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NEWLY DISCOVERED WALL-PAINTINGS FROM THE VICUS  
OF ÁCS-VASPUSZTA

During the course of excavations at the fort of Ács-Vaspuszta (GABLER 1989), Dénes Gabler discovered the fragments of a previously unknown, and thus unpublished, wall-painting<sup>1</sup> on the *terrazzo* floor of House 1 in the *vicus* (SZIRMAI 1991, 97–113).

The present study is devoted to the description of main characteristics observed on these fragments, which are also compared to those of previously excavated materials. The wall-painting fragments recently recovered from the *terrazzo* floor of House 1 in the *vicus* at Ács-Vaspuszta can be better evaluated on the basis of these comparisons.

The larger of two buildings, House 1 in the *vicus* at Ács-Vaspuszta had *hypocaust* heating, related heating channels and a *terrazzo* floor. This building was constructed in the middle of the AD 2nd century.<sup>2</sup>

The find material recovered can be classified into five types on the basis of its motifs and colors. The first type is represented by single-layer fragments showing burgundy-colored motifs painted against a yellow background (*Cat. No.* 2, 3, 4). The second type includes both single and double-layered fragments, decorated with burgundy-colored patterns, painted on a green and white background (*Cat. No.* 5, 6, 7, 11). The third type consists of double-layered fragments with green floral patterns and brown tree branches painted against a white background (*Cat. No.* 8, 9, 12, 13). The fourth type is represented by a single layered fragment, decorated with red, white and blue geometric design (*Cat. No.* 1). The presence of the fifth type is evidenced by two double-layered, blue fragments (*Cat. No.* 10).

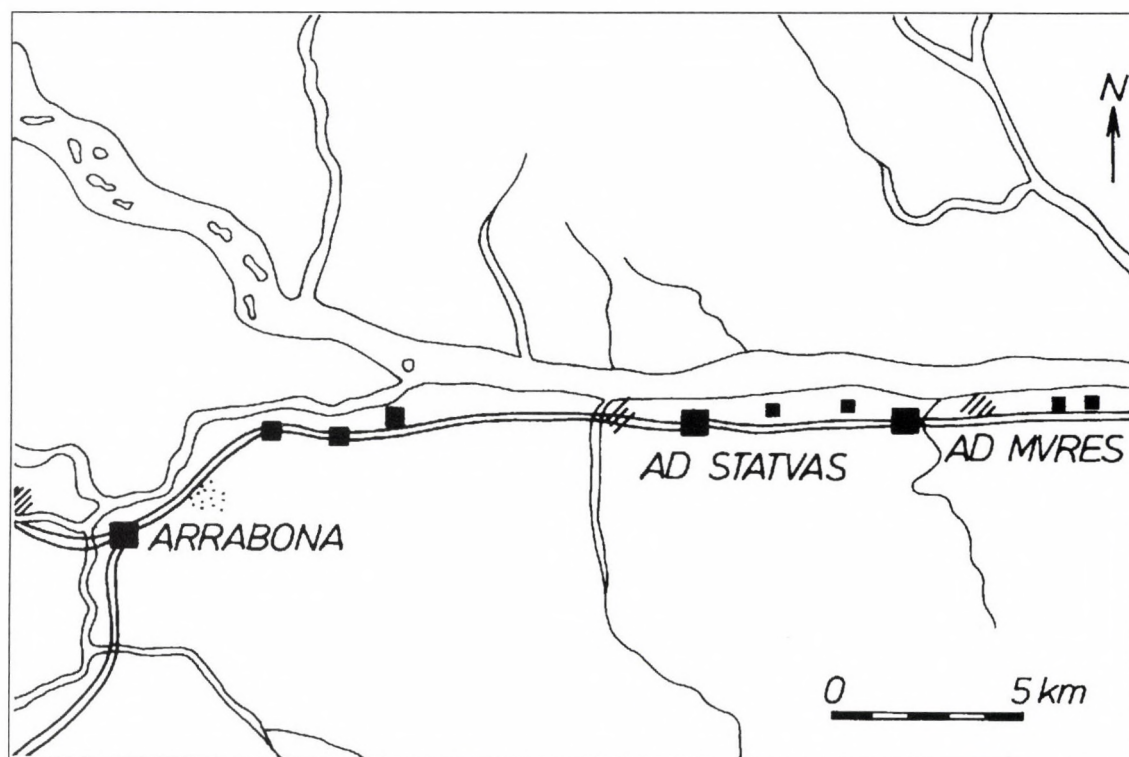


Fig. 1. The location of the Ács-Vaspuszta (*Ad Status*) fort along the Pannonian *limes*

Previously published fragments of wall-paintings from the *terrazzo floor of House 1 in the vicus* at Ács-Vaspuszta (SZIRMAI 1991, 104) may be classified into the following groups on the basis of the motifs and colors used:

- I Burgundy-colored motifs on a yellow background
- II Burgundy-colored tones painted against a green and white background
- III Floral patterns with tree branches painted on a white surface
- IV Fragments decorated with geometric patterns
- V Single-color fragments

Of the colors, white, green and burgundy were each encountered seven times. Yellow and brown both occurred three times. Blue on the other hand, was found only twice, while a single occurrence of red was recorded.

As far as colors are concerned, among the already published wall-painting fragments recovered from the

When this picture is compared to the finds found in the fort itself, it seems that red and white were used with largely similar frequencies in the *vicus* and fort of Ács-Vaspuszta (42 and 37). Green and burgundy paint occurred in three and one cases respectively, while yellow and blue painted fragments were found twice within the fort, i. e. these colors were as rare there as in the *vicus*. To date, no brown and pink painted fragments have been discovered in the material from the fort, although these colors were used in the wall-painting from the *vicus*.

The newly recovered wall-painting was made using the *al fresco* technique, applying but a thin layer of paint on a thin, white-washed base. The plastering was made up by a mixture of fine gravel, sand and lime.<sup>3</sup>

No remains of clay were observed on these wall-painting fragments. The imprint of a single reed stem could be only recognized in a single case (*Cat. No. 12*). Remains of plastering, indicative of renovation, could be found on the back side of nearly all frag-

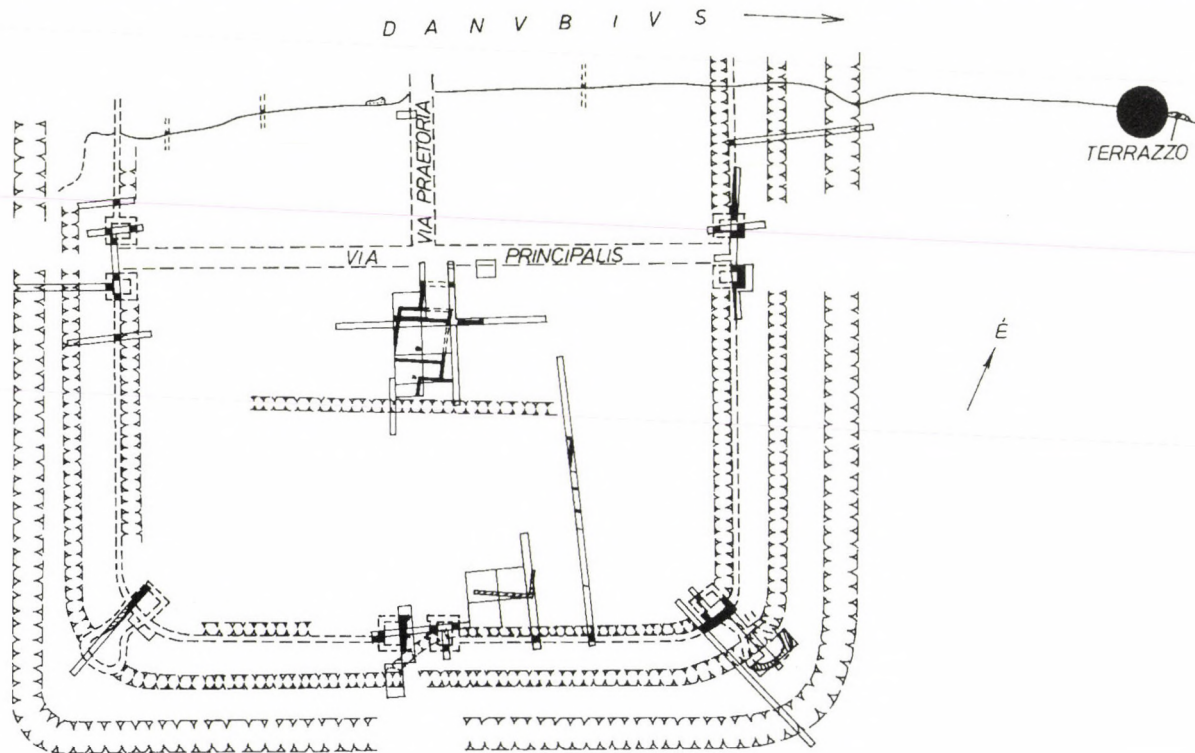


Fig. 2. The find spots of wall-paintings from House 1 of the *vicus*

same site white and red dominate, occurring in 27 and 16 cases respectively. Green and burgundy colors were recorded in almost equal numbers, in 14 and 12 of the cases. Yellow paint was identified on five fragments, while pink occurred four times. Brown paint was encountered three times, while blue occurred only on two fragments.

This find assemblage is dominated by single layer fragments with traces of plastering (*Cat. Nos. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11*). The remains of plastering on double-layered fragments are indicative of three renovations (*Cat. Nos. 5, 8, 10, 11*), although one of these double-layered fragments possibly broke off of an already plastered surface (*Cat. No. 13*).

The backs sides of wall-painting fragments recently recovered from the *terrazzo* floor of House 1 in the vicus at Ács–Vaspuszta are conspicuously often covered with plastering. The picture may have been painted on a *stone wall*, characteristic of the later period. These fragments, therefore, represent the wall-ainting material that may be dated to the first construction period of the Ács–Vaspuszta fort, that is the reign of Constantinus. That wall painting was renewed, therefore it also contains fragments from the Severus Period as well (*Cat. Nos.* 5, 8, 10, 11, 13).

Severus Period pieces already published from the area of House 1 in the vicus (SZIRMAI 1991, 104) include (*Cat. Nos.* 1, 3–7, 10–17, 19–21). Of these, the following fragments are indicative of continuity: *Cat. Nos.* 4, 11, 17.

On the basis of observations by Dénes Gabler, a stratigraphically verifiable Severus Period site within the Ács–Vaspuszta fort was discovered in the form of rubble in Square 9 opened in the proximity of the *porta principalis dextra* (SZIRMAI 1991, 103). Technical characteristics of the wall-painting fragments discovered here, may also be recognized on corresponding specimens found in the vicus (imprint, traces

of white-washing). The probably higher life standard within the fort is reflected by the find assemblage recovered from House 1 in the vicus that contains mostly Severus Period finds that document subsequent renovations.

According to data recently published on *wall paintings in Pannonia*, the find assemblage from the cellar of the main building of the villa at Balácapuszta also contained pieces from the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries (PALÁGYI 1992, 73–75). Fragments of 3<sup>rd</sup> century wall-paintings came to light from the bath wing of the Aquincum *deversorium* as well. Moreover, new data are also available concerning 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century wall-paintings from Brigetio (BÍRÓ E., 1993, 37–45 BORHY–SZÁMADÓ 1995, VII–XI).

Stratigraphic observations made on the fragments found at the Ács–Vaspuszta fort (SZIRMAI 1991, 102–103) also support the *Severus and Constantinus Period* dating of the assemblage of wall-painting remains recovered from the *terrazzo* floor of House 1 in the vicus.

Data on the new wall-painting finds from Ács–Vaspuszta, made using the *al fresco* technique contribute to the high resolution evaluation of AD 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century mural art in Pannonia.

## CATALOGUE

- Fragment 1.* Light blue and red sectors with a narrow, white band running inbetween. Double layered thin, with white, smooth plastering. The back side is smoothed with traces of plastering average measurements = 7 by 4 cm, average thickness = 15 mm (Fig. 4.2).
- Fragment 2.* Yellow sector with bitonal painting and a narrow dark brown band. A „V” shaped motif of burgundy color is painted within this sector. The plastering is gray, thick and rough with grains of gravel. The back side is smoothed with traces of plastering. Average measurements = 4 by 3 cm, average thickness = 13 mm (Fig. 3.1).
- Fragment 3.* Parts of narrow arched motifs in burgundy color, painted in a yellow field. The plastering is gray, thick and rough with grains of gravel. The back side with remains of white-washing. Average measurements = 2.8 by 2.5 cm thickness = 10 mm (Fig. 3.2).
- Fragment 4.* Burgundy patterns painted with a thin brush. The plastering is gray, rough with grains of gravel. The back side is smooth with remains washing. Average measurements = 5.5 by 3.5 cm, average thickness = 11 mm (Fig. 3.3).
- Fragment 5.* Sections of broad, burgundy-colored motifs of irregular shapes painted in a green field. Double-layered. The back side is smoothed with traces of plastering average measurements = 9 by 5.5 cm, average thickness = 20 mm (Fig. 3.4).
- Fragment 6.* Sections of a burgundy-colored motif painted in a green sector along with a white field. The back side is smoothed with traces of plastering. Average measurements = 3 by 4.5 cm, average thickness = 13 mm (Fig. 3.5).
- Fragment 7.* Sections of a burgundy-colored motif painted in a green sector. The back side is smoothed with traces of plastering. Average measurements = 4.2 by 3.5 cm average thickness = 11 mm (Fig. 3.6).
- Fragment 8.* Green leaf motifs in a yellowish white field. Double-layered. The back side is smoothed with traces of plastering. Two pieces. Average measurements = 9 by 9 cm, average thickness = 23 mm.
- Fragment 9.* Green leaf motifs in a white, yellowish field. The back side is smoothed with many traces of plastering. Two pieces. Average measurements = 10.5 by 6.8 cm, average thickness = 15 mm.
- Fragment 10.* Blue field. Double-layered. The back side is smoothed with many traces of plastering. Two pieces. Average measurements = 8 by 6 cm, average thickness = 18 mm (Fig. 4.1).
- Fragment 11.* Sections of green leaf motifs in a white field with burgundy tones, including double-layered

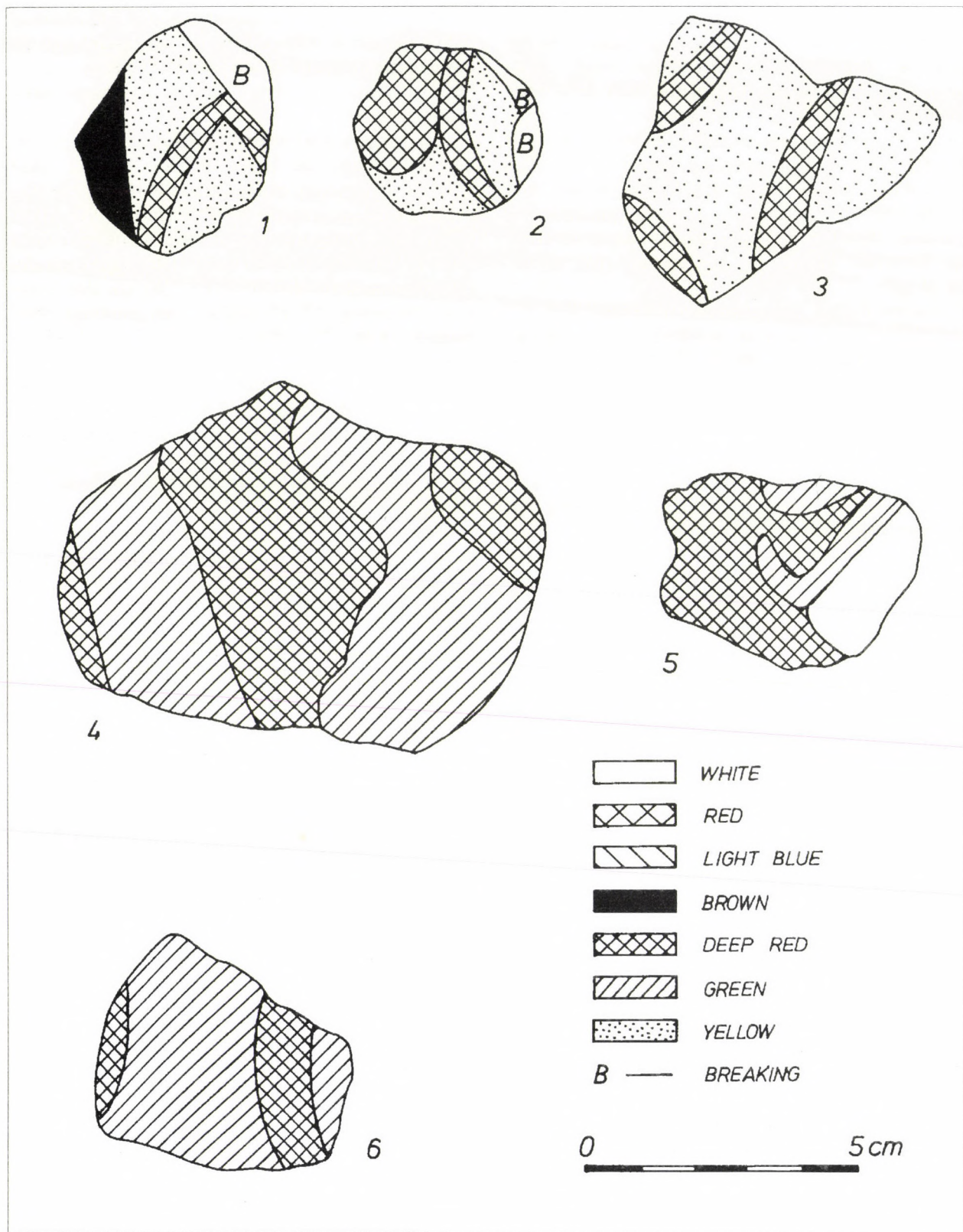


Fig. 3. 1-6: Recently discovered wall-painting fragments from the vicus of the Ács-Vaspuszta fort

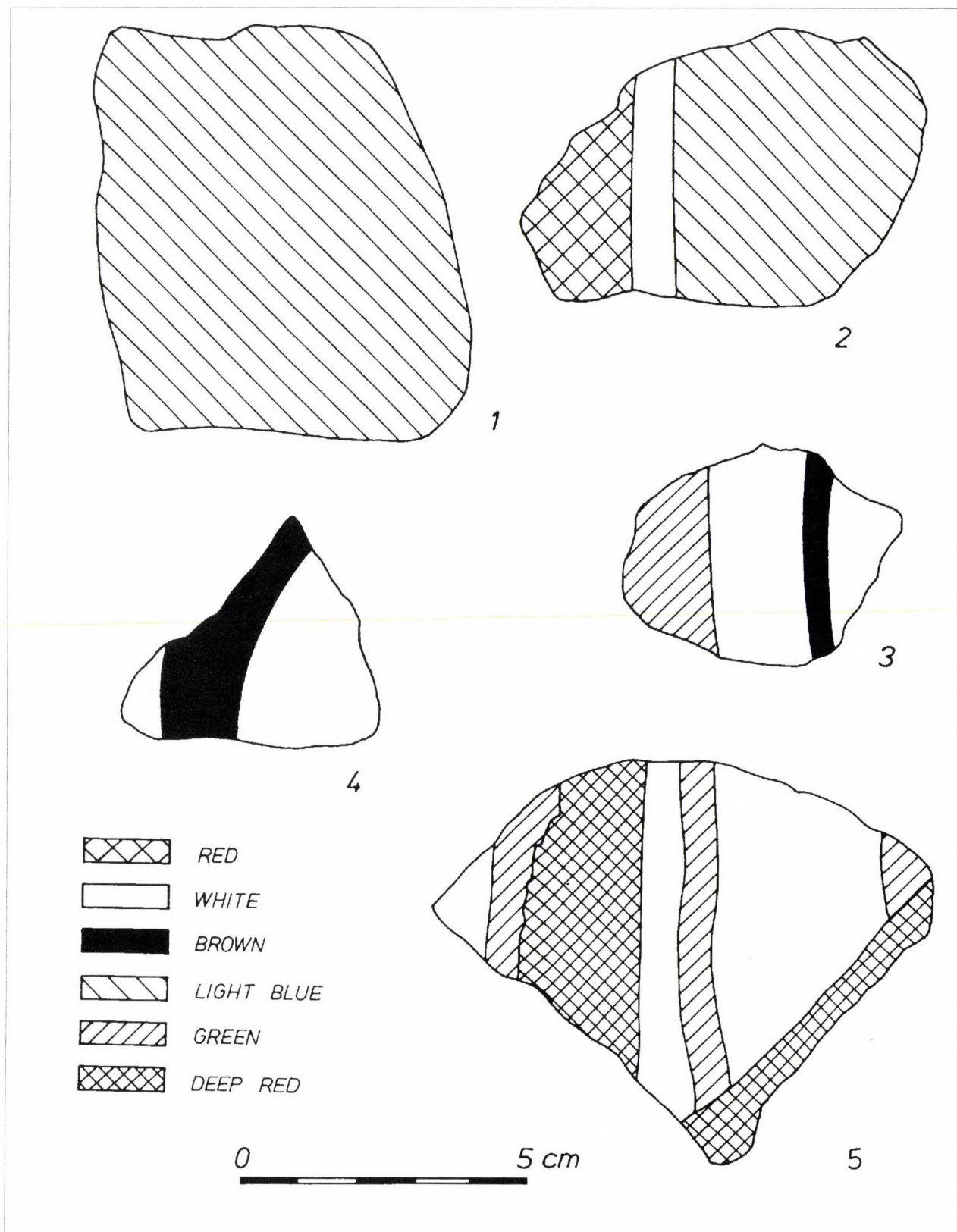


Fig. 4. 1-5: Recently discovered al fresco wall-painting fragments from the vicus of the Ács-Vaspuszta fort

fragments. The back side is smoothed with traces of plastering. Three pieces. Average measurements = 7 by 8.5 cm, average thickness = 20 mm (Fig. 4.5).

*Fragment 12.* Sections of a dark green leaf motif in a white field accompanied by a brown twig. The back-side is smoothed with imprint. Average meas-

urements = 4.1 by 4 cm, average thickness = 12 mm (Fig. 4.3).

*Fragment 13.* Detail of a dark brown tree branch (or trunk?) in a white field. Double-layered with smoothed back-side. Average measurements = 3.5 by 4.3 cm, average thickness = 15 mm (Fig. 4.4).

#### Notes

- 1 The excavator, Dénes Gabler, made this find available to us after the analysis of that site had been finished.
- 2 The kind help of Dénes Gabler must be acknowledged

here. He gave permission to publish information on page 41 in his excavation diary.

- 3 For the most recent results of laboratory analyses see the study by Márta Járó.

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#### CHEMICAL ANALYSIS OF SOME NEW WALL-PAINTING FRAGMENTS FROM ÁCS–VASPUSZTA

Six pieces of the wall painting fragments were investigated by scientific methods. The aim of the investigations was to reveal the similarities of these fragments to those analyzed before (JÁRÓ 1991, 106–113). The analysis methods used were the same as in the previous case, but now, only the different

plaster layers under the paint layer were investigated and the tool marks, if any, were observed.

For each fragment, thickness and composition<sup>1</sup> of the levelling plaster (white preparing layer just under the paint layer), number, colour, thickness of the plaster layer under the levelling plaster, and the surface