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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

THE BRONZE ARTEFACT FROM THE WIETENBERG CEMETERY IN SIBIȘENI

Abstract: By chance, the bronze artifact from the Wietenberg culture necropolis at Sibișeni-*Deasupra Satului* was rediscovered. It comes from near the urn in grave 19. The piece, found among materials from another site (Ocna Sibiului-*Triguri*), is preserved in an envelope specifying its provenance. The artifact is fragmentary, having been cut from a sheet (?) of bronze. The piece is slightly twisted and has a quadrilateral cross-section, but neither end is preserved, so we cannot determine its possible function. We can only surmise that it may have been a needle or a small chisel. On this occasion, the bronze pieces from the Wietenberg funerary inventories (Sibișeni, Luduș, Șoimuș, Dumbrăvița, Sebeș, Cluj-Napoca) are discussed, noting their small number as well as their limited utility (pendants, saltaleoni, needles).

Keywords: *Bronze Age, Wietenberg culture, bronze objects, needle/ chisel, cemetery.*

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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago¹, we published the manuscripts of Professor Iuliu Paul's studies regarding the Wietenberg necropolis in Sibișeni-*Deasupra Satului* village (Alba County), as well as images of the cemetery from the archive preserved today within the “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia.

Although it can be said that the burial vessels and funerary inventories are known today in the scientific circuit, and known to the extent of the published data, the presentation of the only metal piece found in the cemetery has been awaited for over six decades. Chance-based research and reorganisation of materials from the archaeological site of Ocna Sibiului-*Triguri* allowed the random identification of the metal artefact. It was preserved in a paper envelope inscribed with the letterhead “BRUKENTHAL Museum. DIRECTOR'S OFFICE”², on which the author of the research wrote in pencil the following: *Vințul de Jos – Sibișeni / „Deasupra Satului” / Wietenberg Cemetery / Bronze bar fragment (from a chisel?)* (**Fig. 2**).

Given its finding among the special inventory objects of the Ocna Sibiului dig site, we cannot exclude the possibility that the postponement of the piece's publication was also dictated by its being lost among other materials, including, for example, coal samples from the Neolithic dig site at Tărtăria.

¹ POPA 2019a.

² Except for some pieces, still preserved in the Brukenthal National Museum in Sibiu, several dozen boxes with the archaeological materials found in the excavations undertaken by Iuliu Paul at Ocna Sibiului-*Triguri* were transferred to the “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, after the moment when he took over the position of rector of the said university.

Given the importance of its entrance in the scientific circuit, we considered it useful to write this material on it.

BRONZE PIECE FROM THE WIETENBERG CEMETERY. UTILITY

The Wietenberg cemetery in Sibîşeni enjoyed two “performances”, not only at the time of its discovery, but for several decades: it was the largest known necropolis of this culture and the only one where a bronze object had been discovered³, a feat unparalleled until over a decade ago⁴. Therefore, the artefact that constitutes the subject of this study must be appreciated in this particular context.

The small metal object was mentioned by Iuliu Paul in 1985, in the general presentation of the necropolis published in the journal “Transilvania”, where, in connection with the cemetery (Fig. 1), he noted that “other inventory goods are absent, except for a small fragment of a bronze needle found near the urn in grave no. 19”⁵, a statement reiterated in the partially different manuscript version of the published text: “the fragment of a bronze needle from the vicinity of the urn in G 19”⁶, with similar remarks also appearing in the German monographic version of the necropolis (“Bronzenadel bruchstück”)⁷. Thus, in I. Paul’s opinion, the bronze object is a small fragment that belonged to a needle. The needle utility is also used in his works by Ioan Andriţoiu, but in the chapter dedicated to this category of items, Sibîşeni is not included, indirect proof that he probably did

not see the artefact⁸. In one case only, he no longer defines the find based on its functionality, mentioning it only as a “bronze fragment”⁹. Other specialists refer to the artefact, also naming it a needle¹⁰.

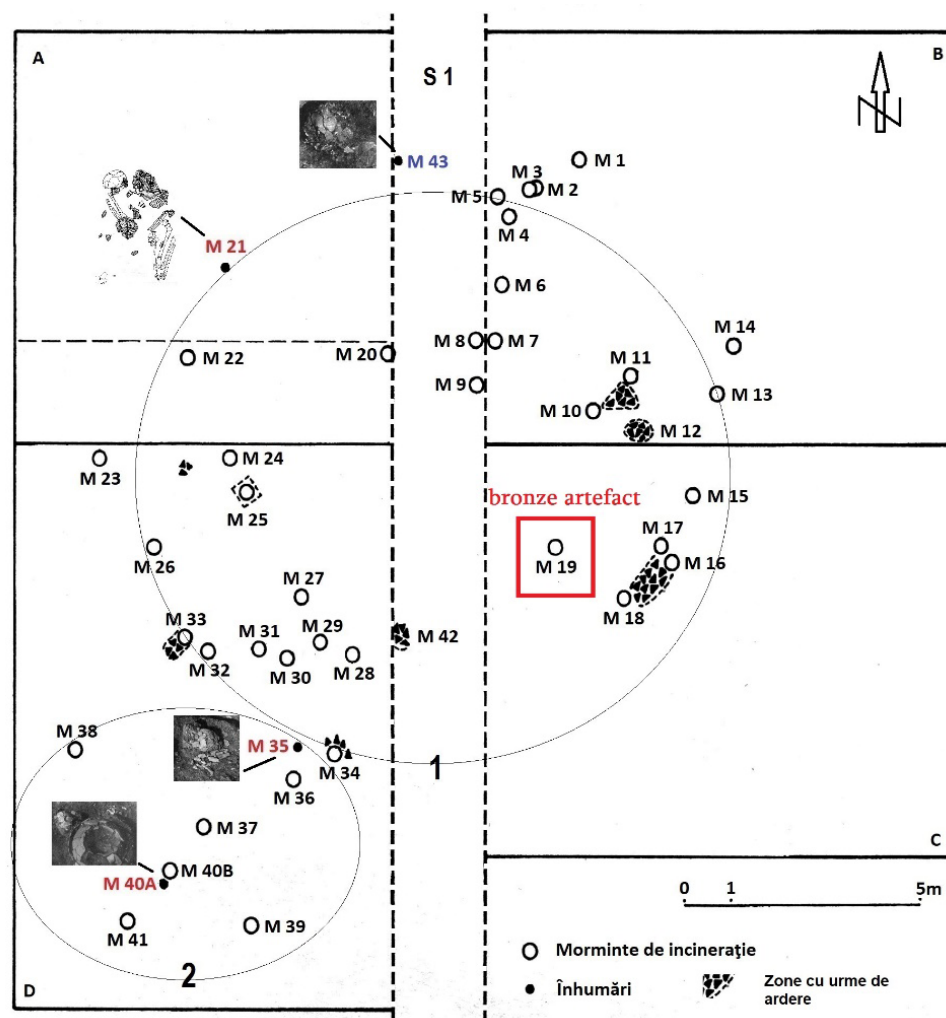


Fig. 1. Location of tomb M 19, with bronze artefact, in the plan of the Wietenberg necropolis from Sibîşeni-Deasupra Satului (after POPA 2019a)

Description: bronze fragment, with quadrangular section (similar to a parallelogram), most likely cut with a chisel from a thick sheet of metal. Wider surfaces have a good, dark-green patina. In contrast, the edges, with relatively sharp margins following the cut-out, are easily retouched. The ends have been broken in ancient times. Viewed from the profile, you can see a slight torsion of the artefact. Preserved dimensions: 3.51 cm (length) x 0.36-0.39 cm (thickness) (Fig. 3).

Typologically and functionally, the artefact raises problems of interpretation. The explanation written by Iuliu Paul on the envelope in which it was found, *bronze bar fragment (from a chisel?)*, may represent a new working hypothesis. The morphology and quadrangular section would argue in

³ PAUL 1983, 10-11; PAUL 1985, II-III; ANDRIŢOIU 1992, 14, 32-34, 51, 53, 74, 94-95 and footnote 346; ANDRIŢOIU 1994, 147-148, 150, 155; BOROFFKA 1994, 75, 106-108, 195, 251-252, Fig. 23, Pl. 120-126; PAUL 1995, 164-197; MOTZOI-CHICIDEANU 2011, 39-40, 148, 530, 533-536, 540, 544-546; POPA 2019a.

⁴ In 2011, a cremation necropolis with 61 graves and, additionally, possibly two stone funerary structures (FĂNTĂNEANU *et alii* 2017), was investigated at Sebeş-Între Râşoace and in 2016 at Oarda de Jos-Şesu Orzii, the largest known Wietenberg necropolis was partially unveiled, with over 70 tombs (CIUTĂ *et alii* 2016, 11, 18, Fig. 5; CIUTĂ *et alii* 2017, 187, 189; CIUTĂ/QIUNN/TOTOIANU 2021; QUINN/CIUTĂ 2025).

⁵ PAUL 1985, II.

⁶ POPA 2019a, 70 (Annex 1).

⁷ PAUL 1995, 164-165.

⁸ ANDRIŢOIU 1994, 148.

⁹ ANDRIŢOIU 1993, 87.

¹⁰ BERECKI 2016, 66.

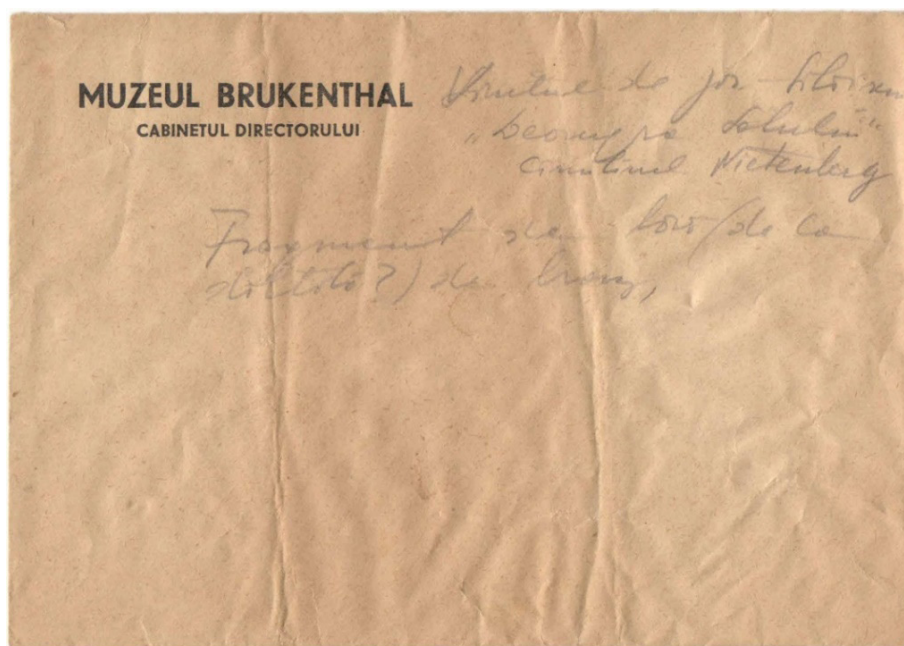


Fig. 2. The envelope in which the metal piece from the Wietenberg necropolis from Sibişeni-Deasupra Satului is kept

favour of this, but in the absence of the ends, it is difficult to appreciate the initial appearance. In the Wietenberg culture, bronze artefacts interpreted as chisels are known, including from the south-western Transylvanian area itself (Sebeş, Cetea)¹¹; however, many prehistoric objects made of copper or bronze may have had a dual function, quite often featuring one widened end (used as a chisel) and the other pointed, which may be interpreted either functionally (as a needle/awl) or simply as intended for insertion into a wooden handle. Suggestive in this respect is the case of the only piece similar to the one from Sibişeni, discovered in the Wietenberg culture cemetery at Luduş, in grave G 5, dated to the Wietenberg III phase, in which, alongside the cremated bones of an adult, a complete bronze needle, having been burnt and measuring 5.4 cm in length, was also deposited. The artefact, with its quadrangular section, has a slight bend/torsion, but with a sharp tip, which determined its inclusion in the category of needles¹².

The needle utility, as has always been catalogued in publications, must therefore be considered with reservations, since neither the general morphology nor the section of

the piece undoubtedly supports such a utility, but even questions it.

CONTEXT AND DATING

According to Iuliu Paul's notes, the bronze piece from Sibişeni would have been found "near the urn" of tomb 19¹³, a grave that we know is part of the central grouping of the cemetery¹⁴. Ioan Andriţoiu, more cautious, stated that the bronze needle from Sibişeni probably belongs to a Wietenberg funeral inventory¹⁵, also pointing out that it comes from "near the urn"¹⁶. The shallow depth of the cremation grave, at - 0.20 m, the lack of the upper part of the urn and its discovery with the bottom up, are sufficient grounds to conclude that it was disturbed by agricultural works. Thus, the presence of the bronze object "near" the urn from G 19 makes probable its association with the

burial mentioned, but we do not have the certainty that the metal object was in the urn. Moreover, it seems improbable, since its presence next to the remains of the cremation would have meant that the needle/chisel would have been burnt, or the piece does not show traces of burning. This finding leads either to the conclusion that the piece was not part of the cremated person's clothing, but rather arrived there

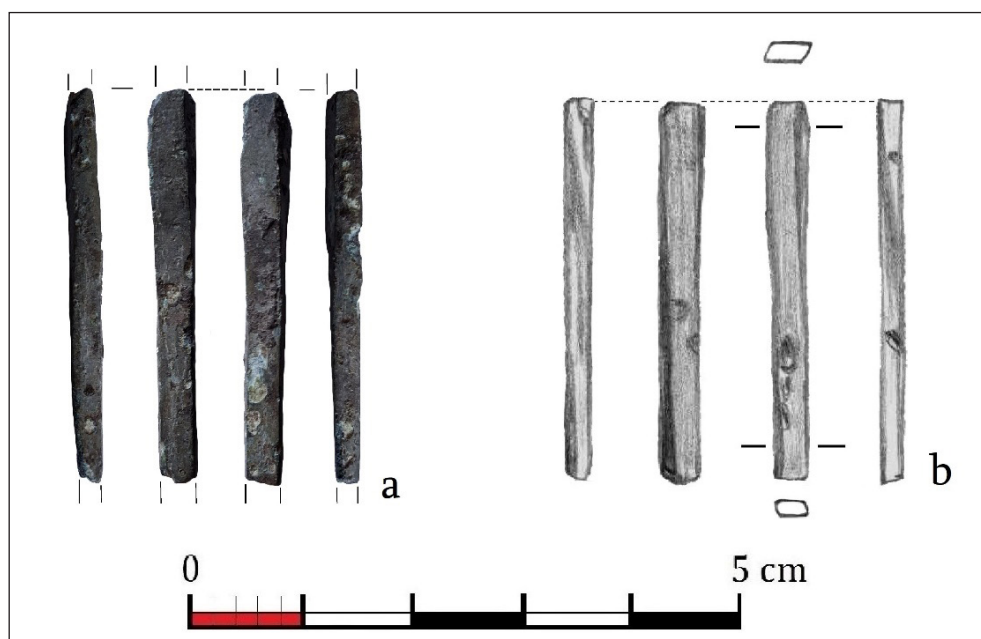


Fig. 3. Bronze artefact from nearby tomb M 19 of the Wietenberg necropolis in Sibişeni-Deasupra Satului (photo and drawing: C. I. Popa)

¹¹ ANDRIŢOIU 1992, 78, Pl. 71/17-18.

¹² BERECKI 2016, 53; REZI 2016, 122, 126, Pl. 39/4.

¹³ PAUL 1985, II; PAUL 1995, 164-165; PAUL 2019a, 70 (Annex 1).

¹⁴ For an updated and detailed plan of the cemetery, see POPA 2019a, Fig. 1.

¹⁵ ANDRIŢOIU 1994, 148.

¹⁶ ANDRIŢOIU 1992, 32, 74.

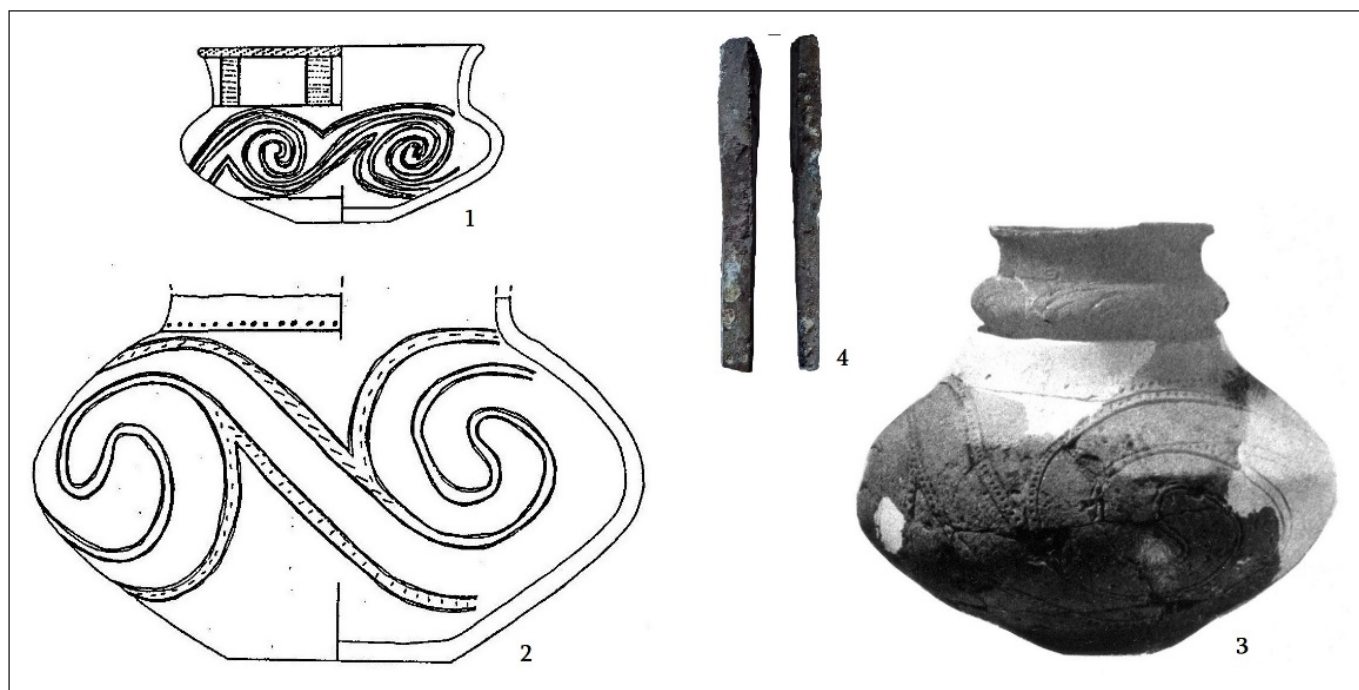


Fig. 4. Tomb M 19 of the Wietenberg necropolis in Sibişeni-Deasupra Satului, complete with the bronze piece (after N. Boroffka 1-2; I. Paul-3)

fortuitously, or that it was deposited after the urn was placed in the cemetery, as the property of the deceased possessor.

According to the illustration published by both I. Paul and N. Boroffka, we are dealing with an urn, respectively a pot-bellied vessel decorated with incised spirals, with the upper part missing, covered with a bowl that served as a lid, also decorated with chained spirals, and along and below the rim, with motifs executed in the *Zahnstempelung* technique¹⁷ (**Fig. 4**). Therefore, the dating of the tomb in the Wietenberg III/C phase is assured.

BRONZE PIECES FROM WIETENBERG CEMETERIES

The discovery of bronze artefacts in the Wietenberg culture funerary inventories proved to be quite sporadic, which evidences that there was no express custom in depositing personal metal objects alongside the buried person. Two decades ago, the only bronze pieces, considered as funerary inventories, were the Sibişeni needle and the *Rollenkopfnadel*-type needle from Mereşti¹⁸. Meanwhile, preventive archaeological research, carried out across large areas, for large infrastructure works or other types of investments, led to the discovery not only of the largest Wietenberg cemeteries, but also the identification of new graves with metal inventories.

Most of the known bronze pieces come from the Wietenberg III cemetery at Luduş (Mureş County), where three cremation graves (G 1, G 2 and G 5) had metal inventories (two pendants, a simple needle and a thin sheet fragment). The artefacts were also burnt, undoubted proof of their wearing by the deceased at the time of cremation (as owners, a man and a teenager were identified in Luduş)¹⁹. The

Wietenberg cremation cemetery in Gheorghieni-Valea Mare (Cluj County) also offered several metal artefacts. The double cremation grave in a stone cist (Cx 8) contained two bronze artefacts, found in both burials: a sword deposited beneath one of the vessels and a small wire fragment, respectively. In the same cemetery, in the urn of a cremation grave (Cx 15), the fragment of a bronze ring was found among the cremated bones²⁰. At Floreşti-Polus Center (Cluj County), one of the cremation graves (G 45) had as inventory a bronze wire with sized spirals at the ends²¹, and in cremation grave G 3 a fragmentary saltaleone was found²². Also, from the inventory of the “princely grave” (G 29) comes a perforated-neck pin (*Lochhalsnadel*) with double-conical head, Wietenberg IV in our opinion, or post Wietenberg (of Bădeni III-Deva type according to M. Rotea)²³.

In other situations, the presence of bronzes is indirectly attested. The existence of bronze oxides on the cremated bones of a child’s grave (G 11) in the Sebeş-Între Răstoace Wietenberg necropolis (Alba County) suggests that the deceased wore a bronze artefact²⁴. A similar situation is documented in the Wietenberg Cemetery in Dumbrăviţa²⁵, where several bones, especially long ones, preserve traces of contact with bronze pieces, which were, however, removed from the cremation by the dead man’s relatives and not deposited in the urn. The large number of graves that provide such examples places the Dumbrăviţa graveyard in first place

DARÓCZI 2021, 16, 18-20, 24, Pl. II/807. Initial mention, in PALINCAŞ 2014, 310.

²⁰ In the inhumation tomb CX 21, near the right hand was a bronze fragment from an unidentified piece, but it seems that it belongs to the Noua culture (CRIŞAN *et alii* 2009, 304).

²¹ ROTEA *et alii* 2008, p. 52; DARÓCZI *et alii* 2025, 17, 19, Pl. III/2.

²² DARÓCZI *et alii* 2025, 16, 19, Pl. I/2.

²³ ROTEA *et alii* 2008, p. 52; DARÓCZI *et alii* 2025, 17, 19, Pl. II/1.

²⁴ FANTANEANU *et alii* 2017, 78, 132, Fig. 233c.

²⁵ Already reported some time ago, at ROTEA 2009, 57.

¹⁷ PAUL 1995, Taf. XV/5; BOROFFKA 1994, Taf. 123/4-5.

¹⁸ ANDRÎTOIU 1994, 148, 154; ROTEA 2009, 57.

¹⁹ BERECKI 2016, 53, 65-67, 139, Pl. 39/1-4; REZI 2016, 122-127, Pl. 39/1-4;

in terms of the number of cremated bearers of bronze metal artefacts. The complete analysis, due to Alexandra Comşa, was published very recently; it was carried out on 15 graves out of the 24 discovered, from which five such examples result: G 9 – traces on the left ulna (female, approx. 18-20 years); G 11 – traces in the area of the skull and ulna (adult male, approx. 45 years); G 14 a – traces on a pebble from the grave's inventory (adult woman 25-35 years); G 14b – traces in the foot area (tibia and patella) (adult woman 20-30 years); G 15 – traces on limestone pebbles from the funeral inventory (*infans I*, undetermined sex)²⁶. Radiocarbon dating of tombs 8 and 9 indicates the middle of the 17th century and the middle of the 16th century²⁷. In the extreme southwest of Transylvania, one of the four skeletons that formed a collective interment in an abandoned dwelling, investigated at Şoimuş-Lângă Sat (aka Şoimuş II) (Hunedoara County), had several bronze saltaleoni, most of them grouped near the chest and left arm area²⁸. The grave with the saltaleone from Floreşti (G 3) was dated between 1619–1504 BCE (95.4% confidence interval)²⁹.

We consider other finds, such as the funerary finds from the Cauce caves-Peştera Cauce and Mereşti-Peştera Almaş, as uncertain, having either other cultural affiliation³⁰ or being wrongly included in the discussion³¹. Likewise, the attribution of certain gold items to Wietenberg culture burials – excluding the exceptional case of the sanctuary with³² sacrifices and offerings at Oarţa de Sus – is illustrated by the gold loop ring discovered in the inventory of the “princely” tomb (G 29) from Floreşti-Polus, initially attributed to a post-Wietenberg horizon, namely the Deva-Bădeni group³³,

²⁶ COMSA 2025, 7-8, 24, 28-33, 43.

²⁷ DARÓCZI *et alii* 2022, 43-44, Pl. III.

²⁸ MARC *et alii* 2016, 175-176, 181, Fig. 7; Pl. 7/3.

²⁹ DARÓCZI *et alii* 2025, 17-18.

³⁰ The context of the discovery of moulds attributed to a metallurgist from Cauce is not very clear, as there is a possibility that they belong to a workshop or possibly a funeral inventory. They have been attributed to the Bronze Age (CIUGUDEAN *et alii* 2005, 48-51, Pl. XXXV/4; XXXVI-XXXVIII); either the Wietenberg culture or the Balta Sărată group (CIUGUDEAN 2021, 64, Pl. VII/2-3, 5-6); we included them in the Deva-Româneşti group (POPA/TOTOIANU 2010, 228, 240). As for the needle with a rolled knob (*Rollenkopfnadel*) from Mereşti, the uncertainties are even greater. It has been associated, without any certainty, with the inventory of an inhumation tomb, which may not belong to just the Wietenberg or Noua cultures. However, some specialists tend to attribute it to the Wietenberg culture (HOREDT 1960, 127-128; SOROCEANU/BLĂJAN/CERGHİ 1976, 65, 67; ANDRIŢOIU 1978, 255; CHIDIOŞAN 1980, 77; BOROFFKA 1994, 108; ANDRIŢOIU 1994, 148, 150; ROTEA 2009, 57; MOTZOI-CHICIDEANU 2011, 543; BERECKI 2016, 33, 154). See also DIETRICH/DIETRICH 2007a, 96, with reservations on the discovery. We have expressed doubt that it could be Wietenberg, citing as an example the burials from Cauce (POPA 2019a, 61). Another *Rollenkopfnadel*-type needle was found at Rotbav-La Pârâuţ in the vegetal layer, but near some Wietenberg tombs, but a direct relationship between them cannot be established. As already discussed, the cultural and chronological classification of the needle is difficult, given that such specimens are found in great numbers also in the Noua culture, illustrated in this site (DIETRICH/DIETRICH 2007a, 90-92, 98, Pl. 2/4; DIETRICH/DIETRICH 2007b, 37, footnotes 11 and 12, Fig. 3).

³¹ We consider the bone pendant found in the inventory of tomb M 5 from Derşida (CHIDIOŞAN 1980, 24, Pl. 7/10a) wrongly included among the bronze artefacts (GÁL/MARINESCU/BERECKI 2018, 148).

³² With several gold and silver artefacts (KACSÓ 1987, 70, Abb. 22-23).

³³ ROTEA *et alii* 2008, p. 52-53, pl. XVIII/3; XIX/2; ROTEA 2009, p. 50, fig. 36; DARÓCZI *et alii* 2025, 17, 19, Pl. II/1.

but which we see as illustrative of those of the Wietenberg IV type³⁴.

In the Luduş cemetery, the bronze artefacts were cremated along with the deceased³⁵. The examples should also be taken into consideration for the previously mentioned discoveries from Sebeş and Dumbrăviţa, in which the artefacts must have been recovered by relatives from the cremation pyre. This was not the case in Sibişeni, as the bronze piece found near tomb 19 was not burnt.

In the case of some of the graves with metal parts (Gheorghieni, Turia) one can observe either special funerary arrangements or a certain distance from the rest of the graves (like at Floreşti-Polus)³⁶, a fact interpreted as a reflection of a different social status of those buried, just as, in other cases, the graves with bronze artefacts (Sibişeni, Luduş) did not benefit from any arrangement/construction³⁷.

CONCLUSIONS

As a constant, we note that the funerary finds of metal pieces from the Wietenberg culture area are concentrated in the centre and the southwest of this region. Such artefacts are missing from other regions, such as the northwest³⁸ or the eastern side. Advancing the hypothesis of the existence of another way of deposition of metal by these communities, not in graves, but in the form of accumulations (/deposits) buried in the vicinity of cemeteries, may or may not be accepted³⁹. But we must take into account a greater variety of funeral practices, such as those at Recea Mare (Sălaj County), a Wietenberg III site with only three complexes, including two separated pits containing human remains, and a third pit with ceramic deposits (probably a *bothros*), to be discussed alongside the complexes from the outskirts of the Late Bronze Age settlement at Nyíregyháza-Oros “Mega Űzleti Park”, where, in the vicinity of five pits containing human remains, two bronze hoards were also found⁴⁰.

From a functional distribution perspective, it can be observed that the bronze artefacts from the clearly attested Wietenberg culture funerary inventories and contexts are limited to only two categories: the first, and best attested, consists of personal adornments and dress accessories (pendants, bronze wire with sized spirals at the ends, perforated-neck pin, gold loop ring and saltaleoni), while the second comprises needles or chisels (**Fig. 5**). The latter category, given the uncertainties regarding the function of the needle from Luduş (which may likewise have served as a garment fastener) and of the fragmentary piece from Sibişeni, could theoretically also belong to the first category. Other artefacts mentioned only from Gheorghieni can be placed into the same category (ring, wire). Even in the case of the analysis of the bones from the Dumbrăviţa necropolis,

³⁴ See, for the same classification, and PALINCAŞ 2014, p. 5; BERECKI 2016, p. 45, 49-50, 63, 66; GÁL/MARINESCU/BERECKI 2018, p. 148.

³⁵ PALINCAŞ 2014, 310; BERECKI 2016, 67.

³⁶ ROTEA *et alii* 2008, p. 52-53, pl. XVIII/3; XIX/2; ROTEA 2009, p. 50, fig. 36; DARÓCZI *et alii* 2025, 17, 19, Pl. II/1.

³⁷ BERECKI 2016, 50.

³⁸ BEJINARIU 2015, 43-45.

³⁹ DIETRICH/DIETRICH 2007b, 41, footnote 10.

⁴⁰ BEJINARIU 2021, 111-114.

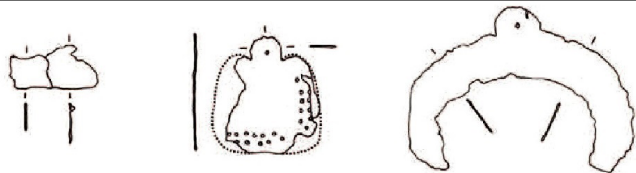
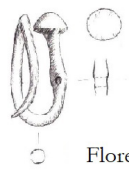
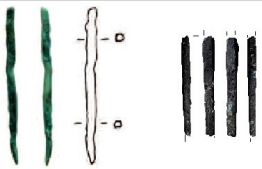
Pendants	 Luduș Luduș Luduș
Saltaleoni	 Șoimuș Florești-Polus
(Golden) lock-ring	 Florești-Polus
Armband	 Florești-Polus
Pin	 Florești-Polus
Needle/ chisel	 Luduș Sibîșeni

Fig. 5. Classification of bronze and gold artefacts discovered in Wietenberg funeral inventories (Phase III and IV/C and D)

the traces imprinted during the cremations also suggest pieces of clothing and adornment, either worn on the hand or the foot, or headware, the individuals aged between *infans I* and 45 years old, but generally women⁴¹. The only piece that stands out from the rest of the funeral inventories, if it turns out to be Wietenberg, is the bronze sword deposited under a ceramic vessel.

We do not intend to discuss here the evolution of the cemetery in relation to the Wietenberg community settlement, established on the large terrace from Sibîșeni. However, as we have also had occasion to note elsewhere⁴², the domestic inventories of the settlement illustrate a long-term development, probably encompassing all known phases of the culture⁴³, and by no means being restricted to a single

phase⁴⁴. Other small bronze pieces were also discovered in the Wietenberg settlement, contemporary to the cemetery. Still pending to be published, they originate from the inventory of a house surveyed in 2014⁴⁵ in the northern sector of the settlement, on the occasion of the extension of the railway in the vicinity of the Vințu de Jos railway station. Also, in the 1990s, a bronze Pădureni-type axe was recovered from a local, but it disappeared before it was documented⁴⁶. In this situation, the bronze piece from the Wietenberg cemetery is the first published from the Sibîșeni site.

translated by Cosmin Mihai Coatu

⁴¹ COMȘA 2025, 28-30.

⁴² POPA 2019a, 68.

⁴³ For now, the most comprehensive work on the excavations in the settlement, while mentioning that it does not illustrate and mention all the

relevant materials, remains ANDRIȚOIU/POPA/SIMINA, 148-152, Pl. II-III, XV-XVI; for other significant materials from this location POPA 2019b; POPA 2020.

⁴⁴ BĂLAN 2014, 43.

⁴⁵ Archaeological excavations by Cristian I. Popa and Roxana Stăncescu.

⁴⁶ POPA 2019a, 70, footnote 192.

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