

Bronze Age dwellings in the caves from the Danube Iron Gates area (România)*

Petru Rogozea (România)

The Danube Iron Gates area (fig. 2), Romanian *Clisura*, Serbian *Derdap*, has 134 km in length, between Baziaș and Gura Văii¹.

The endokarstic forms are located both on the Danube bank and the valleys of its tributaries springing from Locvei and Almăj Mountains. There are 70 catalogued caves within this area², 17 of which revealed dwelling traces (see Appendix I). Unfortunately, some of these caves have been destroyed (*Peștera de sub Stenca Liubcovei*)³, or flooded by the Danube (*Peștera Veterani* - speleological code 2211/2; *Peștera Cuina Turcului* - 2211/5; *Peștera Climente II* - 2211/4)⁴. However, the speleological and archaeological investigations in this area are not concluded; many caves are still to be catalogued and researched.

1. *Peștera Veterani* (the Veterani Cave; other names: *Peștera Maovăț*, *Peștera Piscabara*, *Peștera din Pânza Curii*) - 2211/2; Dubova village, Plavișevîța commune, Mehedinți county.

Danube waters presently flood the cave⁵. With a length of 87 m, the cave is slightly ascendant and fossil, formed following the action of the infiltration waters. It consists of a low entrance and a short gallery leading to a spacious hall having 37 m in length, 28 m in width and 20 m in height. A diffuse light penetrates in the hall through a "window". There are air currents inside, a summer temperature of 20°C and a winter temperature of 4°C. The humidity is about 75 - 94%.

F. Marsigli in his "*Description du Danube*" has noticed the cave as early as 1774⁶. Fr. Grisellini and N. Stoica de Hațeg have also given information on this cave⁷.

During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, several speleological and archaeological surveys and researches have been performed in here⁸. The Iron Gates Complex Research Group started systematic archaeological investigations. The dwelling traces are assigned to a wide span, from the Epipalaeolithic to the 18th century. The results of the excavations are the topic of several scientific papers⁹.

2. *Peștera Gaura lui Călăfir* (Gaura lui Călăfir cave) - 2211/7; Dubova village, Plavișevîța commune, Mehedinți county.

The cave¹⁰ is located in the area called "*Cazanele Mari*", on the left slope of the Ponicoval valley. It is a fossil cave, having 51 m in length¹¹, formed on tectonic fissures. The archaeological traces have been assigned to a span between Neolithic and the 18th century¹².

3. *Peștera Cuina Turcului* (Cuina Turcului cave; other names: *Peștera no. 2* from Gura Ponicovei)¹³ - 2211/5; Dubova village, Plavișevîța commune, Mehedinți county. The cave¹⁴ is located in the "*Cazanele Mari*" area, the Ciucașul Mare massif, has a length of 40 m, a width of 10 m, and is 25 m high. There are no air currents inside and the sun penetrates most of the day. It is a static cave, safe from rains and wind.

The cave is mentioned in the archaeological literature as early as the beginning of the 20th century¹⁵. Systematic archaeological researches have been performed in 1964 - 1969 on a surface off 240 square m. Dwelling traces have been revealed, assigned to a span between Palaeolithic and the 18th century¹⁶.

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4. *Peștera de la Sălitru* (the cave from Sălitru) - 2211/...; Dubova village, Plavișevîța commune, Mehedinți county.

The cave¹⁷ is located in the "*Cazanele Mari*" area. Dwelling traces have been identified, starting with the Neolithic¹⁸.

5. *Adăpostul lui Climente* (the Climente abri) - 2211/..., Dubova village, Plavișevîța commune, Mehedinți county.

It is located in the "*Cazanele Mari*" area¹⁹, displaying dwelling traces assigned to Palaeolithic, Neolithic, transitional period towards the Bronze Age, Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Middle Age, the Bronze Age traces belongs to Cornești - Crvenka (phase II) cultural group²⁰.

6. *Peștera Climente I* (Climente I cave; other names: Preluca lui Climente) - 2211/10; Dubova village, Plavișevîța commune, Mehedinți county.

The cave²¹ is located in the "*Cazanele Mari*" area of the Ciucașul Mare massif, on the right slope of the Ponicoval valley. It has a length of 70 m.

Archaeological researches revealed dwelling traces assigned to a span between Palaeolithic and the Middle Age, the Bronze Age traces belongs to Cornești - Crvenka (phase II) cultural group²².

7. *Peștera Climente II* (Climente II cave; other names: Peștera no. 1 de la Gura Ponicovei) - 2211/4; Dubova village, Plavișevîța commune, Mehedinți county.

The Danube waters presently flood the cave²³. It is located in the "*Cazanele Mari*" area of the Ciucașul Mare massif. The cave is fossil, horizontal - ascendant, with a length of 47 m and no air currents. The temperature in the back part is 15.5°C, the humidity about 90 - 95%.

The various dwelling traces are dated to a span between Palaeolithic and the Middle Age²⁴.

8. *Peștera Gaura Chindiei I* (Gaura Chindiei I cave) - 2222/1; Pescari commune, Caraș - Severin county.

This active cave²⁵ is located in the Danube strait, on "*Rolul Chindiei*", above the Gaura Chindiei II cave, 3 km downstream from Pescari.

The dwelling traces are assigned to Palaeolithic, Neolithic, transitional period towards the Bronze Age, Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Roman period and Middle Age²⁶.

9. *Peștera Gaura Chindiei II* (Gaura Chindiei II cave; other names: Gaura Mică de pe Rolul Chindiei) - 2222/2; Pescari commune, Caraș - Severin county.

The cave²⁷ is located 3 km downstream from Pescari, in the Alibeg area, 80 m above the Danube waters. It is moist and cool cave, 18 m in length, lighted only in the afternoon.

It is the only known cave in Banat where rock paintings are recorded. There are 425 pictograms, beside others that are wiped, assigned to different periods, from Palaeolithic to the Middle Age²⁸. The cave is declared historic and archaeological reservation.

10. *Peștera Gaura cu Muscă* (Gaura cu Muscă cave; other names: Peștera cu Muște, Peștera Coronini, Peștera Golubăț) - 2222/3; Pescari commune, Caraș - Severin county.

The cave²⁹ is located in the Danube strait, 3 km downstream from Pescari close to the Babacai Rock, 28 m above the Danube waters. It is an active, descendant cave, 254 m in length. The temperature is about 12.5-13.5°C, humidity around 96-98 % and there are weak air currents.

Fr. Grisellini is the first who mentioned this cave³⁰. Several dwelling traces have been identified, dated to Neolithic, transitional period towards the Bronze Age, Bronze Age, Late Iron Age, Roman and Byzantine period and Middle Age³¹. The cave provided shelter for a specific species of flies (*Simulium columbacsensis*), which disappeared following the increase of the Danube waters. Local folk stories tell that these flies came from the head of the dragon killed by a mythic hero Iovan Iorgovan. Like the Veterani Cave, this cave has been fortified during the Middle Age.

11. *Peștera de sub Stenca Liubcovei* - 2214/....; Liubcova village, Berzasca commune, Caraș - Severin county.

The cave was located under the rock called "*Stenca Liubcovei*", where Bronze Age and Dacian settlements have been located. It disappeared following the building of the Moldova Veche - Orșova route. On this occasion, metal "weapons and tools" have been recovered³².

12. *Peștera din Valea Ceuca* (other names: *Peștera de sub Vranovăț*, *Peștera de sub Coliba lui Vlada*) - 2221/2; Liborajdea village, Sichevița commune, Caraș - Severin county.

The cave³³ is located on the left slope of the Ceuca valley. It is active, descendant and has 132 m in length. There are no air currents, the temperature is around 10-11°C, and it is warm and moist.

Between 1987 and 1989³⁴ several bronze artefacts have been found in a niche near the entrance, which have been lost.

Accordingly, one can state that the endokarstic forms of relief (abris, caves, and caverns) performed the role of shelter for peoples throughout the millennia³⁵. Palaeolithic dwelling traces have been identified only in the caves from the Danube Iron Gates area and Cerna valley³⁶. As for the other karstic areas from Banat such traces have not been identified yet, since the break of the so - called "cave seal" failed.

In the Danube Iron Gates area the other periods and historic ages are well represented in the 17 archaeological researched endokarstic forms.

Overall, the investigation of the endokarstic forms requests the collaboration of several specialists in different or related fields. The complex research group for the Iron Gates has demonstrated the necessity of such inter - disciplinary investigations. Accordingly, specialists in speleology, palaeontology, archaeozoology, hydrology, ethnology and folklore should offer scientific conclusions on the problems raised by the endokarstic forms. The caves from the Danube Iron Gates area have temporarily sheltered man, wild beasts and domestic animals (the so - called "speleological grazing")³⁷. Man has also used caves as worship places (e.g. Veterani Cave and Gaura Chindiei II). Following their hard accessible location, some caves have been fortified with stone or brick walls (e.g. Veterani Cave, Gaura cu Muscă Cave).

In our opinion, the archaeological investigations in the caves from Banat should continue with the stage of archaeological inventory, followed by systematic archaeological excavations.

NOTES

1. C. Goran, *Catalogul sistematic al peșterilor din România*, București, 1981, 1982, p. 139-183.
2. P. Rogoza, in *Banatica*, 9, 1987, p. 347 sqq.
3. Information from M. Gumă.
4. C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 148; xxx *Geografia "Porțile de Fier"*, București, 1976, p. 31.
5. M. Bleahu et al., *Peșteri din România*, București, 1976, p. 256-258, fig. 104; T. Orghidan et al., *Peșteri din România*, 1984, p. 247-251, fig. 64, 66.
6. L. F. Marsigli, *Description du Danube - depuis la montagne de Kalenberg en Autriche jusqu'au confluent la rivière Jantra dans la Bulgarie*, Haye, 1747, II/1, p. 14, fig. 13.
7. F. Grisellini, *Încercare de istorie politică și naturală a Banatului Timișoarei*, 1984, p. 242-243, pl. VII; N. Stoica de Hațeg, *Cronica Mehădiei și Băilor Herculane*, 1984, p. 12, 26, 32-33, 40; idem, *Cronica Banatului*, 1981, p. 229-230, 233-236, 240-244, 247-294.
8. L. Böhm, *Geschichte des Temeser Banat*, 1861, p. 32-34; A. Boleszny, *Die Donaukatarakte, Veteranische Hohle und Festung Peth zwischen Baziaș, Orșova und Turnu Severin*, 1874; B. Milleker, *Delm*, III, 1906, p. 34-35; M. Roska, *ErdRep*, 1942, p. 71, 316.
9. C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, in *SCIV*, 16, 2, 1965, p. 407-411; idem, *Rezultatele cercetărilor arheologice din zona Porților de Fier*, 1968, p. 42; I. I. Rusu, *IDR*, III/1, 1977, p. 63, nr. X, fig. 30; P. Roman, in *Dacia*, N.S., XV, 1971, p. 76, nr. 11; F. Mogoșanu, in *Dacia*, N.S., XVI, 1972, p. 8, fig. 1; V. Dumitrescu, *Arta preistorică în România*, 1974, p. 165, fig. 177; Gh. Lazarovici, *Neoliticul Banatului*, 1979, p. 185, nr. 36/e; V. Boroneanț, in *PZ*, 45, 1, 1970, p. 2-25; idem, in *Speologia*,

- 1979, p. 178-181; Gh. Lazarovici, C. Săcărin, in *Banatica*, 5, 1979, p. 71-106; M. Comșa, *In Memoriam Constantini Daicoviciu*, 1974, p. 85; R. Petrovsky, in *Banatica*, 3, 1975, p. 128; P. Rogozea, in *Banatica*, 9, 1987, p. 348-358.
10. M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 249, fig. 100.
 11. C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
 12. C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor et al., in *SCIV*, 16, 2, 1975, p. 407; P. Rogozea, *op. cit.*, p. 348-358.
 13. Danube flooded cave, cf. C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 148 ; M. Bleahu et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 248, fig. 100.
 14. A. Păunescu, in *Tibiscus*, V, 1978, p. 11; St. Negrea et. al., in *Journal of Speology*, 3/1, 1965, p. 432.
 15. B. Milleker, *op. cit.*, p. 34-35; M. Roska, *op. cit.*, p. 71, 316.
 16. C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor et al., *op. cit.*, p. 407-411; V. Boroneanț, *op. cit.*, p. 152-166; E. Comșa, in *SCIVA*, 29, 1, 1978, p. 11; P. I. Roman, *Cultura Coțofeni*, 1976, p. 14 sqq; P. Roman, I. Némethi, *Cultura Baden în România*, 1978, p. 44; Gh. Lazarovici, *Neoliticul Banatului*, 1979, p. 29, 44, 195, fig. 5, pl. 36/a, tab. 5; V. Dumitrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 11-14, fig. 1/1 - 3, 2; A. Păunescu, *op. cit.*, p. 11-55; idem, in *SympThrac*, 9, 1992, p. 5 ; F. Mogoșanu, *Paleoliticul Banatului*, 1977, p. 5.
 17. We do not posses speleological data on this cave.
 18. C. S. Nicolăescu Plopșor et al., *op. cit.*, p. 407; P. Rogozea, *op. cit.*, p. 348-358.
 19. We do not posses speleological data on this cave.
 20. C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor et al., *Rezultatele cercetărilor arheologice din zona Porților de Fier*, 1968, p. 13 sqq; V. Boroneanț, *op. cit.*, p. 166-168; M. Gumă, *Epoca bronzului în Banat*, in *BHAB*, V, 1997, p. 43, 45.
 21. M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 248, fig. 100 ; C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
 22. C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor et al., in *SCIV*, 16, 2, 1965, p. 407; V. Boroneanț, in *RevMuz*, V, 6, 1968, p. 542-546; idem, in *Speologia*, 1979, p. 166, 176-177; Gh. Lazarovici, *op. cit.*, p. 25-45, fig. 4, pl. V/30; F. Mogoșanu, *op. cit.*, p. 5; P. Rogozea, *op. cit.*, p. 348-358; M. Gumă , *op. cit.*, p. 43, 45.
 23. St. Negrea et al., *op. cit.*, p. 431; M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 248, fig. 100; C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
 24. C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor et al., *op. cit.*, p. 407; V. Boroneanț, *op. cit.*, p. 166 , 176-177; P. Rogozea, *op. cit.*, p. 348-358.
 25. M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 245; C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
 26. M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 245; P. Rogozea, *op. cit.*, p. 348-358.
 27. M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 244-246 , fig. 99; C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
 28. V. Boroneanț, in *SCIV*, 19, 1, 1972, p. 109-115; idem, *Le caractere magico - religieux de l'art epipaleolithique du sud - ouest de la Roumanie*, in *Les religions de la Prehistoire*, Valcamonica, 1972, p. 105-115; idem, in *Banatica*, 2, 1973, p. 9-15; idem, in *RMMMI*, XLVI, 1977; C. Rîșcuția, I. Rîșcuția, in *RMMMI*, XLVI, 1977; M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 245-246; M. Cărciumaru, *Măturii ale artei rupestre preistorice în România*, București, 1987, p. 71, sqq., fig. 28; P. Rogozea, *op. cit.*, p. 348-358.
 29. M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 242-244, fig. 98; C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 151; T. Orghidan et al., *op. cit.*, p. 232-235, fig. 62.
 30. F. Grisellini, *op. cit.*, p. 319, pl. VIII; N. Stoica de Hațeg, *Cronica Mehadiiei și Băilor Herculanee*, București, 1984, p. 31-33.
 31. M. Roska, *op. cit.*, p. 294, 317; Gh. Lazarovici, *op. cit.*, p. 201-202; P. Rogozea, *op. cit.*, p. 348-358.
 32. Information from M. Gumă.
 33. M. Bleahu et al., *op. cit.*, p. 242, fig. 94, 97; C. Goran, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
 34. Information from I. Dragomir (Gornea).
 35. P. Rogozea, *op. cit.*, p. 362.
 36. *Ibidem*; cf. Appendix I.
 37. R. Vuia, *Tipuri de păstorit la români*, București, 1964, p. 21-67; R. Vulcănescu, *L'evolution des abris pasteuraux chez les Roumains*, in *RRH*, 4, 1965; O. Cazacu, *Pe urmele domesticirii animalelor*, București, 1973, p. 39.

Nr. crt.	Name	Hydro-speleological Code	Atypical	Paleolithic	Neolithic	Enolithic	Transition period	Bronze	HA.A-B	HA.C	LaTene	Roman	Century IV-XIV	Century XV-XVIII	Graves	Coins	Bronze Hoards	Cave Paintings	Ritual Places	Fossils	Obs
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1	Peștera Veterani	2211/2		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	C+1
2	Peștera Gaura lui Călbășir	2211/7			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●						●	C
3	Peștera Cuina Turcului	2211/5		●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	C+1
4	Peștera de la Sălițaru	2211/			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●						●	C
5	Adăpostul Moara Dracului	2211/		●	●	●	●		●				●	●							C
6	Adăpostul lui Climent-te	2211/		●	●			●	●	●				●	●	●					C
7	Peștera Gura Ponico-vei	2211/3		●	●		●		●	●				●						●	C
8	Peștera Climent-te I	2211/10		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	C
9	Peștera Climent-te II	2211/4		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●				●	C+1
10	Peștera Gaura Livoditei	2222/		●						●				●						●	C
11	Peștera Gaura Chindiei I	2222/1		●		●	●	●	●		●		●	●						●	C
12	Peștera Chindiei II	2222/2		●		●	●	●	●		●		●	●				●	●	●	C
13	Peștera Gaura cu Muscă	2222/3	●		●		●	●			●		●	●						●	DC
14	Peștera Gaura Haichu-cească	2223/1	●		●															●	DC
15	Peștera de sub Stenca Liubco-vei	2214/						●	●		●										D
16	Peștera din Valea Ceuca	2221/2	●					●	?								●			●	DC
17	Peștera din Punctul Uricari	2226/	●	●	●															●	DC

DC=FURTHER RESEARCH; C=ALREADY RESEARCHED; D=DESTROYED; I=INUNDATED

Banat - the karstik area

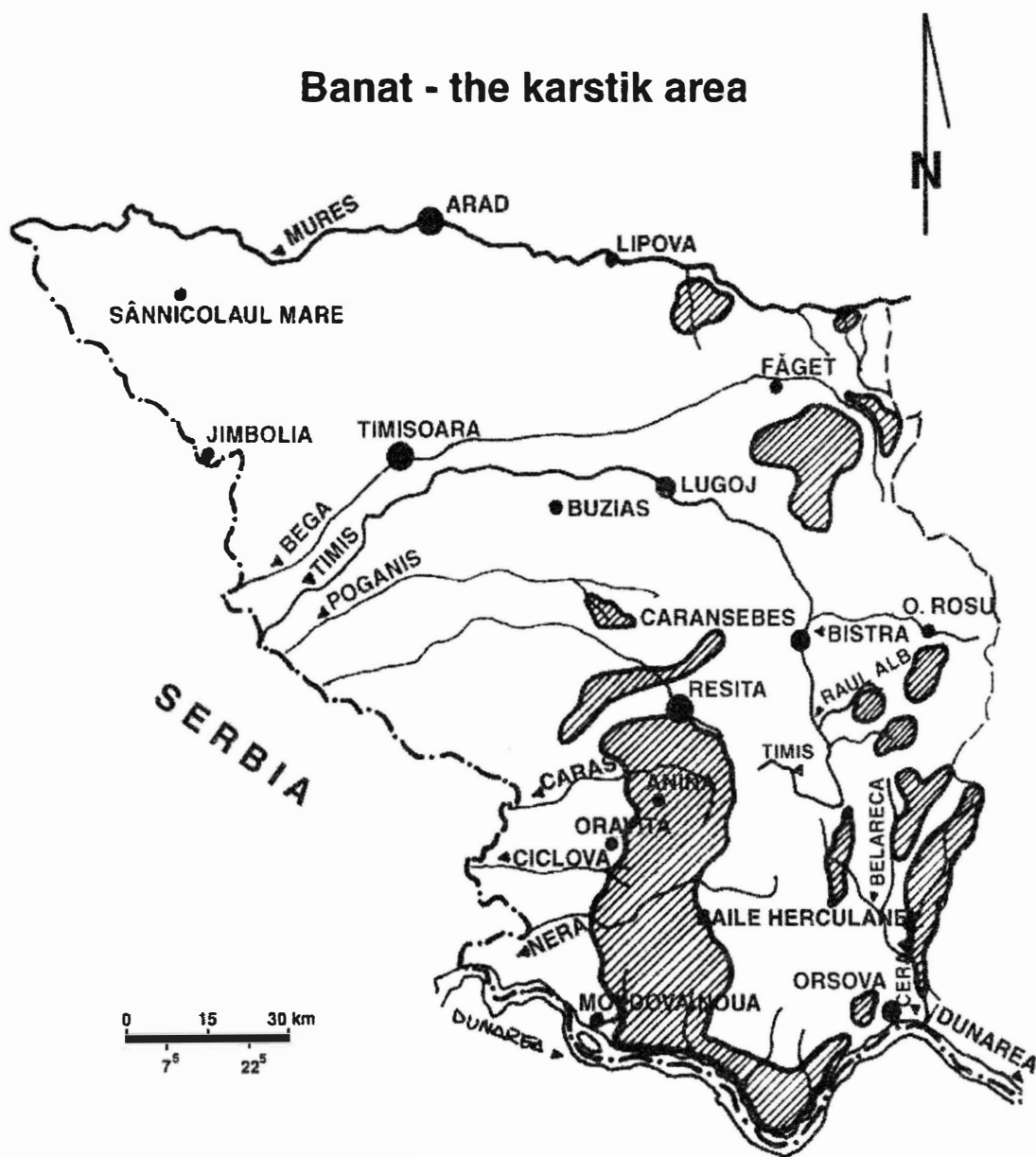


Fig. 1. The map of Banat with the karstic areas.

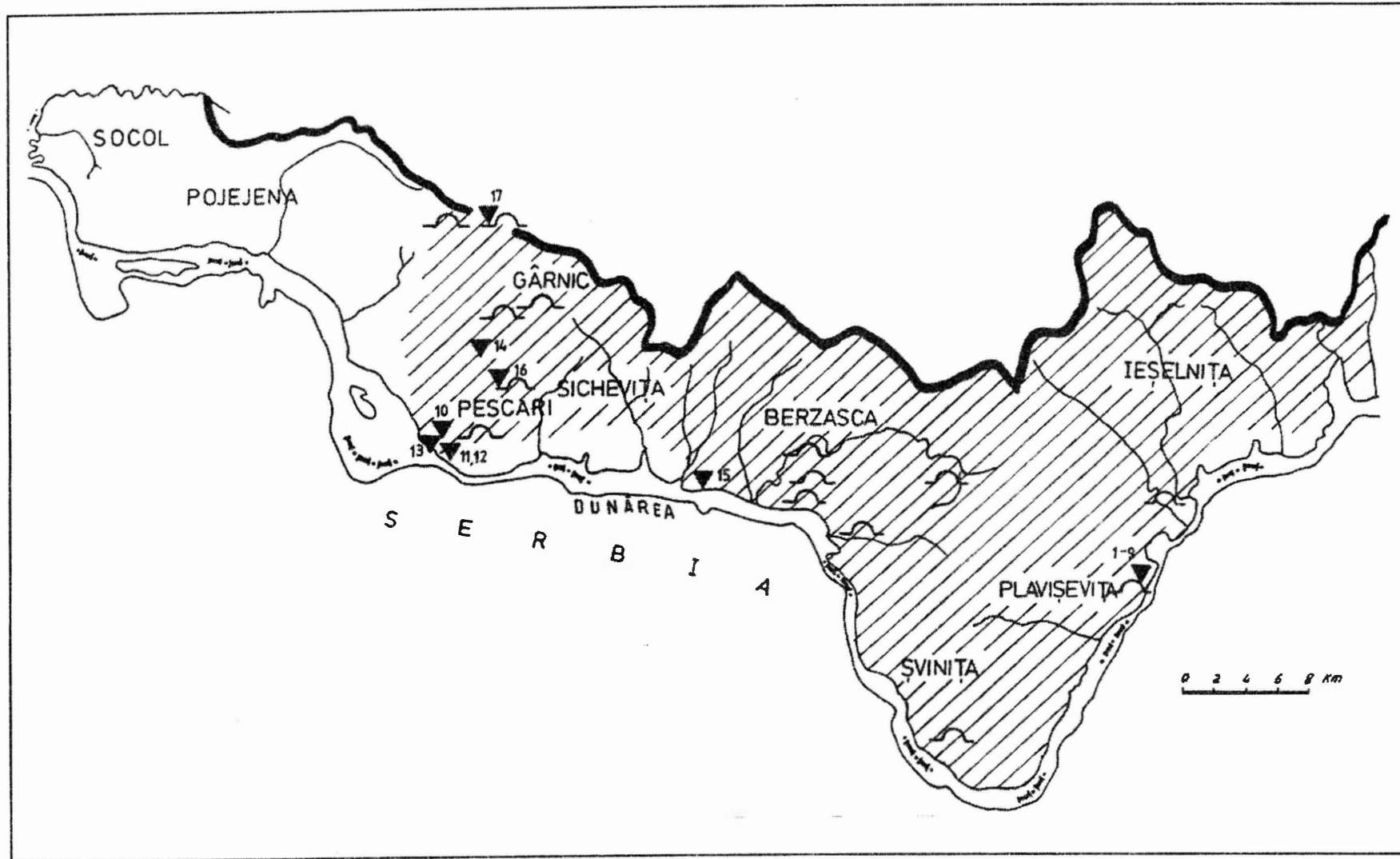


Fig. 2. The location of the caves with archaeological traces in the Danube Iron Gates area.

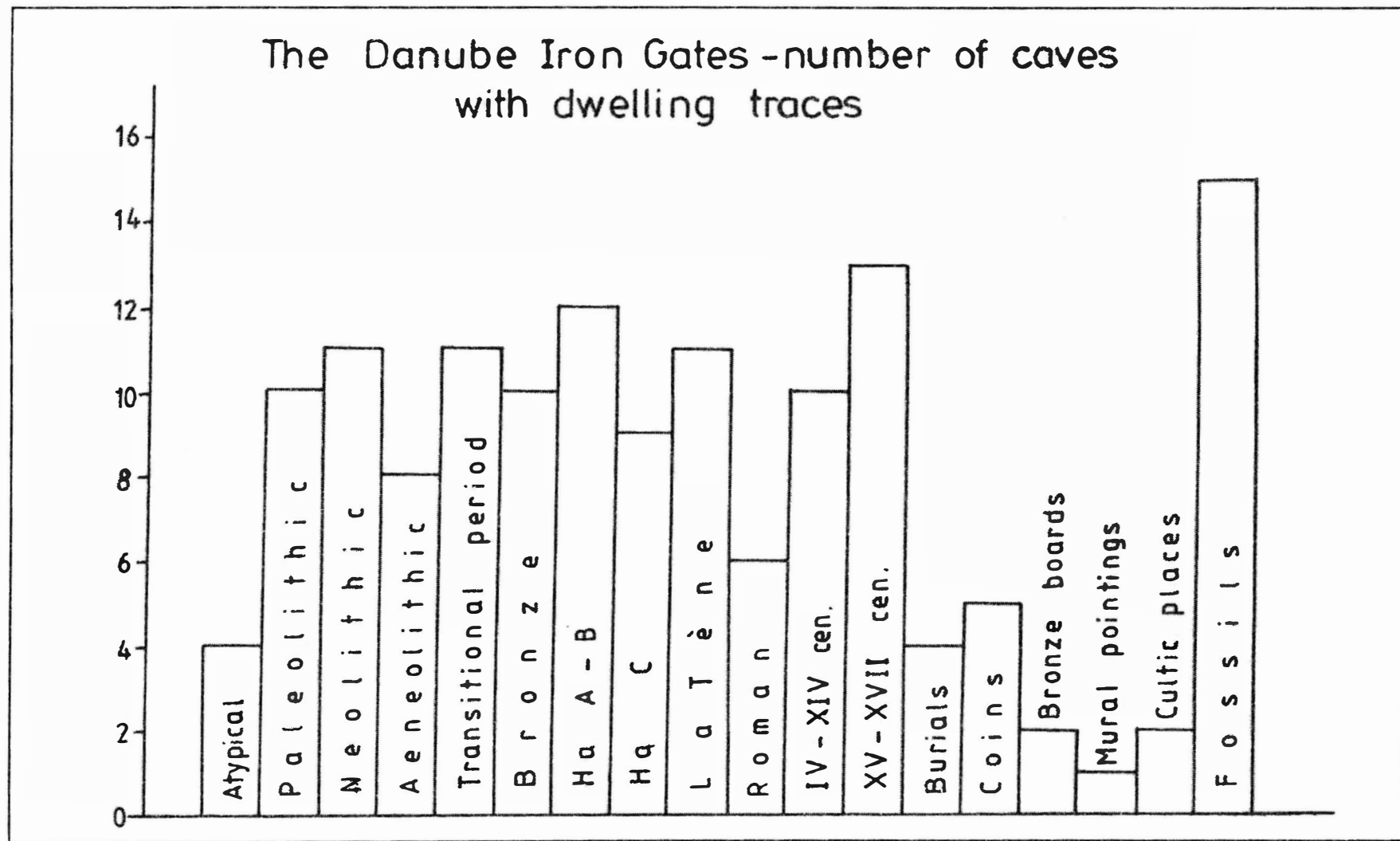


Fig. 3. The Iron Gates - graphic representation of the caves with dwelling traces assigned to different periods and historic ages.