, which during the period of maximum flourishing of the culture, included the territory delimited by the middle basin of the Crasna, the Barcău and the Someş in the north and the north-west, the Meridional Carpathians in the south, the Eastern Carpathians in the east, respectively the Apuseni Mountains in the west¹. At present, over 600 sites with archaeological findings (settlements, necropolises, isolated graves, and discoveries with unmentioned character) assigned to this culture. The Wietenberg culture stations were discovered in all the components of the relief of Transylvania starting from the region of the first terrace of the river courses to the mountainous region. Generally, it is about settlements with one relatively thin dwelling level, what indicates a short-time dwelling². But, in this study, we pay a special attention to the Wietenberg stations situated on dominant places, hardly accessible, which offer a good natural protection. Logically, there comes the question: these stations had been fortified or the Wietenberg communities had seized only the advantages offered by soil, respectively the so-called "natural fortification". The answer to this question can be offered only by the information obtained from the archaeological excavations.

In the analysis, we started from our own investigations done since 1992 in the Şimleu Depression. From a geographical point of view, the Simleu Depression situated in the south-west of Sălaj county, seems to be a connecting unit between the Superior Tisa region and the Transylvania Plateau (pl. V). This character is emphasized by the running direction of the two main river courses, the Crasna and the Barcău, oriented towards the Tisa Plain. From the west, the access in the Simleu Depression could be done only along the valleys of the two rivers through two gorges: that from Marca, in the Barcău valley and that one from Cehei-Şimleu on the Crasna. In exchange, towards the east, the link with the Transylvania region was possible through some secondary narrow gorges, that were passing across Meses Mountains (the gorge in the Rag valley), but especially through a longer route Vârşolţ-Hereclean-Zalău, and from here on through the gorge "*Poarta Meseşeană*" in the region of ancient Porolissum (*Geografia României* 1992, 41-44; *Sălaj. Monografie* 1980, 11-35; Morariu, Sorocovschi 1972, 13-71). In the middle period of the Bronze Age the whole Şimleu Depression was dwelled by communities of the Wietenberg culture (Bejinariu 2001, 95-117). Certain discoveries seem to emphasize short-time isolated dwellings of some Wietenberg communities at the beginning of the first stage of the Late Bronze after which only the discoveries of the Cehăluţ group (Bejinariu, Lakó 2000, 163-219) are certified in the entire area. At present, we know 25 sites with Wietenberg findings (settlements and a necropolis) in the Simleu Depression, as well as two hoards of bronze objects that

belong to the middle Bronze. Six (24%) of the Wietenberg stations known in the Simleu Depression are placed on dominant places hardly accessible. It is mainly about promontories, forms of relief with three steep sides with one way of natural access, the connecting passage with the rest of the hilly or mountainous massif. The Wietenberg stations from Plopiș "*Cuculeu*" (Bejinariu 2002, 239), Guirtelecu Șimleului "*Coasta lui Damian*" (Bejinariu 2000, 40-41), Meseșenii de Sus "*Osoiu Măcăului*"³, Șimleu Silvaniei "*Dealul Cetății*" (Bejinariu 1998, 243-254) and Porț "*Dealul Pleșa*"⁴ belong to this category. The sixth station is located on the superior plateau of Măgura Șimleului which dominates the north-west of the Șimleu Depression through its height (597 m)⁵.

At Plopiș "*Cuculeu*" there took place an archaeological testing trench. There were not found vestiges of fortification at the surface on the connecting passage with the hill from where the promontory starts. The Wietenberg station from Guirtelecu Șimleului "*Coasta lui Damian*" was investigated in 1998-1999. There were discovered two dwellings, a construction considered to be a workshop for working horn and a few pits. On the passage connecting the dwelled plateau with the north-western slope of Măgura Șimleului there were discovered two ditches and rests of afferent palissades. In the filling of the more recent palissade, ceramic La Tene fragments were found what excludes the assignment to the Wietenberg dwelling. In the case of the older palissade we do not have very certain data. But the fact that it had been built in a similar way with that one described above determines us to believe that both had been arranged in the same epoch respectively the earliest in the La Tene D period. The archaeological station from Șimleu Silvaniei "*Dealul Cetății*" was investigated between 1992-1997. Only two Wietenberg complexes were discovered intactly. The defensive arrangements on the connecting passage with the southern slope of the Măgura Șimleului belong to the "classic" Dacian period. In this epoch, as well as in the medieval period, "*Dealul Cetății*" suffered numerous arrangements and levellings for enlarging the area defended by the defensive system on the connecting passage. At Șimleu Silvaniei "*Observer*" elements of fortification discovered there belong to the First Iron Age, to the La Tene D period and to the early Middle Ages. The Wietenberg station from Meseșenii de Sus "*Osoiu Măcăului*" stands at the end of a spur on the western slope of Meseș Mount that dominates a secondary gorge that crosses the mountain. The information obtained as a consequence of the testing trench from 1957 do not speak about finding of some fortification elements.

In 1997, we took notice of the existence of a flat earth wave of 1,5-2 m in height and of a ditch of 0.5 m in depth and about 5 m in width on the very narrow connecting passage. By that occasion, we gathered not only ceramic materials of Wietenberg III type, but also Coțofeni ceramics, as well as a ceramic fragment worked at the potter's wheel that belongs probably to the La Tene period. In the absence of the archaeological excavations, the appartenance of the defensive system from the connecting passage is uncertain. The situation is somehow similar also in the case of the Wietenberg station from Porț "*Dealul Pleșa*". It is about a precincts with a surface of about 0,5 ha surrounded by a wave and a ditch perfectly visible even nowadays. Archaeological excavations done several times provided only ceramic materials of Wietenberg III type.

Starting from the concrete situation from the area mentioned above, we want to expand the investigation on the whole area dwelled by Wietenberg communities. We intend to analyze only the case of the stations considered to be fortified. From the beginning, we mention that there is a series of specialists who have pronounced for the existence of the fortifications within the Wietenberg culture (Horedt 1960, 127; Ferenczi 1964, 117; Chidioșan 1980, 81; Vlăsa 1973, 16-21; Z. Székely 1984, 18; Boroffka 1994, 100-101; Zs. Székely, 1999, 109-126), while others have considered that we possess just lacunary data in this direction⁶. In the last monograph dedicated to the monuments of Wietenberg culture, N. Boroffka presented a list of 14 fortified stations ("*befestigte Anlagen*") that means about 3% from all the Wietenberg stations known in that moment. It is about the stations from Bernadea "*Dâmbău*" (Mureș County), Cluj Napoca "*Str. Cireșelor*", Coldău "*Varbă*" (Bistrița Năsăud County), Dealu "*Cetatea Macului*" (Harghita County), Filași "*Pământul Pădurii Mari*" (Harghita County), Laslea "*Cariera de pietriș*" (Sibiu County), Liteni "*Cetatea Lita*" (Cluj County), Lutoasa "*Cetatea Ciuchiar*" (Covasna County), Oarța de Sus "*Ghiile Botii*" (Maramureș County), Porumbenii Mici "*Galath*" (Harghita County), Racu "*Dealul Bogat/Câmpul Cetății*" (Harghita County), Sighișoara "*Dealul Turcului*" (Mureș County), Turea "*Ökörtilalmas*" (Cluj County) and Turia (Covasna County) (Boroffka 1994, 100). It is mentioned that the fortification elements discovered in this case assigned to the period of the Wietenberg culture if other cultures had not been certified yet there or if the fortification can be related to the level of the Wietenberg culture (Boroffka 1994, 100).

As in the case of the mentioned discoveries from the region of the Șimleu Depression, at a more attentive analysis, the situation proves to be more complex. A few fortifications (Cluj, Racu, and Turea) were attributed to the Wietenberg culture exclusively on the basis of the archaeological investigations which generally lead to the conclusions with a certain degree of relativity. But, most of the mentioned stations were investigated through archaeological excavations. In many cases, the assignment of the defensive elements to the Wietenberg culture is uncertain, especially where there are proofs of dwelling from the subsequent epochs: the first and the second Iron Ages or from the early Middle Ages⁷. The excavations from Laslea "*Cariera de Pietriș*" executed by I. Mitrofan have been still unpublished, and the data concerning this station are very summary (Boroffka 1994, 52, nr. 243). In the case of the stations from Dealu, Lutoasa⁸, Oarța de Sus and Turia only the Wietenberg dwelling was archaeologically certified. In this case, the defensive elements should be also assigned to the Wietenberg culture. The defensive arrangements from Dealu and Oarța de Sus are represented by the earth wave (on which there had been probably a palissade) and ditch/ditches⁹. But, at Lutoasa (Z. Székely 1981, 21-22) and Turia¹⁰ we can speak about walls made of stone stuck with clay and accompanied by ditches in both cases. The use of stone, as material for building defensive elements at the fortified stations of the Bronze Age in Romania, is regarded with a few reserves by several specialists who have hesitated from this reason to put in correspondence this technique with the "prototypes" existent in the Egeean world (Bader 1990, 182). But, in the south-west of Transylvania the walls built of stone with clay are frequently met during the Dacian period¹¹.

On the basis of the matters presented above, the complexity of the problem of the existence of fortified stations in the area of the Wietenberg culture is obvious, as well as the difficulty of its approach only on the basis of the lacunary data that we have there are both arguments pro and counter as concerns the existence of this type of station. In the first view, we could really invoke those fortified stations where just signs of dwelling were certified from the period of the Wietenberg culture. In the region of the Șimleu Depression, from where we started this approach, we can take into consideration only the station Poșt "Dealul Pleșa" (pl. I). Here there were discovered, by the occasion of the surface investigations, exclusively Wietenberg ceramic materials, but the reserves are imposed by the absence of the archaeological excavations. That is how we get to the counter arguments, from which we mention not only the assignment of some fortified stations of the Wietenberg culture on the basis of the surface investigations, but also the fact that in certain cases the defensive elements were wrongly assigned to the Wietenberg culture. It was about achievements from the later periods.

It seems that, when we speak about fortified stations of the Wietenberg culture we take into consideration especially those stations placed in privileged positions from a topographic point of view: isolated peaks, margins of plateau, promontories etc. But we believe that when the proofs are not conclusive enough, for assigning the fortification elements to the period of the Wietenberg culture the word of highly-placed settlements instead of fortified settlements would be more proper. The hardly accessible lands, but easy to defend (what probably imposed the term of "naturally fortified") and the strategic places that dominate obligatory passing places, always determined the human communities to look for their security or from the necessity of controlling the access in the region, respectively the transit commerce. Utilization of those places for these goals along several historic epochs determined the disappearance of the anterior defensive arrangements in many cases because their enlargements through other similar workings or as a consequence of the extension of the fortified precincts through levelling works. We do not own evident proofs to demonstrate certainly the existence of the fortified stations in the area of the Wietenberg culture¹². But, it is sure that there are many Wietenberg stations situated in hardly accessible or strategic places. Referring to the latter one, we want to return to the situation from the Șimleu Depression where three of the six Wietenberg stations placed in high lands occupies even strategic positions along the main access ways. The Wietenberg settlements from Șimleul Silvaniei "Dealul Cetății" (pl. II) and Poșt "Dealul Pleșa" (pl. I) have the control of the access in the Șimleu Depression from the north-west and west along the Crasna and the Barcău valleys. By their position, the two settlements guard the gorges from Șimleu Silvaniei-Cehei and Marca, obligatory places of access in this micro-region (pl. IV). The third station, that one from Meseșenii de Sus "Osoiu Măcăului" dominates a secondary gorge that crosses the Meseș towards the Transylvania Plateau (pl. III). All the three settlements can be assigned on the basis of the discovered ceramics to the Wietewnberg III stage (according to N. Chidioșan's system)¹³. Half of the Wietenberg stations known in the Șimleu Depression do also belong to this stage.

The location of the three settlements suggests us the control attributions of guarding the mentioned access ways. This fact supposes the existence of local or even regional organizational structures which had possibilities for fulfilling this function. The concrete situation determined archaeologically in the region of the town Șimleul Silvaniei provides us signs in this direction. First of all there can be pointed out the large density of dwelling during the period corresponding to the Wietenberg III stage (pl. II). It is about eight sites with traces of dwelling from this period (Bejinariu 2003, 39-40) and a necropolis of incineration in urns¹⁴. The two hoards of bronze objects belonging to the middle period of the Bronze Age, that must be related to the presence of the bearers of the Wietenberg culture (Mozsolics 1967, 167, pl. 20/1-3, pl. 68/2-3), are significant in this context. The central site must have been that one placed on "Dealul Cetății", which offered good possibilities of surveillance., but also of withdrawing in case of danger. Two rivulets that run to the east and the west of "Dealul Cetății" can assure the necessary water. The station is relatively defended against the winds, too. Măgura Șimleului, even if very steep on the southern slope where there is "Dealul Cetății" is formed of mica-schist, a soft rock, that allowed the levelling of the slope for locating the households and practising the agriculture. Among the Wietenberg materials discovered by the occasion of the archaeological investigations in this site, we mention a sample valve for moulding shaft hole axes (Bejinariu 2003, 68, pl. XX/2) which constitute a sign of the existence of a metalurgic workshop in this site. Also on the "Dealul Cetății" the bronze hoard from Șimleu Silvaniei I containing two axes of Pădureni type and one of Hajdúsámson type (*Muzeumi* 1889, 375) was discovered at the end of the 19th century. The other sites with Wietenberg III discoveries from the region of Șimleu Silvaniei are placed at short distance by the central site at most 2 km in straight line¹⁵. The above mentioned necropolis is located at the foot of the hill "Dealul Cetății" to the south. The composition of the two mentioned hoards which contain together five metal objects is very interesting in the discussion context. It is both about objects frequently met in the Wietenberg culture from Transylvania (the two Pădureni-type axes) and about foreign objects of western structure as for example the Hajdúsámson-type axe, the short Au-type sword and the D-shaped bracelet with broadened endings. The latter two objects are associated to the hoard Șimleu Silvaniei II. From these objects, at least the shaft-hole axes represent the main way of representation of the social prestige in the communities of the Bronze Age in the south-east of Europe¹⁶.

It is considered that the specific topography of the surrounding milieu, in the prehistoric ages, can be decisive for the development of a community (Artelius 1999, 21-23). The importance of the Crasna Valley, as a communication thoroughfare¹⁷, the possibility of control of the access through the gorge from Șimleu Silvaniei-Cehei constituted undoubtedly promoting factors for the development of a power centre in the region of Șimleu Silvaniei during the period of the Wietenberg III stage. Such centres existed surely in the Bronze Age (Gediga 1985, 13-26; Stuchlich 1985, 129-142; Bader 1990, 182; Vulpe 2001a, 365-366; Artelius 1999, 23-28). These centres, fortified or just placed in privileged positions from a topographic point of view, do not have to be interpreted according to the defending function¹⁸, but they probably represented also economic centres of production and exchange.

In the next period of the Late Bronze, we notice important modifications in the structure of the habitat from the Șimleu Depression. The stations placed on high lands constitute exceptions: only in two cases of the 45 known sites. The archaeological excavations pointed out a large density of dwelling in the actual region of Șimleu Silvaniei (Bejinariu 2001b, 157-174) for this period, too. The importance of this region is obvious during the First Iron Age, too, which is a period to which the vast fortified settlement on the superior plateaus of Măgura Șimleului belongs (Bejinariu 2002).

NOTES:

1. At present, there are two main proposals of periodization of the evolution of the Wietenberg culture: that one proposed by N. Chidioșan (Wietenberg I-IV) on the basis of the own investigations from Derșida, respectively the most recent, proposed by N. Boroffka (Wietenberg A-D) where the first stage has two substages A1 and A2; cf. Chidioșan 1980, p. 68-84; Boroffka 1994, p. 286.
2. Al. Vulpe considers that the large number of stations assigned to this culture suggests a population with a way of living a little mobile, having an economy based more on the cattle's breeding; cf. Vulpe 2001, pp. 257-258.
3. The results of the testing trench from 1957 executed by V. Lucăcel and E. Lakó have been still unique. In 1997, by the occasion of an archaeological investigation in this site, a series of observations as concerns the location of this archaeological site were made.
4. H. Pop, from the Museum from Zalău, discovered the archaeological station in the summer of 2003.
5. The materials from the excavations started in 1994 by H. Pop, and me are in the collection of the Museum of Zalău.
6. I. Nestor and M. Petrescu-Dâmbovița said that "there are not known fortified settlements" within the area of the Wietenberg culture – cf. Ist. Rom. 1960, p. 112; Rotea 1993, p. 36; Ciugudean 1997, pp. 10-11.
7. Examples: at Bernadea and Sighișoara the assignement of the fortification to the bearers of Wietenberg culture is excluded – cf. Rotea 1993, p. 36, nt. 57. at Filiași, too, the date of the fortification is uncertain – Crișan, 2000, p. 41, nr. 66. At Liteni, there are traces of post-Wietenberg dwelling: Basarabi and Latene – Lazarovici et al. 1993, p. 178; Boroffka 1994, p. 53, nr. 250. An imperial denar from Vespasian and other later materials were discovered at Porumbenii Mici "Galath" – Crișan 2000, p. 64, nr. 122; Boroffka 1994, p. 67, nr. 342. Many questions have appeared because of the execution technique, as well as the assignment of the fortification from Coldău, from where the materials that are later than the period of the Wietenberg culture come (a hoard of metal objects from the first Iron Age and ceramic fragments from the 14th-15th centuries) – Vlassa 1973, pp. 11-37; idem 1982, pp. 65-73; Boroffka 1994, p. 32, nr. 129.
8. At Lutoasa "Cetatea Ciuchiar", the connecting passage with the rest of the massive was separated through a stone wall and two ditches. At the basis of the wall and in inside it ceramic Wietenberg materials were found. It is mentioned that a "fragment of mill with a hole for axis" was also found. The assignment of this object to the bronze age is harder demonstrated and it should be related to a later period, eventually the period Latene – Z. Szekely 1981, pp. 21-22.
9. Dealu – G. Ferenczi, I. Ferenczi 1995, pp. 729-739; Oarța de Sus – Boroffka 1994, pp. 60-61, nr. 301.

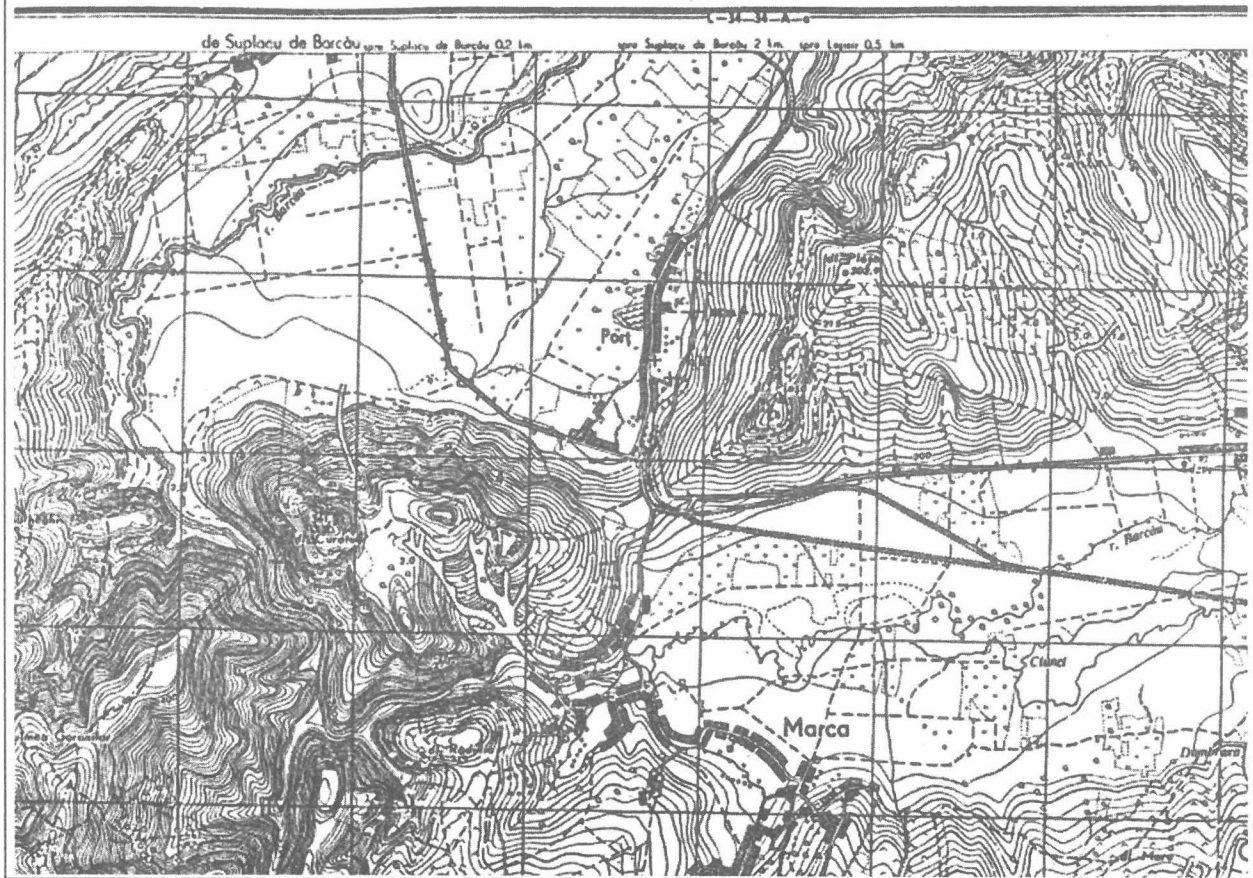
10. Zs. Szekely 1999, p. 110 – it is mentioned that the clay and the stones of the wall had been strongly burnt what makes us think at a wooden superstructure of the wall (palissade).
11. Crişan 2000, pp. 107-110. Only in the south-east of Transylvania, there are very many such Dacian “fortresses”, situated on favourable places from topographic point of view where there are also proofs of dwelling from the period of the Wietenberg culture: Bădeni (Harghita County), Bixad (Covasna County), Covasna “Cetatea Zânelor”, Jigodin III (Harghita County), Valea Seacă (Covasna County) etc.
12. The only certitude would be the station from Oarţa de Sus “Ghiile Botii”, but here we are talking about a special site, considered to be a place for cult according to the excavation’s author – cf. Kacsó 1998, pp. 255, 258.
13. Most of the Wietenberg stations considered to be fortified, according to Boroffka, belong to the Wietenberg III stage: Bernadea, Coldău, Laslea, Lutoasa, Porumbenii Mici, Sighişoara, Turea, Turia: cf. Boroffka 1994, pp. 11-98.
14. Mentioned at the end of the 19th century – cf. Fetzter 1898, pp. 422-423.
15. The site on the “Observer” at 4 km away of the site on the “Dealul Cetăţii” constitutes an exception.
16. Vulpe 2001a, pp. 353-366. Another Pădureni-type axe was discovered in the region of the Şimleu Depression at Meseşenii de Sus – Bejinariu 2003, p. 68, pl. 3/a-b.
17. The Crasna valley made the connection with Transylvania on the superior course of the Barcău (the southern half of the Şimleu Depression).
18. As we have already said, the three sites located in these “strategic” places belong to the Wietenberg III stage that correspond to the second half of the Middle Bronze. We can not exclude the reports of determination possible between the wish of controlling the access along the valleys of the two rivers through the stations Poř and Şimleu Silvaniei, and the events reflected in the instability of the habitat of the Otomani culture - Kovács 1988, pp. 119-126; Kemenczei 1989, pp. 73-96; Bóna 1992, pp. 32-35; Roman, Nèmeti 1990, p. 39; Kacsó 1997, p. 85.

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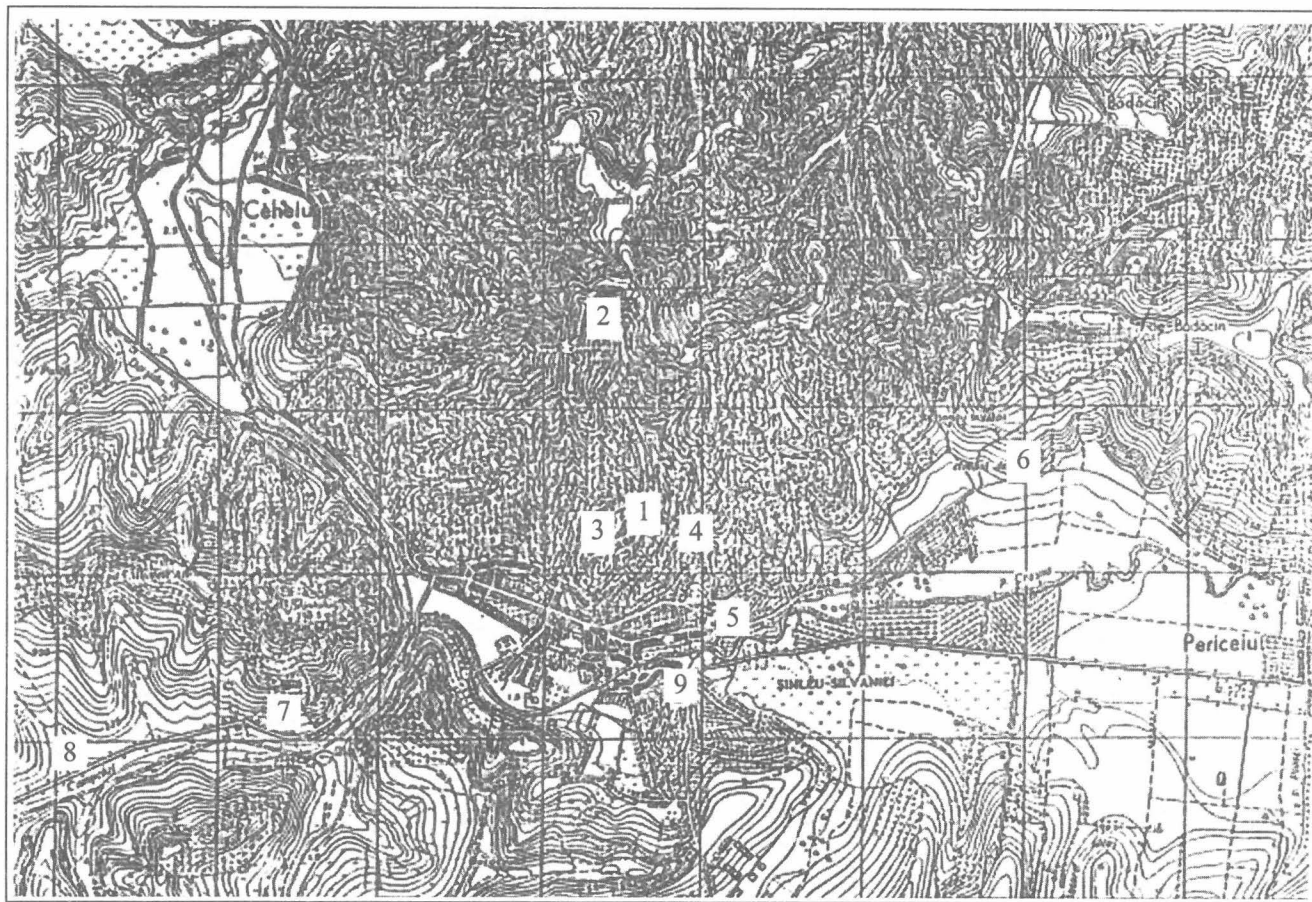
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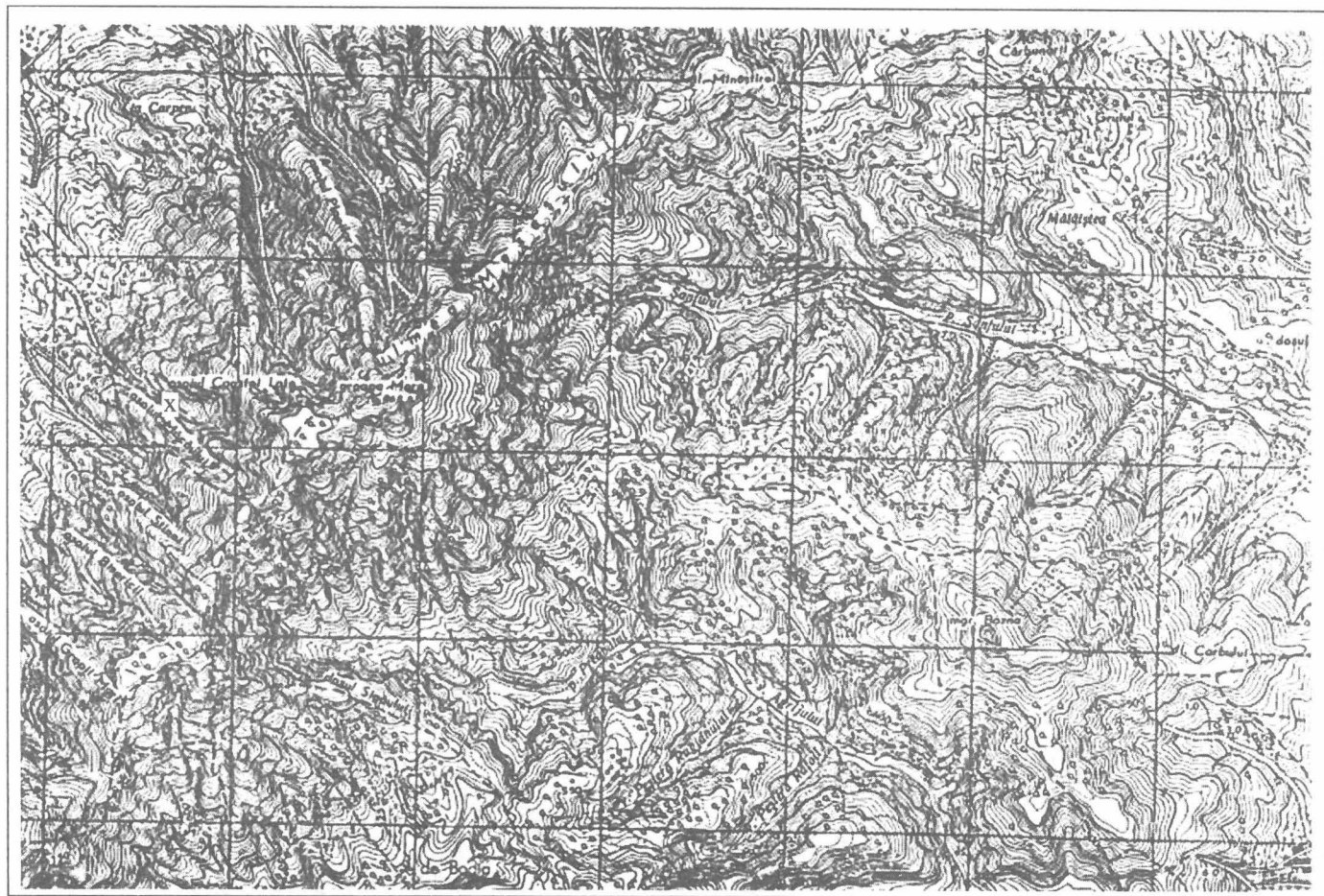
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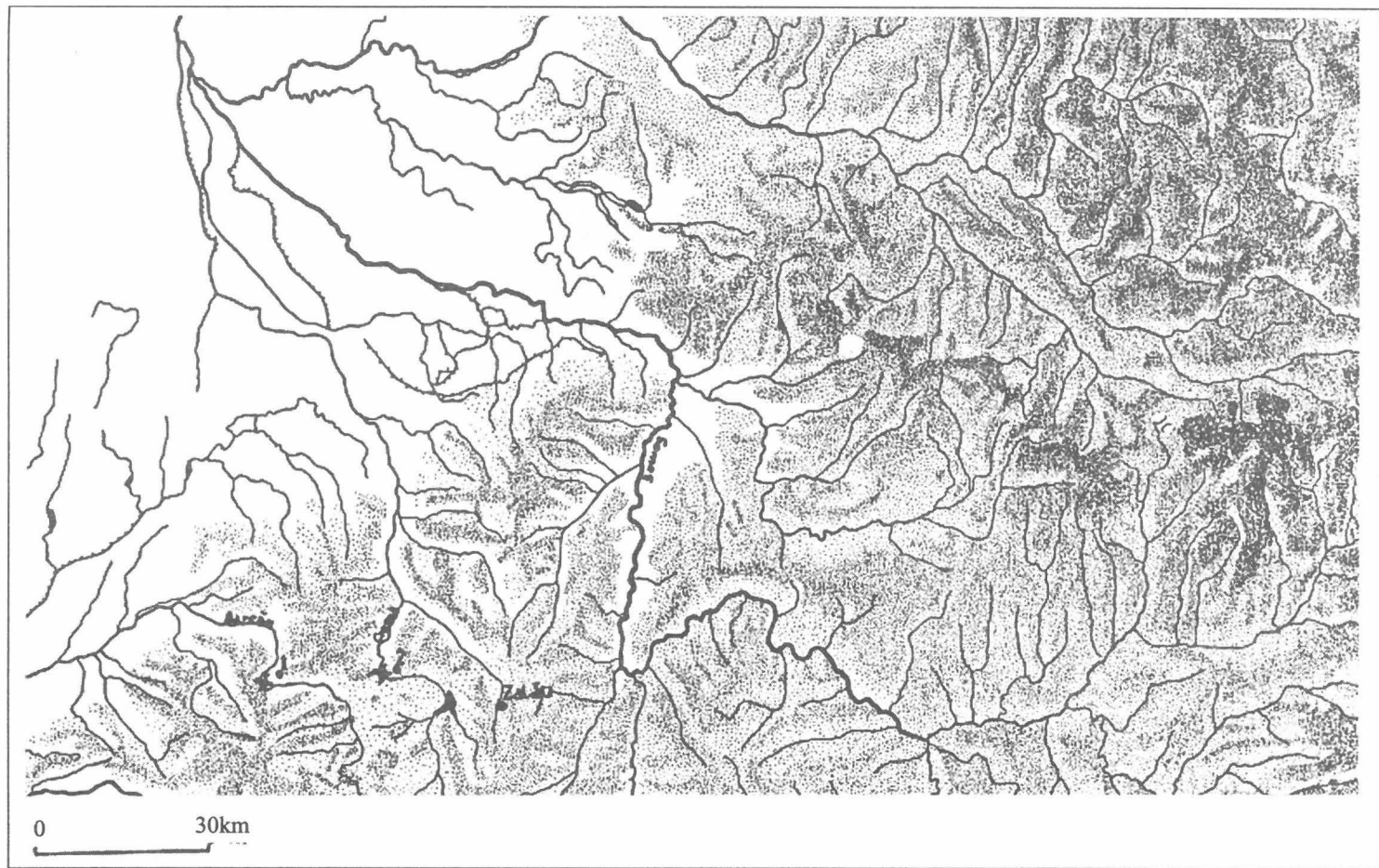
PL. I. The Wietenberg archaeological site from Poșt "Dealul Pleșa" (x).



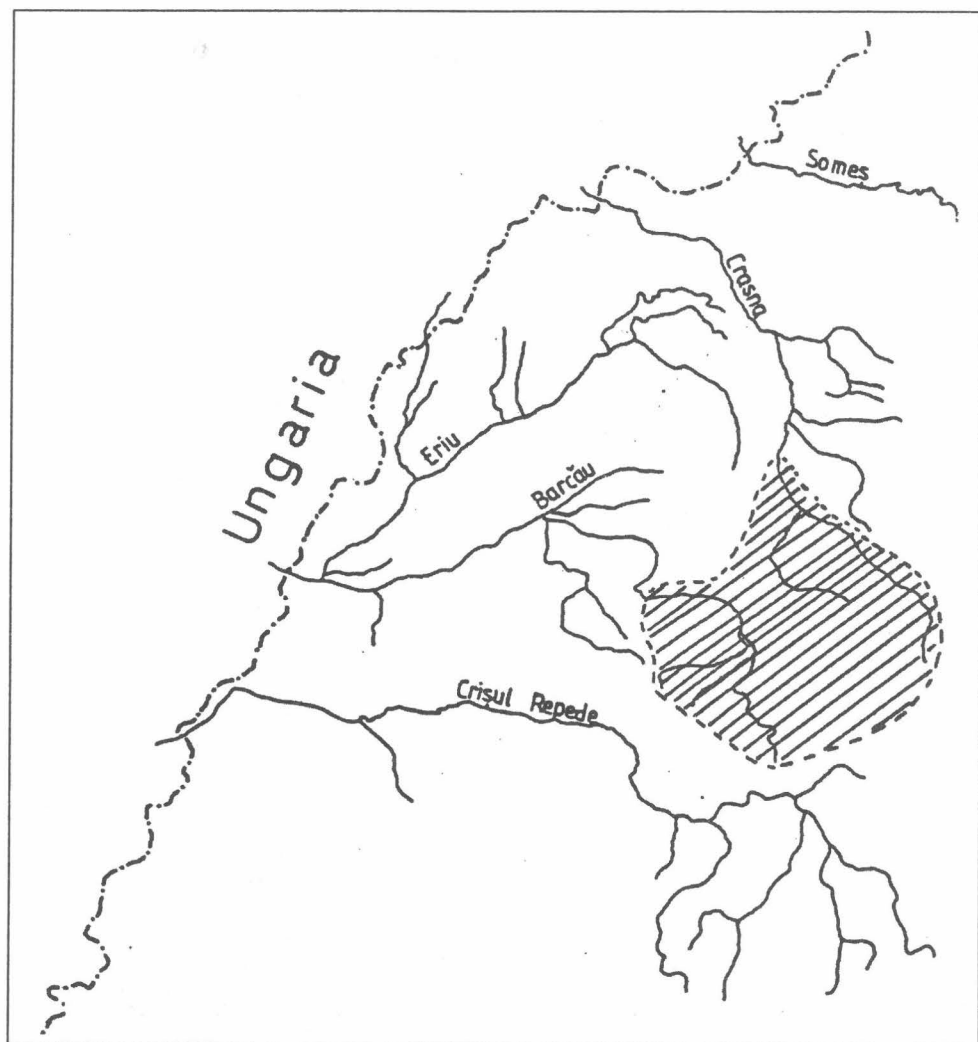
Pl. II. The Wietenberg archaeological site from Șimleu Silvaniei “Dealul Cetății” (1) and the others Wietenberg discoveries from Șimleu Silvaniei area (2-8).



Pl. III. The Wietenberg archaeological site from Meseșenii de Sus “Osoiu Măcăului” (x).



Pl. IV. The geographical position of the passes from Marca and Șimleu Silvaniei.



Pl. V. The geographical position of the Depression of Șimleu in north-west ern România.