

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: The True Location of "Lake Hermanstadt" and How to Get There. With Notes on Contemporary Publications.

Part 1: "Lake Hermanstadt," Its Location in Emily Gerard's Writings and in the Cindrel Mountains. With a Travel Report

*Dracula Brama Stokera: prawdziwa lokalizacja „Jeziora Hermanstadt” i jak tam dotrzeć. Z uwagami na temat współczesnych publikacji.
Część 1: „Jezioro Hermanstadt”, jego lokalizacja w pismach Emily Gerard oraz w Górach Cindrel. Z relacją z podróży*

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ABSTRACT

Part I of this paper discusses the location of Dracula's "Lake Hermanstadt" near the Scholomance, the mythical School of the Devil mentioned by both Bram Stoker (1897) and Emily de Laszowska Gerard (1885 and 1888). It addresses the question whether either of the authors actually was familiar with the lake's exact site, which I was able to reconstruct from Gerard's 1888 travel account, military maps from the Habsburg era and by personally traveling there in August 2013 and July 2015; this article also shows maps and photos from my exploration trips. Part II discusses other reports from the second half of the 19th century, describing foot walks to this lake. These travel logs confirm many curious details presented by Gerard, including the lake's alleged ability to influence the weather and its supposed connection to the open sea, but no clear association with the Scholomance, the "Devil's Cauldron" and the dragon sleeping under the surface. For this, Gerard must have consulted other sources, or conflated separate notions. It is Stoker, finally, who tightly fixed the site of the mysterious Scholomance's to that of Gerard's lake in the Cindrel Mountains.

Keywords: Stoker; Gerard; *Dracula*; Scholomance; Hermanstadt; Hermannstadt; Cindrel; lake; Iezerul Mare; vampire; magic; devil; folklore; Transylvania

ABSTRAKT

W części pierwszej artykułu omówiono lokalizację „Jeziora Hermanstadt” z powieści *Dracula* Brama Stokera, usytuowanego w pobliżu Scholomance – mitycznej szkoły diabła, wspomnianej zarówno przez Brama Stokera (1897), jak i Emily de Laszowską Gerard (1885 i 1888). Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy którekolwiek z tych autorów rzeczywiście знаło dokładne położenie jeziora, które udało się zrekonstruować autorowi, na podstawie relacji z podróży Gerard z 1888 roku, map wojskowych z czasów monarchii habsburskiej oraz dzięki osobistym wyprawom w to miejsce, odbytym w sierpniu 2013 i lipcu 2015 roku. W artykule zamieszczono również mapy i fotografie z tych ekspedycji. Część druga jest poświęcona relacjom z pieszych wędrówek nad to jezioro odbywającym się w drugiej połowie XIX wieku. Dzienniki podróży potwierdzają wiele intrygujących szczegółów przedstawionych przez Gerard, w tym domniemaną zdolność jeziora do wpływania na pogodę oraz jego rzekomy związek z otwartym morzem. Nie znajdują jednak jednoznacznych powiązań z Scholomance, „kotłem diabła” ani ze smokiem śpiącym pod powierzchnią wody. W tym zakresie Gerard musiała korzystać z innych źródeł lub połączyć odrębne wątki tradycji ludowej. Dopiero Stoker jednoznacznie utożsamił lokalizację tajemniczej Scholomance z jeziorem opisanym przez Gerard w Górach Cindrel.

Słowa kluczowe: Stoker; Gerard; *Dracula*; Scholomance; Hermanstadt; Hermannstadt; Cindrel; jezioro; Iezerul Mare; wampir; magia; diabeł; folklor; Transylwania

Introduction

I reconstructed the site of Stoker's "Lake Hermanstadt" as early as June 2013, and mentioned this in the Christmas issue of *Letter of Castle Dracula*:

This new paradigm, presented just before the centenary of Stoker's death (20 April 2012), already aided me to solve another old riddle: The location of the Scholomance, the Devil's School, which the novelist placed at "Lake Hermanstadt" [sic – HdR]. Again with the help of antique Habsburg military maps, the true site, originally described by Emily Gerard, could be established: Iezerul Mare, next to the Platoul Diavolului, high up in the Cindrel Mountains south-west of Sibiu. My local guide confirmed that the folk beliefs quoted by Gerard and Stoker were still respected; full details can be found in the planned "Dracula Bram Stoker Travel Guide" which I am currently preparing together with Dacre Stoker, Bram Stoker's great-grandnephew.¹

As the publication of this guide book was postponed again and again, I decided to present my findings at the "Children of the Night" International Dracula Congress

¹ Hans C. de Roos, "Fact & Fiction in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Time for a New Paradigm," special Christmas issue of *Letter of Castle Dracula*, December 22, 2013: 5.

in November 2022. The following paper is based on the insights and materials discussed at this virtual meeting. The first part deals with reconstructing the actual location of “Lake Hermanstadt,” using Gerard’s travel descriptions.² The second part, to be published in the next issue of *Kultura i Historia*, will analyze texts by other contemporaries who discussed either this mysterious lake or the myths of the Devil’s Cauldron and the Scholomance, and will examine the link between the three.

Just as for the location Stoker most probably had in mind for his Castle Dracula, my research regarding “Lake Hermanstadt” emphatically includes “learning by walking.” From the available texts alone, it was impossible to decide which of the two glacier lakes in the area Gerard visited was supposed to be the “Devil’s Cauldron”: I had to visit the place itself to elicit the spontaneous comments that finally settled the issue. As a photographer and artist, I have been advocating a more visual approach to Dracula Studies since 2012. The maps and photos contained in Part I are no mere holiday souvenirs, but serve to link Stoker’s mythical “Lake Hermanstadt” – with its mark of remaining hidden to the non-initiated – to real places, and to show other scholars the route, so that they can learn about these local myths first-hand, before the regional folklore fades away forever.

The ultimate goal of my research, however, was not merely to map the geographical background of Bram Stoker’s story, but to collect materials leading to a better understanding of the complex relationship between fact and fiction in his *Dracula* novel, as discussed in some of my other papers.³ The way Stoker inserted the myth of the Scholomance into his story is typical of how he handled both in his narrative: Building on his preparatory library research, using respected sources and detailed notes, he produced literary characters and locations that appeared authentic to his readers, but in the end could not unambiguously be traced back to historical-biographical or topographical reality. Count Dracula is initially linked to the historical Vlad III the Impaler, but in Chapter 25, Van Helsing and Mina Harker discard this association and instead identify their foe as “[t]hat other of his race who, in a later age, again and again, brought his forces over The Great River into Turkey Land”⁴ – possibly a hint to Michael the Brave (1558–1601).⁵

² Although it is usual to italicize foreign-language words in academic texts, this article is so full of them that I have dispensed with it, in favor of a more orderly layout, and only used quotation marks where it seemed appropriate.

³ E.g. De Roos, “Fact & Fiction”; “Bram Stoker’s Vampire Trap: Vlad the Impaler and His Nameless Double,” *Linköping Electronic Articles in Computer and Information Science* 14, no. 2 (March 19, 2012); “*Dracula*’s Truth Claim and its Consequences,” *Journal of Dracula Studies* 16 (October 2014): 53–80.

⁴ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Constable, 1897), Chapter 25, Dr. Seward’s Diary of 28 October.

⁵ See again my paper “Bram Stoker’s Vampire Trap” and my book chapter “Count Dracula’s Address and Life-Time Identity,” in *Dracula: An International Perspective*, ed. Marius Crişan (Palgrave, 2017), 95–115.

The route descriptions to Castle Dracula get vaguer as the protagonists approach it: Jonathan Harker, Professor Van Helsing and Mina all fall asleep while snow storms obscure any recognizable landmarks.⁶ Van Helsing is said to be based on a real person, but finding out whom the novelist had in mind is a tantalizing task.⁷ Therefore, it should not surprise us that "Lake Hermanstadt," which Van Helsing mentions as the location of the Scholomance, is not listed in any atlas. Finding it all the same on the military maps of the Habsburg era is one thing; suspecting that Stoker willfully created a fictitious name for this lake in order to render any verification or falsification impossible is another thing. The following paper should be read as a contribution to a new paradigm transcending the principles worded by Elizabeth Miller and her colleague Clive Leatherdale.⁸ At the same time, I am trying to untangle a number of misunderstandings introduced by the writings of Raymond McNally, Radu Florescu and Leslie Klinger.

Dracula and the Scholomance as Cultural Phenomena

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is not only a novel; it is a cultural phenomenon. Since its first edition, it has never been out of print, and the text has been human-translated to and published in book form in more than 50 languages.⁹ The Count Dracula character, its variations, imitations and re-inventions have appeared in more than 700 film, television, and video adaptations globally.¹⁰ In this respect, the *Guinness Book of Records* puts him far ahead of Sherlock Holmes.¹¹ Although not everyone

⁶ For the reconstruction of the location of the castle, see my paper "Castle Dracula: Its Exact Location Reconstructed from Stoker's Novel, His Research Notes and Contemporary Maps," *Linköping Electronic Articles in Computer and Information Science* 14, no. 1 (February 7, 2012), and my book chapter "Count Dracula's Address."

⁷ See my article "Heeft de vampierbestrijder uit Bram Stoker's *Dracula* echt bestaan? De Amsterdamse psychiater Albert van Renterghem en de hypnose," *De Parelduiker* 17, no. 6 (October 2012): 41–58. In an 1897 interview, Stoker insisted that Van Helsing was based on a real person. See Jane Thompson Stoddart, "Mr. Bram Stoker: A Chat with the Author of *Dracula*," *British Weekly*, July 1, 1897.

⁸ See my article "Fact & Fiction," 2–5.

⁹ Video call conversation with Professor Gordon Melton, Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion, June 3, 2026. In his email to the author of June 15, 2026, Melton pointed out that *Dracula* is still missing from Wikipedia's "List of literary works by number of translations" but deserves to be included in the top 60.

¹⁰ John Edgar Browning and Caroline Joan Picart, *Dracula in Visual Media: Film, Television, Comic Book and Electronic Game Appearances, 1921–2010* (McFarland, 2011), 3f.

¹¹ "As of August 2015, Bram Stoker's Count Dracula has been portrayed in a total of 538 films (both cinema releases and TV films – more than any other literary character. This puts him a long way ahead of his closest literary character rival, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, with 299 appear-

appreciates Stoker's style¹² – e.g. his long-windedness, chivalric sentimentality and “cardboard characters”¹³ – “Dracula's indelible influence on pop culture”¹⁴ cannot be denied. For this reason alone, the novel and its elements deserve the attention of academic scholars.

The popularity of Stoker's story not only extends to its characters, but also to the fictitious sites featured in the text. Castle Dracula became the inspiration for the Castlevania franchise, while around a million tourists are visiting Castle Bran near Braşov, Hotel Castel Dracula in the Borgo Pass, and the Poenari Castle in the Argeş Valley every year, hoping to experience some of the dark atmosphere of the vampire's fortress. In all three cases, the connection with Stoker's Count is thin or non-existent, as the novelist, according to my research, imagined Count Dracula's stronghold to be located on an empty mountain top, Izvorul Călimanului, in the volcanic Kelemen Alps, ca. 24 km south-east of the mentioned Hotel Castel Dracula.¹⁵

After Castle Dracula, the Scholomance is the second site mentioned in Bram Stoker's Dracula novel connected with evil supernatural powers. While the castle is the residence of the King Vampire and his three wanton brides, the Scholomance is said to be the earthly seat of the Devil himself, where he teaches the Dark Arts to a few selected students. That the Count attended this school himself links him directly to Satan. This is how Professor Van Helsing describes the Scholomance in Chapter 18 of Dracula:

The Draculas were, says Arminius, a great and noble race, though now and again were scions who were held by their coevals to have had dealings with the Evil One. They learned his secrets in the Scholomance, amongst the mountains over Lake Hermanstadt [sic – HdR], where the devil claims the tenth scholar as his due.¹⁶

Popularized by Dracula, the Scholomance today is an important site or “zone” in various fantasy games and books, such as the online game *World of Warcraft*

ances as of the same date.” Quoted from <https://guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/97587-most-portrayed-literary-character-in-film>

¹² Recently, film director Robert Eggers called Stoker “a bit of a hack writer.” Quoted from Robert Eggers, “‘I had to make the vampire as scary as possible’: Nosferatu's Robert Eggers on how folklore fuelled his film,” *The Guardian* of December 27, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/dec/27/robert-eggers-nosferatu-vampire-director>.

¹³ “The novel is usually considered flawed, or even ‘a spoiled masterpiece.’ [...] Obviously it's a story we want to hear badly enough to put up with the stretches of dullness and the undelineated cardboard characters whose voices mostly sound identical.” Quoted from Dr. Michael Delahoyde, Washington State University, “Bram Stoker: *Dracula*,” n.d.

¹⁴ Dacre Stoker, “Foreword,” in Browning and Picart, *Dracula in Visual Media*, 2.

¹⁵ See again my paper “Castle Dracula: Its Exact Location,” and my book chapter “Count Dracula's Address.”

¹⁶ Stoker, *Dracula*, Mina Harker's Journal of 30 September.

(including the *Mists of Pandaria* remake), the Hearthstone card game Scholomance Academy, and the Young Adult novel *A Deadly Education* by Naomi Novik, that have appropriated the Transylvanian myth for their own artistic and commercial purposes.



Fig. 1. Scholomance illustration in the Demonic Paradise Wiki



Fig. 2–3. *World of Warcraft*. Top: the island of Caer Darrow, Classic version. Source: Warcraft Wiki. From the Warcraft Wikipeage: “Caer Darrow [...] is an island and a ruined keep located on Darrowmere Lake in the Western Plaguelands. Prior to the Third War, Kel’Thuzad made a deal with the House Barov and established the headquarters of the Cult of the Damned under this ancient human fortress, in the catacombs that became Scholomance, a school of necromancy. Once a bright institution it is now dedicated to the darkest, most vile arts, where human monsters seek to push the bounds of power and life itself.” Bottom: *Mists of Pandaria* expansion. Final boss room of the Scholomance dungeon in *World of Warcraft*, where the players encounter Darkmaster Gandling. © All images: Blizzard Entertainment Inc. (Microsoft)

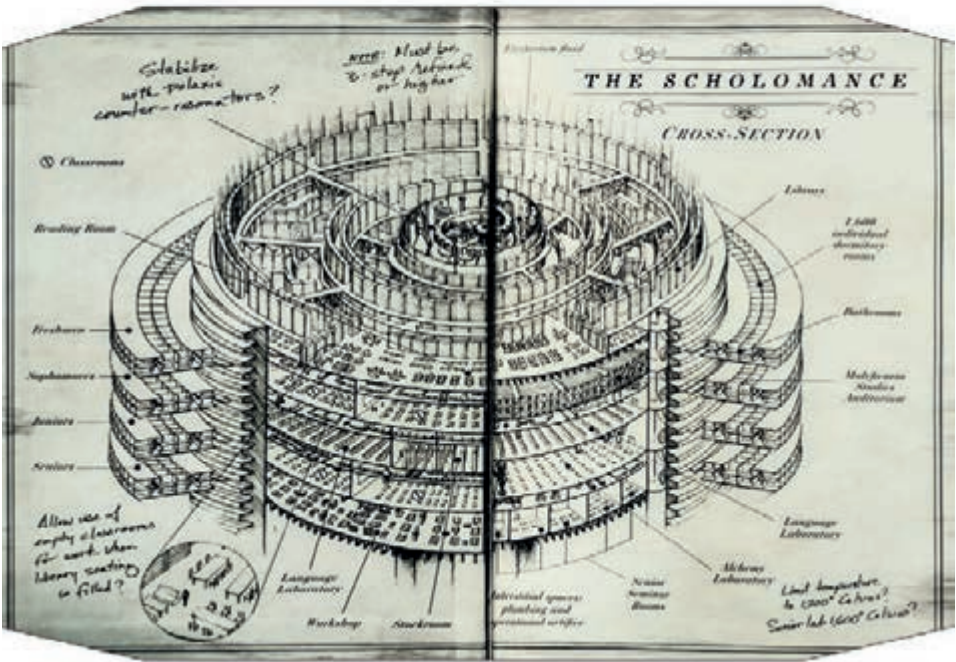


Fig. 4–5. Top: *Scholomance Academy Expansion* (Hearthstone game). Bottom: *A Deadly Education* (Naomi Novik, 2020)

Reconstructing the Site of “Lake Hermanstadt” from Gerard’s Travel-Log

From Bram Stoker’s preparatory notes,¹⁷ we know that the novelist took this notion about the Scholomance from the Scottish author Emily de Laszowska Gerard (1849–1905), who lived in Hermannstadt and Kronstadt (Braşov) from 1883 to 1885; her Polish husband, Ritter Miecislaus von Laszowski (Mieczysław Łaszowski), was a hussar in the Austro-Hungarian Army and was stationed in these towns.¹⁸ These are Stoker’s handwritten remarks based on Gerard’s article “Transylvanian Superstitions in The Nineteenth Century,” Vol. 18 of July 1885:

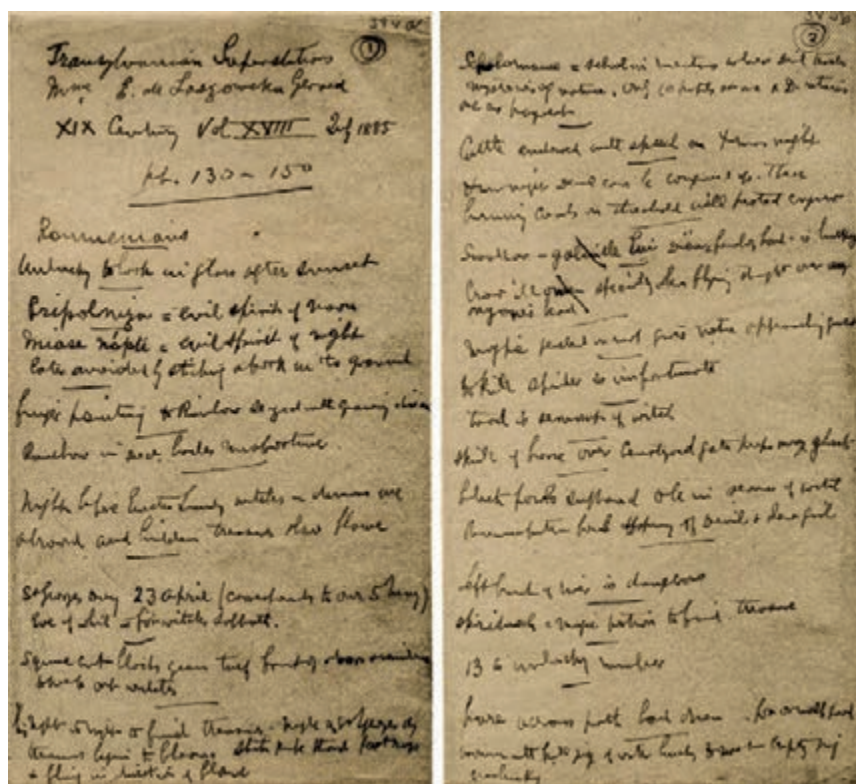


Fig. 6. Stoker’s Notes, pages 52 and 53, from the 2008 facsimile edition by Robert Eigheten-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller

¹⁷ Hereinafter referred to as “the Notes.” See Robert Eigheten-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller, eds., *Bram Stoker’s Notes for Dracula: A Facsimile Edition* (McFarland, 2008).

¹⁸ See the preface to Emily Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest: Facts, Figures, and Fancies from Transylvania* (Blackwood & Sons: 1888). See also Katarzyna Gmerek, “Emily i Dorothea Gerard: nieznanie pisarki szkockiej w Polsce,” *Biblioteka* 9, no. 18 (2005): 13.

The relevant paragraph from this article reads:

As I am on the subject of thunderstorms, I may as well here mention the Scholomance, or school supposed to exist somewhere in the heart of the mountains, and where all the secrets of nature, the language of animals, and all imaginable magic spells and charms are taught by the devil in person. Only ten scholars are admitted at a time, and when the course of learning has expired and nine of them are released to return to their homes, the tenth scholar is detained by the devil as payment, and mounted upon an Ismeju (dragon) he becomes henceforward the devil's aide-de-camp, and assists him in "making the weather," that is to say, preparing the thunderbolts.

A small lake, immeasurably deep, lying high up among the mountains to the south of Hermanstadt, is supposed to be the cauldron where is brewed the thunder, and in fair weather the dragon sleeps beneath the waters. Roumanian peasants anxiously warn the traveller to beware of throwing a stone into this lake lest it should wake the dragon and provoke a thunderstorm.¹⁹

Three years later, in 1888, Gerard published her travel memoirs in the form of a book, *The Land Beyond the Forest*.²⁰ In Volume 2, on pages 5–6, we find exactly the same text.

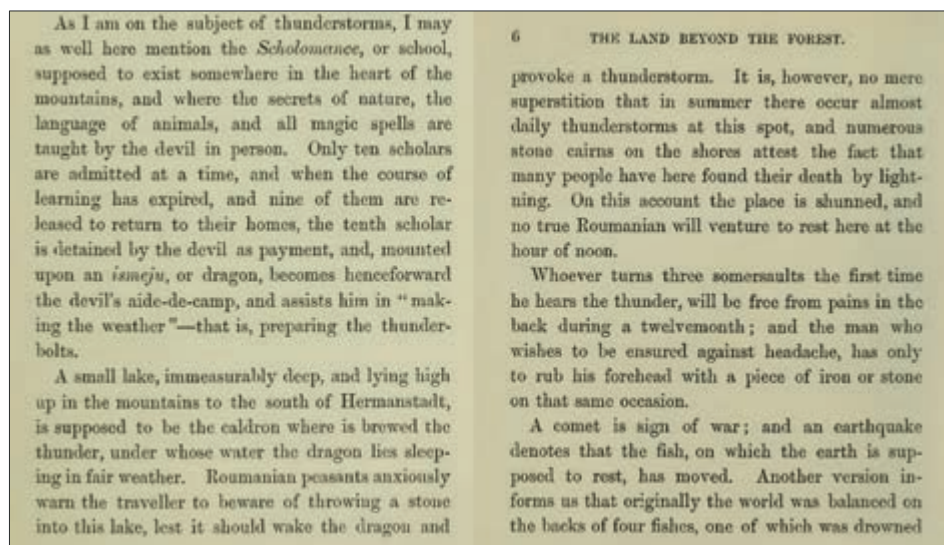


Fig. 7. Facsimile of Emily Gerard's 1888 book *The Land Beyond the Forest* (collage), Chapter 27, pages 5–6

¹⁹ Emily Gerard, "Transylvanian Superstitions," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (July 1885): 136.

²⁰ Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest*.

In the 2008 facsimile edition of the Notes, however, Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller comment that there is no evidence that Stoker actually read the book.²¹

Only in late October 2018, Philip Spedding, Development Director at the London Library, unearthed a series of books that Stoker may have consulted in the London Library, instead of in the Whitby Library or the library of the British Museum.²² The London Library listed 26 book titles Stoker would have referenced in his preparatory notes.²³ The last title on this list is Emily Gerard's 1888 book. In fact, Stoker's Notes do *not* mention this book, only Gerard's article in *The Nineteenth Century*. During the "Children of the Night" Dracula Conference 2021, however, independent researcher Lokke Heiss presented his arguments that Stoker actually *did* peruse Gerard's volumes.²⁴

Whatever the case, in the text of *Dracula*, Stoker copied Gerard's spelling error "Hermanstadt" (instead of Hermannstadt) – an oversight suggesting that neither Stoker nor Gerard cared much about the actual site of the Scholomance, and perhaps even did not know its precise location. I will discuss later whether this is true.

What I was interested in, back in 2013, was to identify the *actual location of the lake* that was hinted at by Gerard and later became the model for Stoker's "Lake Hermanstadt." The obvious problem is that Gerard's article, even if we correct the spelling error, does not provide exact geographical clues. There are many mountains "to the south of Hermannstadt" (now called Sibiu), and there are many small lakes to be found there. The name "Lake Hermanstadt" used by Stoker cannot be found in any of Gerard's texts, nor can it be spotted on any old or modern map of Transylvania; we may suspect that the name was invented by Stoker himself. This means that another set of clues is needed to locate it – provided that Gerard's lake was not purely fictitious.

As for the name "Scholomance," most scholars assume that it refers to the "Solomonari," who – according to certain Romanian superstitions – were wizards "learned in the wisdom of Solomon," able to create storms and ride dragons. In the Talmud and in the "Testament of Solomon" (1st–3rd century AD), King Solomon is said to have tricked the demon Asmodeus (in other sources: Beelzebul or Beelzebub) into helping to construct the temple in Jerusalem. Hence, this king had a reputation

²¹ Eighteen-Bisang and Miller, *Notes*, 123, footnote 252.

²² Or in addition to the works consulted there; Stoker may have consulted some titles multiple times.

²³ Mike Wilton, "The London Library Has Found Books Bram Stoker Used as Research For Dracula," Allhallowsgoek.com, November 10, 2018; email exchange of the author with Spedding. November 5, 2018.

²⁴ His presentation was titled "In Emily We May Acquit and Blame the Word on Schmidt."

of being able to summon supernatural creatures. According to various apocryphal writings, he could also speak with animals, and was a master of alchemy.²⁵

Solomon's Rocks: On the Wrong Track with the Wrong King?

In his book *The New Annotated Dracula* (2008), Leslie Klinger quotes the opinion of *Dracula* scholar Nicolae Paduraru, the founder of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula. According to Klinger, Paduraru identified the Scholomance as

[...] 'the rocks of Solomon,' where the scholars took their oaths to uphold their way of life, located at Bâlea Lac (Lake Balea), high in the Carpathians between Sibiu (Hermannstadt) and Braşov.²⁶

Following Klinger's hint, in October 2012, I visited Bâlea Lac in the Făgăraş Mountains east of Sibiu, but no one I asked there knew about such "Solomon's Rocks" at or near the lake.²⁷

Such a rock *is* mentioned, however, by former Boston professors Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu in their book *The Essential Dracula* (1979). The authors refer to it as "Pietrelelui Solomon," which in their opinion was located near a town called "Păltiniş Pietrele":

Near Hermannstadt (known as Sibiu in modern Romanian) close to the town of Paltinis Pietrele, is a spot called "pietrelelui Solomon," the rocks of Solomon. We know that students often took vows to uphold their way of life.²⁸

But like "Lake Hermanstadt," the name "Păltiniş Pietrele" is not marked on the maps of Transylvania I was able to consult. In the Romanian language, the word

²⁵ In his book *Siebenbürgische Sagen* (J. Gött, 1857), 177f, Friedrich von Müller wrote that "Kaiser Salomo" had the gift to control the weather, and that those who inherited his skills were called "Scholomonar." In his essay "What Was the Scholomance – Horror, Ancient Myth and the Origins of the Devil's School," 2011, Jason Colavita argues that the Transylvanian legend of wandering wizards controlling the weather and riding dragons must have its roots in pre-Christian Dacian and Thracian myths around the pagan god Zalmoxis or Salmoxis (also: Zalmus), whose power his priests were allegedly able to wield.

²⁶ Leslie Klinger, *The New Annotated Dracula* (Norton, 2008), 342f, note 45.

²⁷ Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest*, Chapter 51, reports on her visit to Bâlea Lac, but does not mention any supernatural properties.

²⁸ Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu, eds., *The Essential Dracula* (Mayflower, 1979), 195, note 278.



Fig. 8. Bălea Lac. A promontory rock is visible somewhat right of the center, but to the local population, it is *not* known as “Solomon’s Rock.” Photo: Hans C. de Roos, 2012

“Păltiniș” refers to a sycamore-maple grove; it is a generic name.²⁹ In Romania, there are several towns and villages bearing this same name (e.g. near Caransebeș in Caraș-Severin County, or in Botoșani County).

The denomination “Pietrelelui Solomon,” however, seems to be unique. In “Solomon’s Rock: Myths, Legends and a Site of Natural Beauty,” Rachel Mundy explains that according to a local legend, King Solomon, while fleeing on horseback, fell into an abyss while his steed was jumping from one rock to another over 50 m distance. On this rock plateau, constituting a natural fortress, remains of the first Dacian settlement of the region have been discovered. The spoiler: This rock is located close to Brașov, which is around 140 km east of Hermannstadt. Traditionally, inhabitants of the Schei District of Brașov organize a procession to these Solomon’s Rocks during the spring holidays, commemorating the one day in the year that Romanian people were allowed to sell goods in the Saxon city without paying a toll. Today, it is a touristic point of interest, with a parking place and a hotel nearby.³⁰

We can conclude that the “Pietrelelui Solomon” is a well-defined site, but it can neither be described as “near Hermannstadt,” as McNally and Florescu did, nor as “to the south of Hermannstadt,” as indicated by Gerard. If Gerard actually wanted to point to Solomon’s Rock, the phrase “to the south of Kronstadt” would have been far more accurate. An even bigger problem is that the King Solomon linked to these

²⁹ “Păltiniș” derives from the Latin *platanus*; in Europe, the sycamore tree is a species of maple (*acer pseudoplatanus*).

³⁰ Rachel Mundy, “Solomon’s Rock: Myths, Legends and a Site of Natural Beauty,” *Brașov Visitor*, No. 1 (October 2004), at brasov-visitor.ro. The website is no longer active.



Fig. 9. Map from 1862, showing Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and Kronstadt (Braşov)



Fig. 10. Google Maps showing Pietrelelui Solomon near Braşov



Fig. 11–12. Pietrelelui Solomon. Photos by Nicu Farcaș, Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

rocks is believed to be a *Hungarian* king, a medieval ruler cursed by his mother for killing his own brother³¹ – there is no apparent connection to the biblical King Solomon, who died of natural causes, around 930 BC, after a reign of 40 years.

Further Clues Found in *The Land Beyond the Forest*

My research only progressed when I continued studying Gerard's book *The Land Beyond the Forest*. In Volume 2, Chapters 54 and 55, she reports on an excursion that should lead to a lake:

As on the second morning the rain had stopped, we thought we might venture to proceed on our way, the next station we had in view being the Jäeser See, a mysterious lake lying high up in the hills, of which many strange tales are told. This Meeresauge (eye of the sea, as all such high mountain-lakes are called by the people) is the source of the river Cibin, and believed by the country folk to be directly connected with the ocean by subterraneous openings. The bones of drowned seamen and spars from wrecked ships are said to have been there washed ashore; and popular superstition warns the stranger not to presume to throw a stone into its gloomy depths, as a terrible thunderstorm would be the inevitable result of such sacrilege. According to some people, the Jäeser See would be no other than the devil's own caldron, in which he brews the weather, and where a dragon sleeps coiled up beneath the surface.³²

From these details, we may conclude that this "Jäeser See" is the same lake as the one mentioned at the beginning of Volume 2 of Gerard's book, and in her article "Transylvanian Superstitions." To find the location of Stoker's "Lake Hermanstadt," all we would have to do is to find this "Jäeser See." Unfortunately, like "Lake Hermanstadt," it was not listed in any atlas of Romania. But while searching for this name, I noticed that "iezer" is the Romanian word for "mountain lake": Perhaps, Gerard mistook the term "iezer" for the name of the lake?

³¹ See, e.g. "People of Romania: Brasov (part III)" at abctravelromania.com; "Solomon's Rocks (Pietrele lui Solomon)" at brasovtour.com; Wikipedia, lemma "Pietrele lui Solomon." According to the curse, the king would die as soon as he would be seen by a commoner, so he tried to escape from his country unseen. During this dramatic adventure, he lost his crown (or he hid it, according to other versions). Legend has it that this was the crown that gave Kronstadt its name. The historical King Solomon of Hungary lived from 1053 till 1087 and reigned from 1063 till 1074. He was cursed by his mother after he raised his hand to strike her during an argument, when he had lost a battle against his cousins.

³² Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest*, Vol. II, 353f.

In order to find out which mountain lake she was referring to, I had to study the rest of Chapters 54 and 55. In this text, Gerard describes how her little travel group first visits the Hungarian customs station of La Dus, then continues to the Bistra Forest the next morning; Gerard mentions visiting a “Klause” or “monster dam” facilitating the transport of timber. After the group leaves the pine forest and moves to higher ground along a mountain shoulder, a snow storm forces the excursionists to return; Gerard does not actually reach the mysterious lake. But as La Dus and the Bistra Forest are marked on the 1876 Austro-Hungarian military maps, I could trace some of the group’s route and make an educated guess about the planned destination.

The mentioned “monster dam” must refer to the “Friedrichsklause” as marked on the 1876 Habsburg map, just south of Colonie Bistra and the “J.H.” (“Jagdhaus” or Gamekeeper’s Lodge).³³

The Habsburg map shows *two* nearby lakes as Gerard’s possible destination: Iezerul Mare (Big Lake) and Iezerul Mic (Small Lake). Both are cauldron-shaped glacial lakes just below the peak of Mount Cindrel,³⁴ 35 km southwest of Hermannstadt at ca. 2,000 m altitude.³⁵ Both names correspond to Gerard’s term “Jäser.” Next to the Cindrel, we find the “Teufelsplatte (“Platoul Diavolului”, “Devil’s Plateau”). The border between Transylvania (Austro-Hungarian territory) and the personal union of Wallachia and Moldavia, established in 1859, becoming the United Principalities of Romania in 1862, and the independent Kingdom of Romania in 1877, ran south of the Cindrel mountain range.

³³ David Turnock, “Settlement History and Sustainability in the Carpathians in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics* 1, no. 1 (2006): 48 informs us that “Colonia Bistra” was founded in 1870 by German settlers from Baden to provide the Petrești paper factory with wood; they constructed a “stavilar” (dam) to regulate the water flow and ease the transport of logs downhill. A further barrage was constructed at Oașa Mare. In the *Jahrbuch 1893* of the Siebenbürgische Karpathenverein, 85, Frieda von Kimakowicz also describes the Friedrichsklause as a “colossal” dam; her report will be discussed in Part 2.

³⁴ Also spelled Cândrel, Cschindrel, or Csindrel.

³⁵ In fact, there are two more glacial cirques in the region, the Gropata and the Iujbea Rășinariului cirques (also north of the Cindrel Peak), but they contain no lakes. In “Patrimoniu de mediu, arhitectural și cultural,” the Grupul de Acțiune Locală (GAL) Mărginimea Sibiului informs us: “In the central part of the main summits of the three massifs Lotru, Cindrel and Șureanu, at heights of over 1,900 m, 15 glacial cirques were carved by glaciers. The relief and altitude conditions were less favorable for the development of glacial phenomena. As a result, four glacial cirques were formed on the northern and eastern slopes of the Șerbota-Frumoasa – Cindrel peak: Gropata, Iezerul Mic, Iezerul Mare and Iujblea, two of which harbor glacial lakes, from which their names derive” [“Iezerul” means “mountain lake” – see above]. Of the two mentioned glacial lakes, Iezerul Mare is the largest (ca. 300 × 160 m) and the deepest (13.3 m). Nicknamed “The Emerald Sea” (Comoara de Smarald), Ioana, “Iezerul Mare al Cindrelului,” *De pe drum. Jurnale de călătorie*, 2014, calls it “without a doubt, the jewel of the Cindrel Mountains” (“fără îndoială, bijuteria Cindrelului”). Confusingly, in the Iezer Mountains (Romanian: Munții Iezer/Munții Iezer-Păpușa), east of Sibiu, in Argeș County, there are also two sites named Iezerul Mare (2,462 m) and Iezerul Mic (2,409 m).

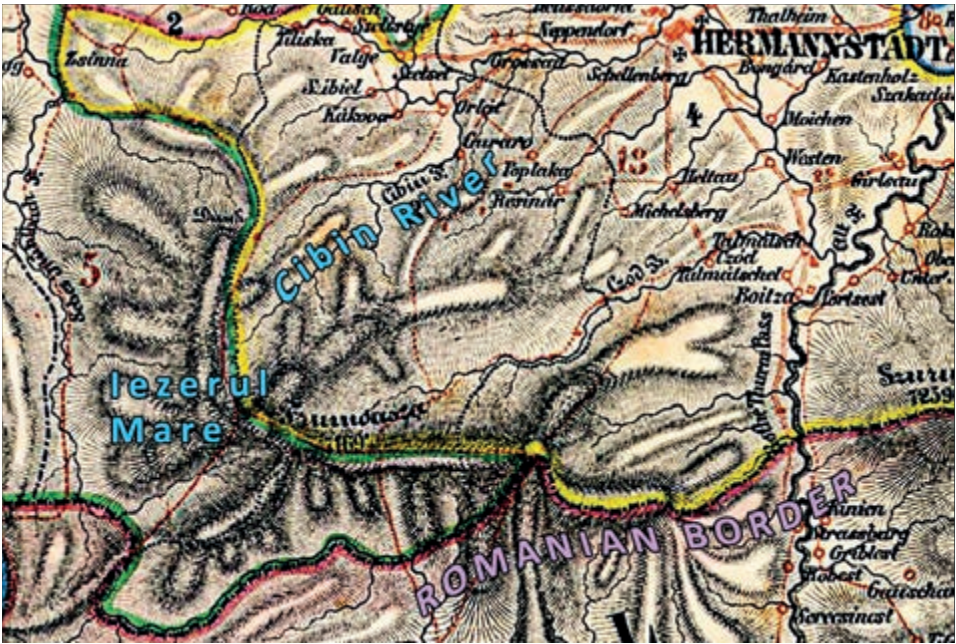


Fig. 13. Map of Siebenbürgen, Hermannstadt Verlag, 1862; border with the new United Principalities of Romania (1862)



Fig. 14. Habsburg military map, 1876, showing the Bistra Colony, La Dus, and the two discussed lakes (Second Military Survey, ZONE_23_COL_XXIX_RIU_SEBES_1876). I marked the probable route from La Dus to the glacier lakes in June 2013; it turns out to be the same route as taken by Frieda von Kimakowicz in 1891; her writings will be discussed in Part 2 of this article



Fig. 15. 1876 Habsburg military map showing Mount Cindrel, the lakes and the Devil's Plateau (Teufelsplatte, Platoul Diavolului)

Learning by Walking: A Personal Exploration of the Terrain and Local Myths

Based on Gerard's description and the maps alone, there was no way to determine which of the two lakes was meant. Hoping to learn more at the actual site, I made a hiking trip in August 2013. My base was the Pensiunea Grandor, which can be reached from Sibiu along the DJ106A. Here, the name "Păltiniș" came back into play, as a little ski resort town by this name was located between my hotel and Mount Cindrel. It is possible that McNally and Florescu had been on the right track, but that trying to combine the account of the lake with that of Solomon's Rock had resulted in a story that made no sense.

Walking up to Mount Cindrel from the Păltiniș ski lift station ("Statie Tele-scaun") and back means a twelve-hour trip, which should be started directly after sunrise in order to return before dark. My host Florin warned me that one wrong turn could cause several hours of delay. This means that for first-time visitors to this area, hiking with an experienced guide is highly recommended. I managed to find one, in the person of Stefan Giuran, a member of the Păltiniș Mountain Police.

We were accompanied by Florin's teenage son, Alex, who acted as a translator. Our goal was to reach the two mountain lakes, Iezerul Mare and Iezerul Mic.



Fig. 16. Google Maps with mark-ups for Sibiu, the DJ106A, the PensiuneaGrandor, Păltiniş, and the route to Iezerul Mare

- Around 8:30 a.m. Stefan drove us to the Statie Telescaun and then to a bend in the DJ106N.
- Along the DJ106N, we reached the Cantonul Silvic Muncel, a forest house 2 km south of the Păltiniş ski lift station (along the road: approximately 3½ km).
- One kilometer further to the southwest, a smaller trail, marked by red vertical bars, took us to the main ridge (“crestei principale”) of the Cindrel Mountains.
- Still by four-wheel-drive, we proceeded to Şaua Şerbănei at an altitude of 1,885 m. Here the protected nature reservation began, and we had to leave our car at this point.
- By 10 a.m. we started walking in the direction of the Iezerul Mare, along Vârful Niculeşti, Vârful Cânaia (1,962 m), Şaua Cânaia and Şaua Cindrel. To return, we took an alternative route along the Cabana Cânaia.

The moment of truth only arrived when we reached Iezerul Mare. Spontaneously, our guide warned me not to throw any stones into the water, as this could provoke a storm. As he spoke only little English, I had neither discussed Emily Gerard's description nor Stoker's novel with him. Thus, he could not know that this was one of the characteristics of the lake we were looking for.



Fig. 17. Arrival at Iezerul Mare, August 2013. Photo: Hans C. de Roos

Moreover, he explained to me that the lake was fed by an underground well, so that the water was continuously flowing over the edge. On the north side, as I could see myself, it formed a creek, which he said was the origin of the Cibin, the river that flows to and through Sibiu (Hermannstadt). This was another defining characteristic mentioned by Emily Gerard.³⁶

We also climbed the top of Mount Cindrel (2,244 m) and hiked to the other lake, Iezerul Mic, but the smaller water was less impressive and there was no similar story implying that this tarn would be the source of storms, too. We thus may conclude that Iezerul Mare was the mysterious lake Emily Gerard was heading for: the lake that – according to some people she had spoken to – was the cauldron where the Devil brewed the weather.

In accordance with Gerard's text, the whole area still today is believed to be dangerous, as the weather can suddenly change, with thunder and lightning, heavy rain, and even hail. Our guide told us about a 42-year old German tourist who had

³⁶ Iezerul Mic is connected to Râul Mic, which joins Râul Mare, originating from Iezerul Mare, to form the Cibin River. In this sense, Iezerul Mic also contributes to the Cibin River. The much larger Iezerul Mare is considered to be the main source, however: "Cibinul izvoraste la confluenta a doua rauri, Raul Mare si Raul Mic, la 30 de kilometri de comuna Gura Raului. Insa firicelul de apa original pleaca din lacul Iezerul Mare" ("The Cibin springs at the confluence of two rivers, Raul Mare and Raul Mic, 30 kilometers from the Gura Raului commune. But the original stream of water leaves from Lake Iezerul Mare") Quoted from "Ati vazut vreodata Cibinul curat?" Sibiul.ro, no date.



Fig. 18. Leaving Stefan's car at Șaua Șerbănei, July 2015. Photo: Hans C. de Roos

been killed by a thunderbolt on top of Vârful Rozdești (1,952 m), a mountain peak we had crossed earlier. This had happened on June 10, 2013, just two months before our hiking trip. He had been accompanied by his family, three children under six years old included. For this reason, our guide did not allow us to take a break at the Cindrel peak, as he believed that it was too dangerous there. And although the weather remained stable that day, I could hear the distant sound of rolling thunder as soon as we reached Iezerul Mare.

There are other, more romantic stories connected to Iezerul Mare – although they are violent as well. According to a local tale, the lake was formed by the tears of the shepherd's daughter Frumoasa ("The Beautiful"), who had fallen in love with a shepherd boy, Cindrel. But because Cindrel was from a poor family, the girl's parents conspired with another clan to marry her off to their rich but ugly son, and to kill Cindrel. Today, the two lovers stand next to each other forever as Mount Cindrel and Mount Frumoasa (2,168 m), joined (or separated) by the Devil's Plateau. In another variant, the daughter of a giant wished to marry Cindrel, but when she saw that he only had eyes for Frumoasa, in her jealousy she asked her father to kill the shepherd boy.³⁷ In a third variant, Cindrel was in love with Măriuca, with Frumoasa playing the part of the jealous third. A group of "sânziene" (fairies, elves) who sympathized with the heart-broken Frumoasa lifted Cindrel and Măriuca high up in the air, but after a moment of ecstasy, the pixies cruelly let the lovers fall to

³⁷ See, e.g. "Poveste de dragoste la Iezerele Cibinului," *Tribuna.ro*, April 11, 2014.



Fig. 19–20. Top: *Antena 3* news report of June 11, 2013. Bottom: Victim at the accident scene, June 10, 2013

earth. At the places where their bodies hit the ground, Iezerul Mare and Iezerul Mic were formed.³⁸



Fig. 21. Romantic impression of Iezerul Mare, seen from Mount Cindrel. Photo: Courtesy of Artografica Photo School, Sibiu

What Did Gerard and Stoker Know?

After finding the site, one question remains: Did either Emily Gerard or Bram Stoker, or both, know where the mythical lake was actually located? As for Gerard, I tend to answer this in the affirmative, as this lake was the stated goal of her expedition. Even if her travel group had to turn around, I assume that at least the hired guides knew exactly where they were heading for, and that Gerard, too, must have had an idea how to find their destination on a map, even if she did not see the lake with her own eyes. As far as Stoker is concerned, I have more doubts. Even if he actually read *The Land Beyond the Forest*, we have no evidence that he recognized the lake Gerard described in Chapter 55 as the same place mentioned in “Transy-

³⁸ E.g. Thomas Hupfer, “Vârful frumoasa – eine rumänische Legende,” *Impuscator.ro*, April 15, 2022; Ramona Găină, “Legenda vârfului Frumoasa, stânca născută dintr-o femeie superbă și dragoste ei neîmplinită,” *Adevarul.ro*, June 3, 2013.

Ivanian Superstitions" and at the start of the book. The notion that the lake would be connected to the ocean does not appear in *Dracula*. Nor did Stoker mention the name "Jäeser See." All in all, Stoker mentions nothing that could *not* be found in Gerard's article "Transylvanian Superstitions." For this reason, I doubt that he did any further research on the location of the lake; possibly, he merely used the information from this article and created the name "Lake Hermanstadt" by combining the word "lake" with the name of the city mentioned by her.

A Visual Documentation of the Route from Păltiniș to Iezerul Mare

In order to document my route for scholars and other interested travelers, I decided to produce a visual documentation of the route from Păltiniș. In June 2015, I traveled to the same guesthouse again and made the same hiking trip together with the same guide, Stefan. This time, I had a small geo-tagging device mounted on my camera. Back at home in Munich, I processed these geo-tagged photos with Robo-Geo, a software capable of creating KMZ files. Such files can be opened in Google Earth Pro, which will show a zoomable map with mark-ups of the saved route, illustrated by clickable photos that are time-stamped and exactly pinned in place according to their recorded GPS data. By now, the trail from Păltiniș to Iezerul Mare can also be found on specialized hiking websites such as WikiLoc,³⁹ *muntii-nostri.ro*⁴⁰ or OutdoorActive.com⁴¹ – without the background information about Stoker's novel, of course.

³⁹ de.wikiloc.com/routen-wandern/paltinis-muncel-batrana-rozdesti-cindrel-frumoasa-serbota-mare-cabana-oasa-26043956

⁴⁰ <https://muntii-nostri.ro/trail/saua-steflesti-varful-cindrel/>

⁴¹ <https://outdooractive.com/en/route/mountain-biking/transylvania/paltinis-cindrel-oasa-jina-sibiu/152847817/>

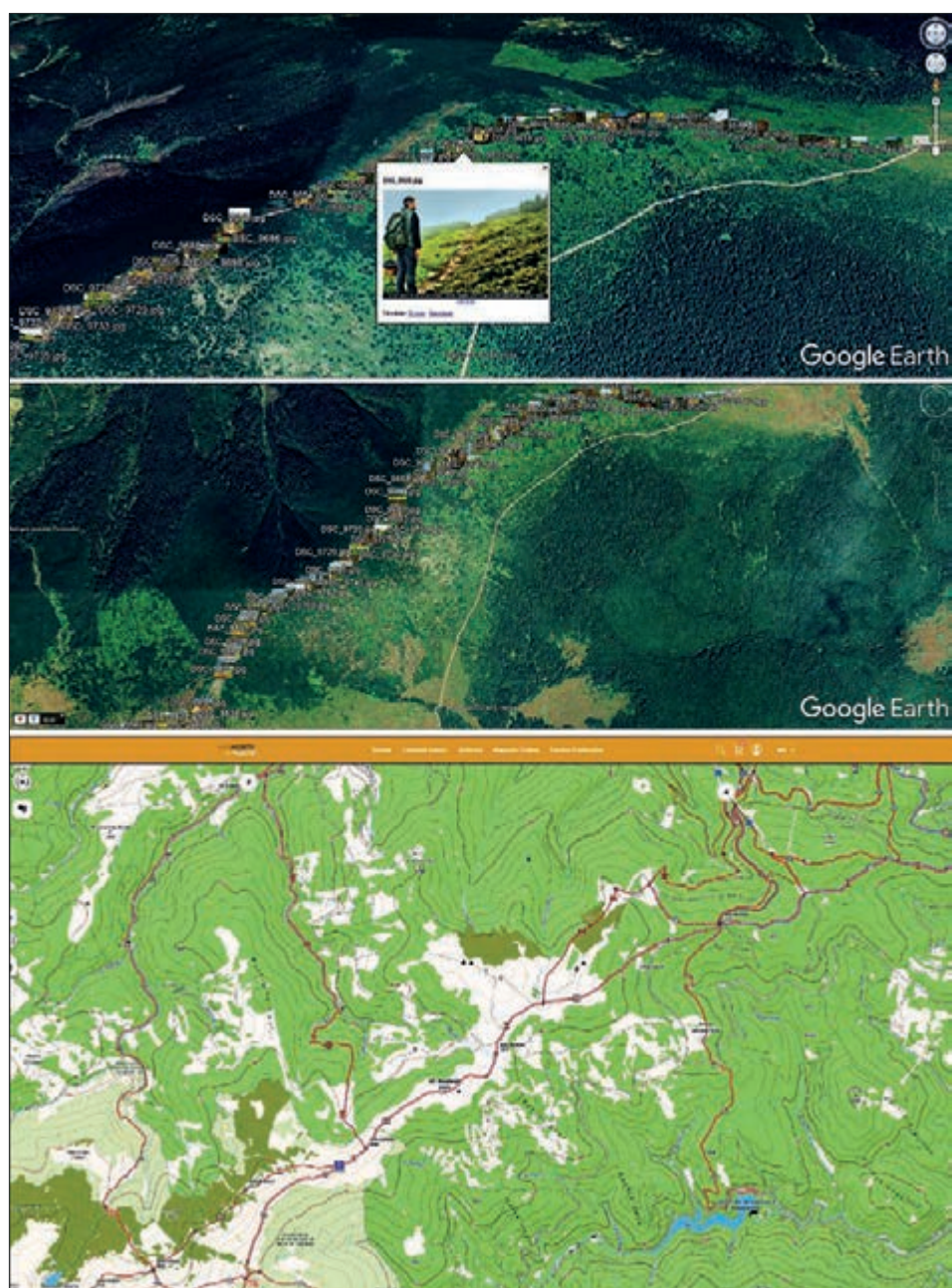


Fig. 22–24. Route from Păltiniș to Iezerul Mare, Robo-Geo reconstruction displayed on Google Earth (top and centre) vs. Munțiiinostri map (2026) for the hiking route from Șaua Ștefleșt to Vârful Cindrel (23MN04) (bottom)

Time-Stamped, Geo-Tagged Photos from the Second Trip, July 1, 2015

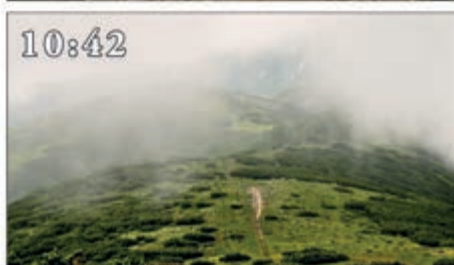


Fig. 25–32.

8:43. A large boulder, near Vârful Rozdești

9:18. A large boulder, near Vârful Rozdești

9:21. A shepherd, near Vârful Rozdești

9:24. Donkeys, near Vârful Rozdești

9:28. Following the road signs with the red bar

9:34. Stepping out from the car, en route to Șaua Șerbănei

10:10. Alpenrose (*Rhododendron myrtifolium*)

10:42. Șaua Niculești

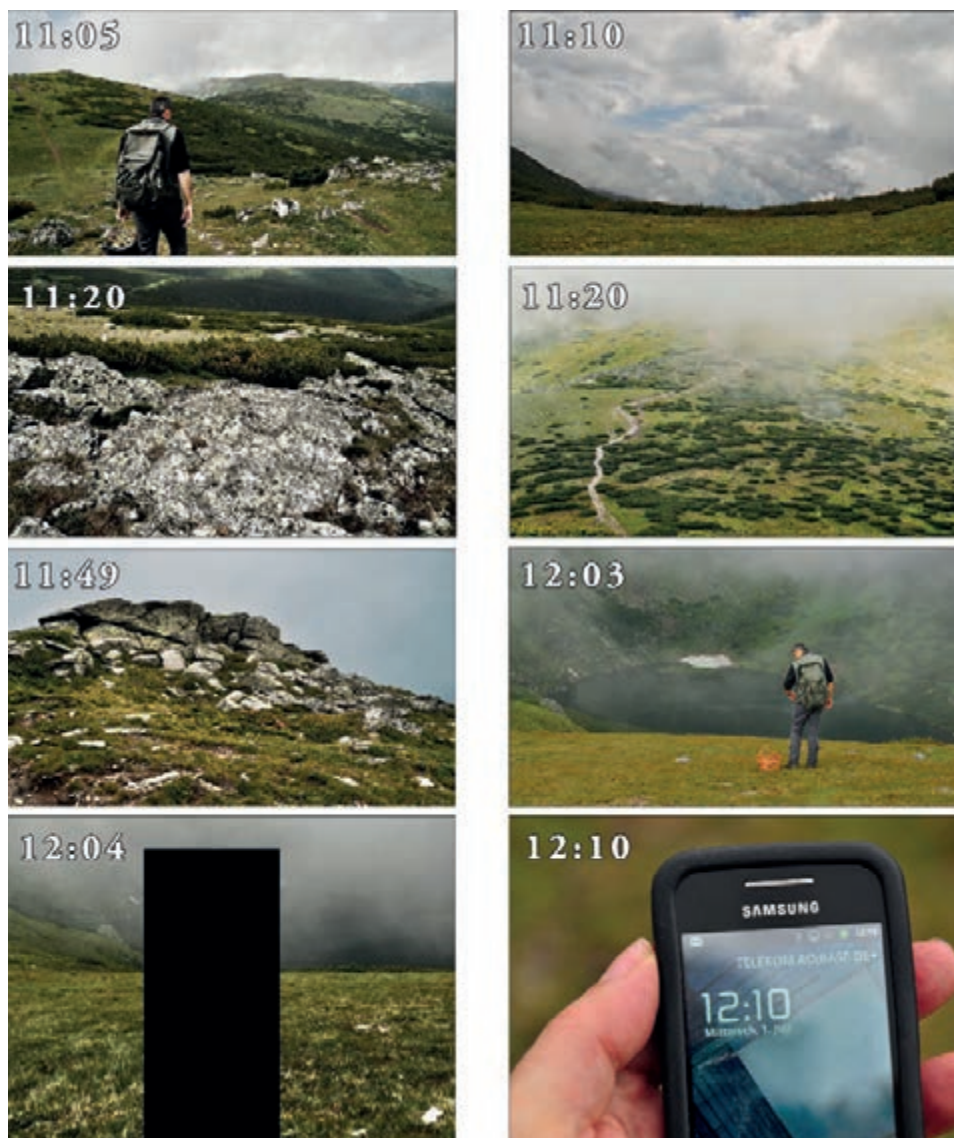


Fig. 33–40.

11:05. Between Șaua Niculești and Șaua Cânaia

11:10. En route to Șaua Cânaia

11:20. Near Șaua Cânaia

11:20. Near Șaua Cânaia

11:49. Șaua Cindrel

12:03. Arrival at Iezerul Mare

12:04. Arrival at Iezerul Mare

12:10. Time to turn back

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