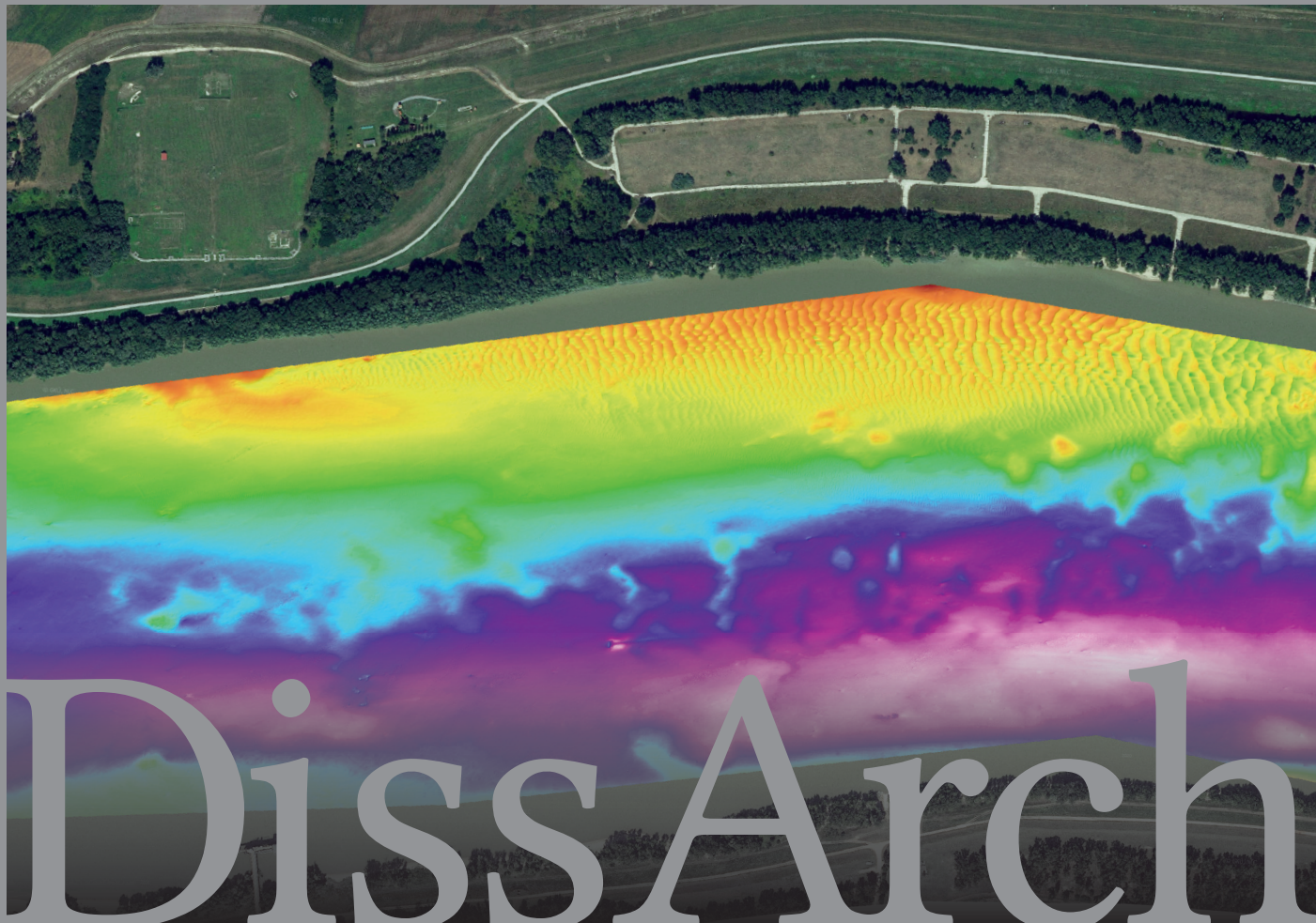


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ex Instituto Archaeologico

Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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New data on the settlement history of the so-called *villa*, a Roman period building, at Testvérhegy

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Abstract: Testvérhegy and its surroundings have been densely inhabited since prehistoric times; therefore, the history of the area is interesting for research for several aspects. A settlement structure unique in Pannonia emerged there, consisting of rural settlements and *villa* estates which mutually supported each other. The centre of the area, and the site inhabited probably for the longest time, is the *villa* at Testvérhegy. Although first excavated in 1934, further research did not take place there until the mid-2000s, when housing development projects gave a second wind to the study of the area. This paper aims to examine the relations between the two larger, seemingly separate units of the site: Complex A and Complex B. Understanding this relationship further nuances the periodisation and extent of the settlement and its relationship with the surrounding buildings, thereby enriching our knowledge of the north-western ‘suburb’ of Aquincum.

Keywords: Roman agriculture, rural settlement, *villa*, Aquincum, urban archaeology

Introduction

Research on this part of Aquincum’s territory dates back nearly a century. The first excavations started as early as the 1930s, when Lajos Nagy worked on the Csúcshegy and Sándor Garády on the Testvérhegy, but afterwards, only field surveys were conducted in the area for a long time. The situation changed completely when major construction projects began at Mocsárosdűlő and Csillaghegy in the early 1990s, and especially with the housing estate development projects from the 2000s onward at Testvérhegy and Harsánylejtő, which gave the research an even greater impetus. Besides housing development projects, traces of *villas* and rural settlements have been found during road construction and utility development, all of which are presented in this article, which aims to illustrate, in addition to pre-

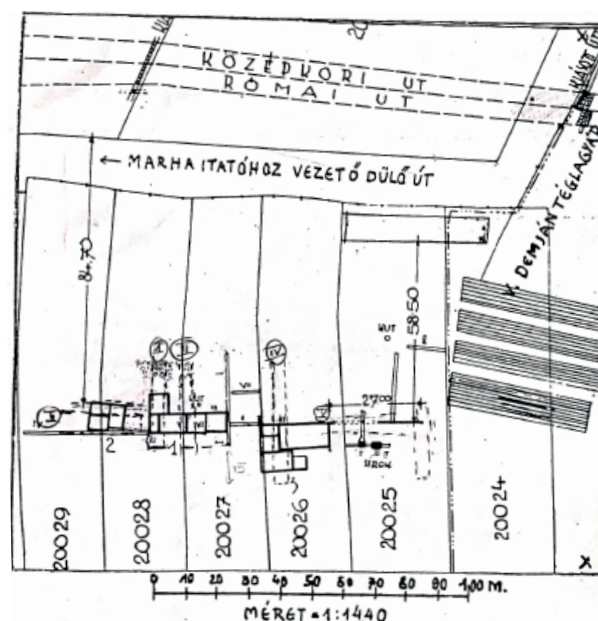


Fig. 1. Survey map of Sándor Garády’s excavations (after GARÁDY 1936, Fig. 50).

senting the *villa* at Testvérhegy and a novel chronology, how densely this area was populated in Roman times.

Research history and excavations at Testvérhegy

The so-called *villa* at Testvérhegy has long been a focus of research on *villae* around Aquincum. Sándor Garády, a self-taught archaeologist, excavated there first in 1934. As his main goal was to reconstruct the building complex's ground plan (Fig. 1), he focused on uncovering the walls and did not necessarily concern himself with the interiors. He distinguished three buildings, which he believed were separate and most likely belonged to a *villa rustica*. He identified Building 2 as a three-room stable¹—tentatively, based on its simple ground plan and the seeming lack of comfort. According to more recent results, the other two outbuildings were connected by a shared courtyard.² As it turned out, there was not only one building on the site; therefore, this cluster of architectural remains was designated as Complex A.

This discovery came from a six-year-long archaeological campaign (Fig. 2) conducted by Orsolya Láng in 2002–2004 and Zoltán Havas in 2005–2008 within the frame of a housing development project. Orsolya Láng revised Garády's reconstruction of the ground plan and further explored the *villa*'s surroundings.³ She discovered a section of the so-called 'diagonal' Aquincum–Brigetio road in relation to the foreground of the *villa* (north-west of Lánglilom Street), along with a detail of a cemetery aligned with the road.⁴ She found the so-called entrance building (Complex B) in the north-eastern part of the *villa* complex.

Between 2005 and 2008, Zoltán Havas led three excavation campaigns in the area to

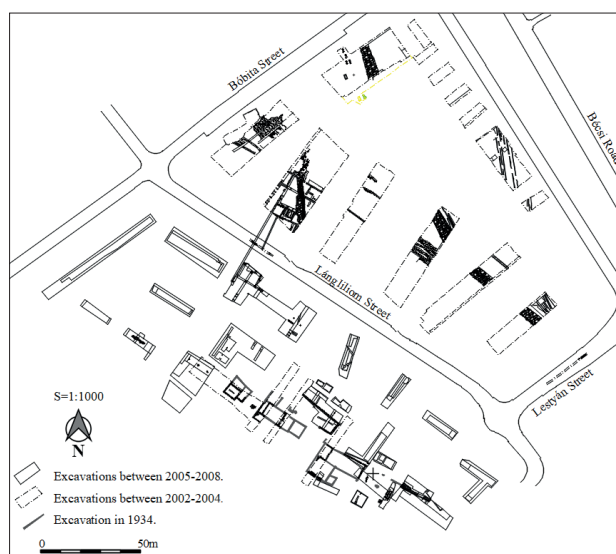


Fig. 2. Survey map of Orsolya Láng and Zoltán Havas' excavations (after HAVAS 2009, Fig. 1).



Fig. 3. Structures associated with Complex A (after HAVAS 2007, Fig. 2).

1 GARÁDY 1936, 92.

2 HAVAS 2007, 142.

3 For a more detailed description, see LÁNG 2003; LÁNG 2004.

4 LÁNG 2004, 103.

clarify the relationship between the buildings of Complex A,⁵ unearthed by Garády, and to find the south-eastern part of Complex B. He revealed that Buildings 1 and 3 in Complex A shared a courtyard with a well and a basement (Fig. 3). In light of that, Havas suggested a new function for Building 3 (which Garády and Mária T. Bíró previously believed to have served a domestic purpose), interpreting it as a heated wine storage based on a small room (Room 3/V) added later, probably in a following building period. Drawing on parallels from France, Havas interpreted the small room as a must-press,⁶ a theory supported by findings of *tubulae* fragments inside the building and the lack of plaster on the walls. Moreover, the basement and well found by Garády were suitable for storage and water supply, and there is evidence of a huge vineyard established near the *villa* buildings, on the slopes of Csúcshegy-Hársánylejtő, after the Marcomannic Wars,⁷ the yield of which could conveniently be processed in the newly built *villa*.

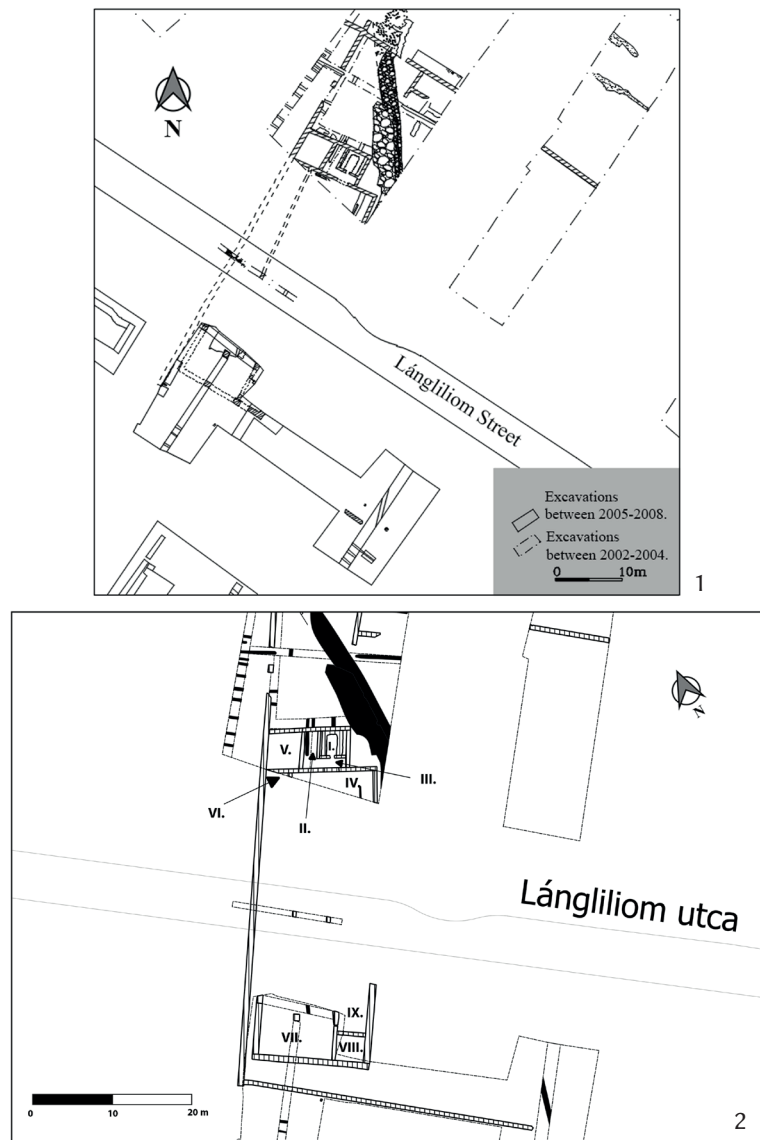


Fig. 4. 1 – structures associated with Complex B (after HAVAS 2007, Fig. 3), 2 – reconstructed rooms of Complex B.

Based mainly on its linear arrangement, Mária T. Bíró interpreted Building 1 as a bath complex.⁸ Nothing else supports her theory: the building lacked a heating system and had unpainted walls. Therefore, it was most likely a domestic building, as the clear separation between the *villa rustica* and the *villa urbana* is rare among the *villae* around Aquincum.⁹ Apart from Csúcshegy I, Szentendre-Skanzen, Pomáz-Lugi-dűlő, and Mocsáros-dűlő, no obvious main buildings are known in the area; thus, the *villa* at Testvérhegy fits the common *villa* structures surrounding Aquincum, in which a single building could serve many different purposes due to the relative poverty of the densely inhabited area.

5 For a more detailed description, see HAVAS 2006; HAVAS 2007; HAVAS 2009.

6 HAVAS 2011, 186.

7 HAVAS *et al.* 2007, 176.

8 T. BÍRÓ 1974, 37.

9 According to the basic arrangement, the owners of the *villa* lived in the *pars urbana*, which must have been clearly separated from the *pars rustica*, the agricultural part of the *villa* occupied by servants (ROYMANS – DERKS 2011, 21).



1



1



2



2

Fig. 5. 1 – road and perimeter ditch next to Complex B, with blocked gate of the last period, 2 – the gravel floor of Room VII.

Fig. 6. 1 – building 2 of Complex A with traces of fire inside, 2 – wall between Rooms 1/II and 1/III with *in situ* threshold and stone step.

Complex B was excavated in two campaigns between 2003 and 2006. It is located approximately 40 m north-east of Complex A (Fig. 4.1). Whether the two complexes belonged together remained a question to be answered by the investigation of a 15 m wide strip of land between them in the future. However the shared stone fence, the similar orientation, building materials, methods, and the dating all speak for that. The north-eastern part, found during the excavation of Surface F (the most densely built-in area excavated) was unearthed by Orsolya Láng in 2003. A complex with an at least six-room building (of the sixth room, the trench covered only a corner, revealing little information) and surrounded by a stone fence on three sides (the fourth was beyond the excavated area¹⁰) occupied its south-western half, and a section of a four-layer road stretched north-east of it. Traces of mortar could not be observed between the stones in the walls, and they had no foundation. The building's walls were ca. 50–60 cm wide, and the rooms lacked heating and plaster, which would have made them suitable for living. In separating building periods, researchers relied heavily on floor layers, which remained in quite good condition.

Another key feature in the north-eastern trench is the road,¹¹ the four layers of which were partially destroyed by the erosion of the mountain¹² (Fig. 5.1), which also damaged the building, allowing the identification of shared destruction and rebuilding phases. The road came in through a gate in the

10 LÁNG 2004, 101.

11 Recent earthworks rendered the part outside the *villa* complex of the north–south road barely recognisable. It likely joined another, slightly wider east–west road just outside the fence; only a large gravel patch remained of the one-time intersection.

12 LÁNG 2004, 97.



1



2

Fig. 7. 1 – wall segment and threshold stone discovered in 2003 at the north-western part of Building 1, 2 – 12 m-long segment of the north-eastern closing wall of Building 3, uncovered in 2005.

stone fence, decorated with a half-column on each side. During the last building phase of the complex, the gate was blocked by stone slabs, indicating it was out of use by then. Initially, Orsolya Láng thought that this road led to the entrance of the *villa* complex and interpreted the associated edifice as the ‘entrance building’. The structure of the stone fence was similar to the walls, and its north-western section doubled as the south-western wall of the building, highlighting its importance from the building’s perspective. In conclusion, the fence was erected together with the stone building. Such perimeter walls are not rare amongst *villae* or *vicii*; they separated and protected the estates. The perimeter wall in Complex B likely served only to demarcate property rather than defensive purposes.¹³



Fig. 8. T-fibula with a hinged pin (Riha 6.4.3 = Böhme 28 variant).



1



2

Fig. 9. 1 – damaged 16 m-long wall section running south-east from the corner of Room 3/IV found in 2005–2006, 2 – part of the courtyard of Complex A, viewed from north-east.

13 Varro mentions four types of perimeter structures around villa estates. This fence, a simple stone structure, matches Type 4 (Varro, *Rer. rust.*, I, 14,4).



Fig. 10. 1 – south-eastern closing wall of the courtyard of Complex A and the patch of terrazzo floor attached to it, 2 – southern corner of the courtyard of Complex A with a reused threshold stone.

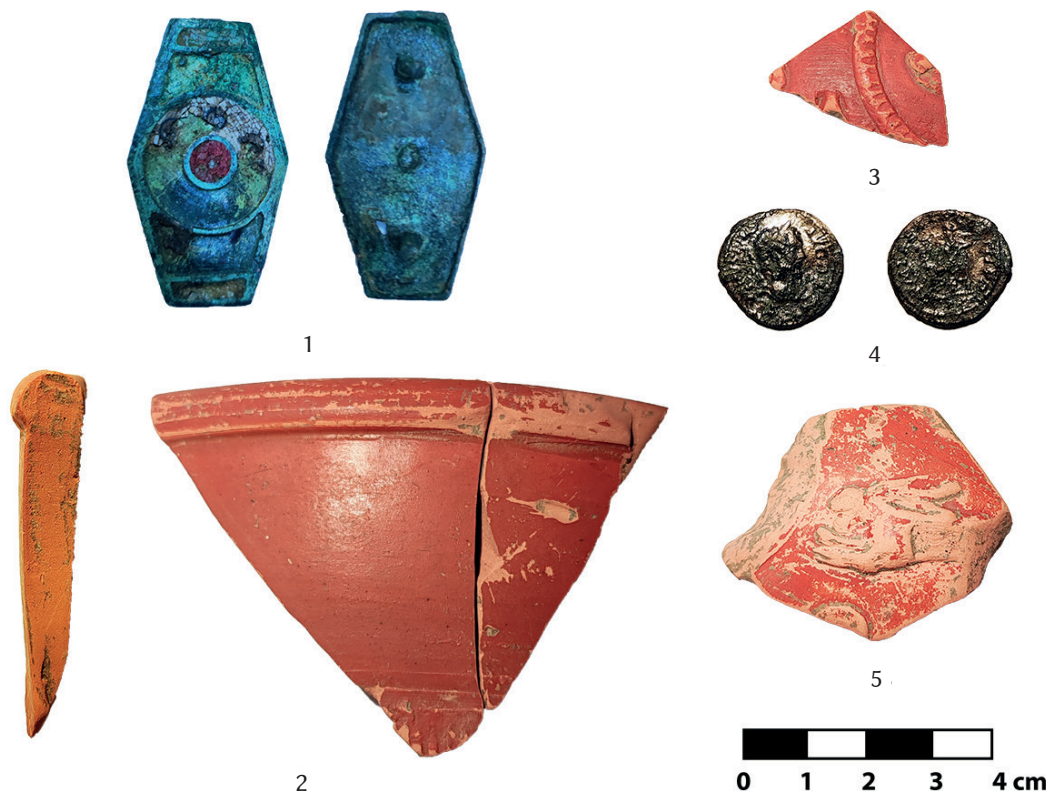


Fig. 11. Finds from the later building period, corresponding to the end of the 2nd–3rd century AD, of the courtyard of Complex A. 1 – shield-shaped bronze button with multicolour enamel inlay, 2nd–3rd century AD, 2 – Drag. 37 *terra sigillata* bowl fragment from Rheinzabern, mid-2nd–mid-3rd century AD, 3 – Drag. 37 *terra sigillata* bowl fragment, Westerndorf, end of the 2nd–mid-3rd century AD, 4 – denarius of Septimius Severus, AD 211, RIC IVa 245, 5 – Drag. 37. *terra sigillata* bowl fragment, Pfaffenhofen, middle-third of the 3rd century AD.

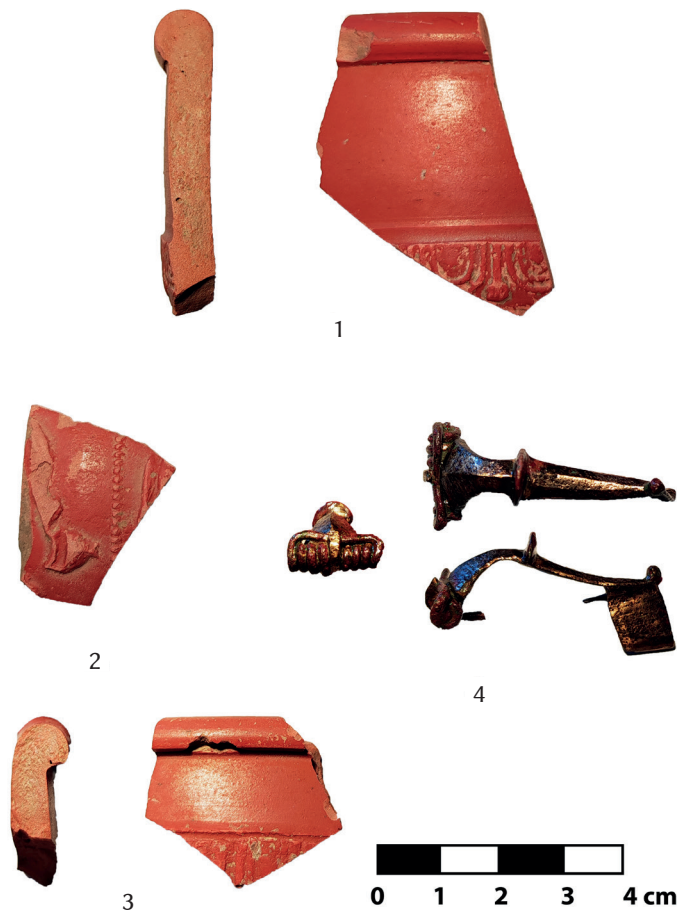


Fig. 12. Finds from the older building period, corresponding to the mid-2nd century AD, of the courtyard of Complex A. 1–3 – Drag. 37 *terra sigillata* bowl fragments, Lezoux, 2nd century AD, 4 – strong-profile bronze brooch with a single button, 2nd century AD (Almgren 84 = Kovrig VIII = Riha 3.1.2 variant).

masonry was identical to the features in the north-eastern part. This surface provided key finds for dating because—unlike the stray finds around the north-eastern part—the layers that contained them could easily be associated with building phases.

Distinct parts of Complex A

Unfortunately, the 2000s excavations rarely reached intact layers of Complex A; thus, determining the exact dating and function of the structures is problematic. The feature referred to by Garády as Building 2 (Fig. 6.1) is a small three-room structure with *opus spicatum* foundations (courses of stone aligned at a 45° angle, separated by horizontal rows for support and levelling). This masonry technique was typical of most of the walls of Complex A. The *opus spicatum* technique was widely used for wall foundations, as it allows soil moisture to seep through.¹⁵ This was particularly important here because it meant that water flowing down the hillside could cause less damage to the foundations. Despite all this foresight, the walls were found in a severely damaged condition caused probably by the erosion of the mountain. Patches of a burnt clay layer with a significant amount of roof debris covering it were identified as the floor level of the complex. The roof debris comprised

In preparation for additional phases of the housing development project two years later (in 2005), Zoltán Havas opened more trenches covering the back end of the complex. Since available evidence indicated that the walls of the entrance building continued there, he focused primarily on this area in 2006 and unearthed, in the plot of the then-future Building 20, three rooms of the south-western part of Complex B.¹⁴ The biggest one was a relatively large courtyard with a gravel floor (Fig. 5.2), to the eastern side of which two considerably smaller rooms were added later. Most of these rooms lay beyond the excavation trench; their other ends were reconstructed based on the line of the known walls. This part of the building was also sited within a perimeter fence, which in this case did not double as an external wall of the complex. The buildings were erected a bit south-east of the walls, and the narrow passage between them and the perimeter wall was covered with scattered gravel. Most walls were dismantled down to their foundations. The main walls were 80 cm wide, the dividing walls, 50–55 cm. Their ma-

¹⁴ HAVAS 2007, 149.

¹⁵ ADAM 1999, 144.

charred roof beams and nails, suggesting the building's probable demise by fire.¹⁶ The entrance was likely at the south-east junction of Rooms 2/II and 2/III, where the tops of the wall stubs were levelled and coated in a smooth layer of clay. A 7.5 m long stone construction was found north-west of this part in 2006. It can be interpreted as a buttress, as it lacked a straight profile and was not connected to any wall. This structure provides evidence that Roman land use can be expected away from the buildings in this direction.



Fig. 13. Graveyard of Bithynia Severa, BHM Aquincum Museum and Archaeological Park (source).

Garády's distinct Buildings 1 and 3 have since been found to have shared a courtyard, excavated by Zoltán Havas in 2005–2006. The first part of the building had at least six rooms and two building phases; its walls were erected using a variety of binding materials. According to Garády's description, Rooms 1/I and 1/III–IV were connected by a vestibule (1/II), which one could reach upon entering the building via a few step stones leading up to a threshold stone on both the right and left.¹⁷ This reconstruction was revised in light of the results of the 2003 excavations, when Orsolya Láng carefully unearthed walls of Room 1/II and Room 1/III and identified them as parts of a single structure (Fig. 6.2). Room 1/V may



Fig. 14. Presumed building phases of Complex B.

have been added to the western part of the building later; its northern closing wall is yet to be found, but it could be entered perhaps through a separate entrance in the east. In addition, a paved road, perhaps an internal road of the *villa* complex, ran north-eastwards outside the building.¹⁸ In the complex, only Room 1/IV had a terrazzo floor. Garády did not find Room 1/VI; Orsolya Láng discovered it. The western and southern closing walls of the room, connected to Rooms 1/III–IV from the south-west, were also discovered; they may continue beyond the excavated area in the south-east. A threshold stone was found in the western closing wall (facing Building 2), but later, a roof slab was discovered under it, so it is unlikely *in situ* (Fig. 7.1). The poor condition of the terrazzo floor between Buildings 1 and 2 may hint at the possible contemporaneity of the two; however, no further evidence supports that.

16 LÁNG 2004, 94.

17 GARÁDY 1936, 89–90. The floor level of Room 1/III was 70 cm higher than that of Room 1/II and matched the floor level of Room 1/I.

18 LÁNG 2004, 93.



Fig. 15. 1 – Joining of the north-western (I) and the north-eastern (II) enclosure wall, 2 – stone slab floor of Room IV in building phase 2.

military attire (Fig. 8).²¹ Steps led from there to two smaller rooms with slightly elevated floors (by 14 and 70 cm, respectively) in the west (3/I–II).²² Building material resembling *opus signinum*²³ was smeared between the stones of the shared wall of Rooms 3/IV and 3/II, indicating a need for waterproofing. An even more elevated passage, of which four steps were preserved, led to Room 3/III, the floor of which was 130 cm higher than the threshold stone of the entrance. The western rising wall of the room was found in a severely damaged state, scattered across a 90 cm-wide strip; the well-preserved 40–50 cm-wide *opus spicatum* wall foundation was found at a depth of about 70–80 cm. Room 3/V, a small square chamber with a terrazzo floor, was found about 130–140 cm above Room 3/III; it was probably added in a later building phase.²⁴ The east wall of Room 3/III also had *opus spicatum* foundations, which incorporated a small drainage channel at the entrance threshold stone. A 16 m long, north-west-directed dry wall section with no foundation was unearthed at the eastern corner of Room 3/IV (Fig. 9.1). The wall could not be reconstructed because part of it remained unearthed. Two building phases were distinguished in 2006, and the cemetery of Bithynia(!) Severa was identified south of it, where inhumation and cremation graves were found in 2008, attesting to the importance of the place amongst the villa's surroundings.

Sándor Garády excavated five rooms in the second part of the building, which was partly unearthed again during the 2000s excavations. These rooms could be entered through a 60 cm-wide door opening into the elongated Room 3/IV; the threshold stone was 3 m wide.¹⁹ According to field descriptions, this large room was filled with a large amount of roof debris, which could have covered the building completely. In 2005, Zoltán Havas examined a 12 m long section of the north-eastern closing wall (Fig. 7.2),²⁰ a 50–55 cm wide wall built using the *opus spicatum* technique of limestone set in mortar. The wall was heavily damaged, with courses of stone sliding over one another and large amounts of loose stone leaning outwards from the building. The south-eastern wall of Room 3/IV was highly similar in technology and proportions to the previous one.

An important discovery of the year was the identification of a destruction layer comprised of charcoal, wattle, and daub inside the building. This layer yielded a fragmentary T-fibula, a type present in Pannonia between the early 3rd and early 4th centuries AD as part of the

19 GARÁDY 1936, 93.

20 HAVAS 2006, 97.

21 BEREZ 1991, 166.

22 The partition wall between Rooms 3/I–II was not found during the 2003 excavation.

23 Similar to the *opus caementicium* (Roman concrete); brick, and grog (crushed pottery) made it waterproof (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 35. 46).

24 GARÁDY 1936, 94.

The most important result of the 2005–2006 excavations was the identification of the shared courtyard of Buildings 1 and 3 in Complex A (Fig. 9.2). The north-western closing wall had already been excavated in 2005, but its interpretation remained a task for the next year. The structure was an 85–90 m-wide wall foundation without any binding material. Its north-western end has not been discovered, which was surprising because in theory, Trench III of the 2003 excavation covered it; however, the profile has revealed that digging stopped 5–10 cm above the top of the wall. The south-eastern end was found in the form of a wall corner, a 60–65 cm wide, north-east–south-west-directed dry-stone wall²⁵ joining the north-western corner of Building 3. Part of the excavated wall section was merely a foundation,²⁶ joined in a 1.5 m long segment by a terrazzo floor patch with a stone foundation from the south-east, indicating another room (Fig. 10.1).²⁷ Its level slightly decreased towards the presumed interior of the room. The wall section stood in part on a 1.6 m-long limestone threshold stone laid perpendicularly, from which another wall started towards north-west (Fig. 10.2). This threshold stone

is different from others in the complex, and the 60 cm passage it marks in the wall is considered too narrow, indicating that the stone was probably reused in the wall as building material. The earlier wall is actually a 60 cm-wide foundation, with the trench covering a 6.9 m-long, straight segment that turned towards the south-west at a corner to form a room of unknown extent. Based on the wall junctions, this structure is older than the other two walls of the courtyard.²⁸ These walls bound the space interpreted as the courtyard between Buildings 1 and 3 in Complex A, also the location of the cellar and well excavated by Sándor Garády. The courtyard floor level provided further clues to the building's dating; luckily, unlike the rest of the complex, this part was not affected by modern disturbance. A rubble fill layer was exposed under the walkway, followed by fill layers from before the building

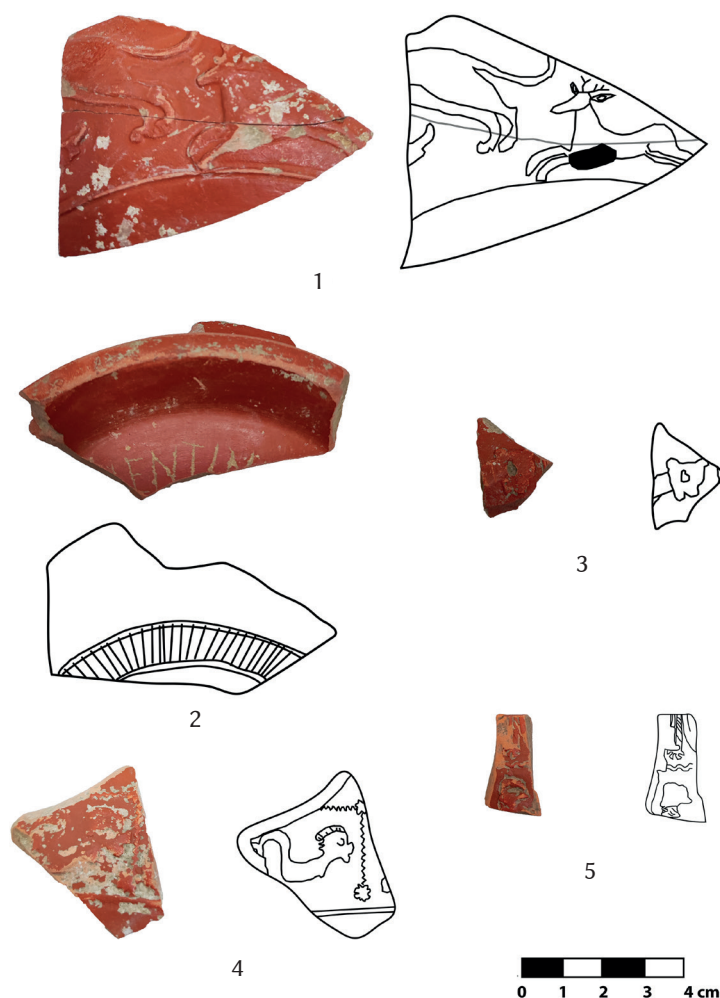


Fig. 16. 1 – Drag. 37 *terra sigillata* bowl fragment, Lezoux, Antonine period, 2 – Drag. 18/31 *terra sigillata* plate fragment with graffito [VAL]ENTIN[VS], Central Gaul, Antonine period, 3 – Drag. 37 *terra sigillata* bowl fragment, Rheinzabern, Antonine or Severan period, 4 – Drag. 37 *terra sigillata* bowl fragment, Lezoux (Albucius, lustus), Antonine period, 5 – Drag. 37. *terra sigillata* bowl fragment, Rheinzabern (Maximilianus), Antonine period.

25 About halfway, the wall turns east with a break.

26 HAVAS 2007, 142.

27 Walls or other features associated with this room were not discovered during the excavation.

28 HAVAS 2007, 142.

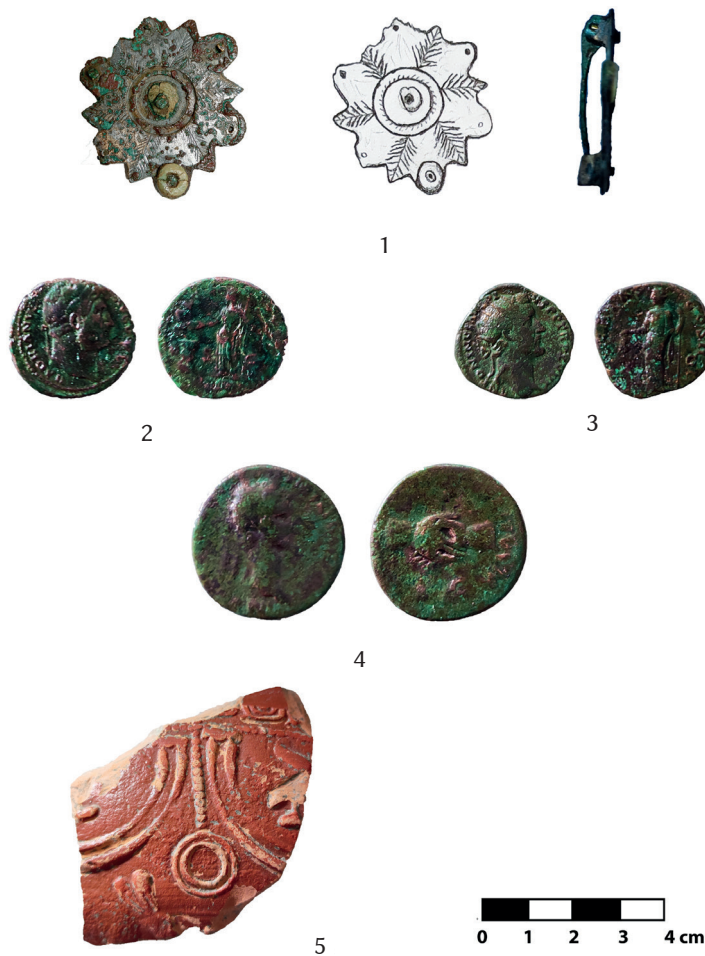


Fig. 17. 1 – Silver-plated bronze disc fibula with carved pine tree branches and bone inlays (Riha 7.7 = Feugère 24f = Ettlinger 39), second half of the 1st–early 2nd century AD, 2 – *as* of Hadrian, AD 125–128, RIC II 678, 3 – *dupondius* of Antoninus Pius, AD 154–155, RIC III 933, 4 – *as* of Nerva, AD 97, RIC II 95, 5 – Drag. 37 *terra sigillata* bowl fragment, Lezoux (circle of Cinammus), Antonine period.

attests to inhabitation in the 4th century AD.³² The numerous finds in the brown, clayey, homogeneous layer under the walkway likely belong to an earlier period. One of these is a 2nd-century AD, strong-profile, single-button bronze fibula (Fig. 12.4). Most *terra sigillata* bowls recovered from this layer were products of the Lezoux workshop circle (Fig. 12.1–3) and also date from the 2nd century AD. The material and dating of this layer match another layer, contemporary with the walls of Complex B, which was observed in almost all trenches. Unfortunately, most finds of dating value were discovered in layers disturbed in the Middle Ages or in Neolithic strata. This chronological position aligns with the nearby *villae*, most of which were founded after the Marcomannic Wars (AD 166–180) and reached their heyday during the Severan period. In the case of Testvérhegy, another piece of corroborating

was constructed. The Roman artefacts recovered from these sites date some parts of the building, even if they do not help determine the exact time of their construction.

The dating of the find material (Complex A)

Sándor Garády dated the use of Complex A to the early 3rd to early 4th century AD based on the recovered finds, and the 2000s excavations confirmed his interpretation. The *terra sigillatae* recovered from the walkway and the filling of the courtyard consist almost exclusively of types produced in the early to mid-3rd century AD in workshops at today's Rheinzabern, Westerndorf, and Pfaffenhofen (Fig. 11.2,3,5).²⁹ The shield-shaped bronze button with enamel inlay, recovered from the courtyard, is a typical find in camps along the *limes* and dates from the 2nd to 3rd centuries AD (Fig. 11.1).³⁰ The *denarius* issued by Septimius Severus in AD 211, found on the top of the north-western wall of the courtyard, may also belong to this period (Fig. 11.4).³¹ A silver-plated crossbow fibula recovered from the destruction layer of Building 3

29 I owe special thanks to Barbara Hajdu for identifying the fragments.

30 BÓNIS – SELLYE 1988, 32 (similar to Fig. 21.3). The inner circle is red, while the outer circle features blue dots against a white background. In addition, there are two symmetrical, horizontal enamel fields, a blue and a green one. Traces of two rivets are visible on the backside.

31 HAVAS 2006, 96.

32 HAVAS 2006, 97. This particular piece did not make it to the museum.

evidence of this dating is the small graveyard of the family of Bithynia Severa between Buildings 1 and 3 (Fig. 13). The *nomen gentile* 'Severa' was given during the Severan times, and the *praenomen* suggests a citizen of eastern—perhaps Syrian—origin, offering a good example of migration to Pannonia from the East at the beginning of the 3rd century AD. Eastern groups of wealthy merchants came with the army during the eastern military campaigns of the Severan dynasty, and they contributed greatly to the heyday of the small estates around Aquincum.³³

The *villa* buildings found by Sándor Garády are in a lot of aspects similar to other *villae* in the area;³⁴ however, Complex B is completely different, enriching our understanding of the character of the area in Roman times.

The chronology of Complex B

Orsolya Láng already presented a relative chronology of the north-eastern trench,³⁵ which, with some corrections, also applies to the south-western one (Fig. 14), implying that the aforementioned layers with finds of dating value could determine the occupation period of the whole complex. A timber structure probably larger than Complex B was erected in the site area in the first building period. The exact measures and function of this building are yet to be determined. The associated features included north–south- and east–west-directed parallel rows of posts. These could be discerned only in the few areas without stone structures or floors, where the trench could be deepened to reach the respective layers. Therefore, the plan of this early structure could not be reconstructed. The archaeologist leading the excavation interpreted it as a *horreum*.³⁶

In the second building phase, Complex B had simple dry stone walls, and the first perimeter walls were also erected then: first the north-eastern, then the north-western one (based on their relative



Fig. 18. 1 – Red-slipped hemispherical bowl fragment with barbotine decoration, first half of the 1st century AD, 2 – glazed skillet handle with the portrait of a deity, second half of the 2nd century AD, 3 – silver nail fibula, around the turn of the era, 4 – red-slipped hemispherical bowl fragment with barbotine decoration, first half of the 1st century AD.

33 PÓCZY 1971, 94.

34 Including the details described above, the proximity of the main road, and the siting of the whole complex on elevated ground.

35 LÁNG 2004, 97–100.

36 LÁNG 2004, 98.



1



1



2



2

Fig. 19. 1 – Conjoining walls of Room V (building phases 2 and 4), 2 – floor level of Rooms V and II in building phase 4.

Fig. 20. 1 – Bread oven established in Room I in building phase 6, 2 – traces of renewal on the wall between Rooms VII and IX.

positions, as the latter joins the former (Fig. 15.1)). However, it remains unclear if they were built in a single go or attest to the later division of the plot. In this period, the excavated walls surround two large courtyards with different flooring: the north-eastern one (Room IV) had a stone slab pavement³⁷ (Fig. 15.2), while the south-western one (Room VIII) had a gravel floor. A patch of gravel floor with key dating finds was found at the southern end of the complex, just outside the building. This layer (SU 44) was very close to the south-eastern fence and contained fragments of *terra sigillata* vessels (Fig. 16) made in workshops in Rheinzabern and Central Gaul, dating the floor to the second half of the 2nd century AD. There was another layer (SU 35) right under this one, which was similarly rich in finds of dating value. Fortunately, this loamy layer was found throughout the south-western profile, and the walls of the complex had been cut into it. Based on the recovered finds—three coins and *terra sigillatae*; see Fig. 17.5—this layer was a floor level until the mid-2nd century AD. The three coins included a rather worn piece with the portrait of the emperor Nerva (Fig. 17.4), and two coins in good condition, issued by Hadrian (Fig. 17.2) and Antoninus Pius (Fig. 17.3), respectively. These three coins hint at a gradual filling of the area: the Nerva coin was embedded in the lowermost part of the layer, and the Antoninus Pius coin was found at the smallest depth. A fairly rare, silver-plated bronze disc plate brooch with bone inlay was also discovered in this layer (Fig. 17.1). Similar brooches are known mostly from final 1st-century AD contexts in the area of today's France and early 2nd-century AD environments in the Rhine–Danube region.³⁸ Based on that, the stone building was probably erected during the second half of Antoninus Pius's rule.

³⁷ LÁNG 2004, 98.

³⁸ RIHA 1979, 184.

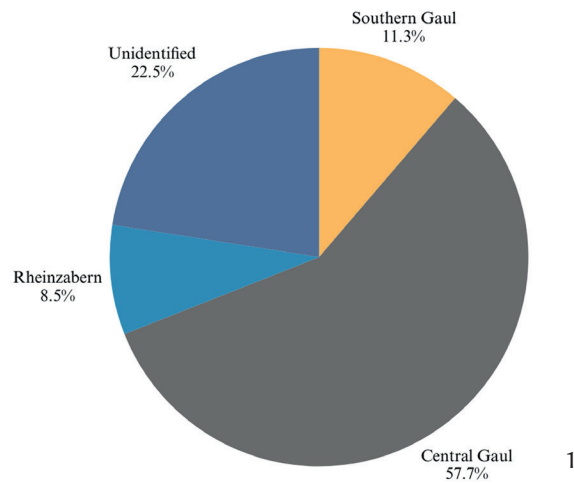


Fig. 21. 1 – Scatter of *terra sigillatae* (Complex B), 2 – wall painting fragments outside Room VIII, 3 – possible reconstruction of the composition adorning the foot of a wall (by Anita Kirchhof: [KIRCHHOF 2011](#), Fig. 915).

The third and fifth ‘building’ periods are actually destruction periods, appearing as brown humus layers deposited by erosion. Coming down the slope, the soil severely damaged the walls, floors, and road, and mixed several layers. As a result, some relatively early artefacts from the 1st to the end of the 2nd century AD ended up outside the complex. These finds indicate that the area had already been occupied well before the time of the buildings, i.e. hint at Roman habitation before the establishment of Complex B. Some of the relocated finds fit the 2nd century AD dating, including a glazed skilket handle with the portrait of a deity from the second half of the century (Fig. 18.2).³⁹ These lead-glazed pottery skillets—imitating bronze *pateras*—might have been the cheaper version

39 [BUGÁN 2002](#), 104.

of the real thing.⁴⁰ The identification of the depicted deity is debated; she is likely Luna, but some argue for Kybele, Venus, or Isis.⁴¹

Complex B reached its full extent in the fourth building period when its ground plan was also the most complex: the large courtyards became smaller, and seven new rooms were created. The new walls of Rooms I, II, III, V, and VI in the north-eastern part, attached to already existing ones, were thinner and had a foundation just half as deep than the previous ones and the fence (Fig. 19.1). The courtyard's floor was refurbished; the floor level associated with this phase bears traces of rectangular timber structures related perhaps to craft activity (similar traces were uncovered in Room V, too; see Fig. 19.2). Room I had a gravel floor, which was difficult to study due to later alterations. Rooms II and III—actually a single space not divided by walls—had rammed earthen floors; they surrounded Room I. The new, partially excavated rooms in the south-western part were connected to the courtyard (called Room VII); they are estimated to have been similar in size. Both had gravel floors but yielded only a single find and no clues about their former function. The most interesting finds associated with this period are wall-painting fragments (discussed below) found outside the building, near Room VIII.

Another renovation phase followed the destruction in the fifth period in both parts of the complex. The major development associated with this phase is the establishment of a large baking oven in Room I in the north-eastern part (Fig. 20.1). The lack of pottery or brick finds suggests that it was used for baking bread. The U-shaped structure occupied the entire room, and its wattle-and-daub walls were heated multiple times to temperatures exceeding 500 °C.⁴² Considering the importance of this activity, it is probable that simultaneously, the surrounding Rooms II and III were turned into storage rooms.

This period was more difficult to discern in the south-western part. The only alteration was the renewal of the dividing wall between the courtyard and Rooms VIII–IX (Fig. 20.2). However, the unusually intact wall section may be evidence of the comprehensive renovation of the entire structure. Unfortunately, only foundations remained, bearing no traces of renovation and buried beneath intense destruction layers indicating rapid decay, which may have prompted the occupants to abandon the erosion-ridden complex.

Dating of the find material of Complex B

The most important finds of dating value from the site are *terra sigillata* fragments. Instead of a predominance of Rheinzabern imports, present on any 3rd-century AD Roman site,⁴³ most vessels⁴⁴ came from Central Gaul (Fig. 21.1). These workshops supplied the Danube provinces between the rules of Trajan and Commodus. *Terra sigillata* fragments date Complex B to between the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and the Marcomannic Wars/death of Marcus Aurelius. Other finds support that, including the only wall painting fragments from Testvérhegy, which was found at Complex B in 2006 under the rubble layer concluding the fourth building period and is thus associated with it by stratigraphic position (Fig. 21.2). A 3 × 1.5 m part could be restored, which Anita Kirchhof analysed in her PhD dissertation, separating four compositions. The most important part of the mural fragment is a colourful linear fill pattern (Fig. 21.3), with at least four different colours. It corroborates the dating of the complex to the Antonine period (such compositions simplified to

40 BUGÁN 2002, 106.

41 G. DELBÓ 2022, 147.

42 According to the archaeomagnetic survey carried out by Péter Márton.

43 GABLER 2006, 77.

44 Only 8% of the 71 fragments belonged to vessels from Rheinzabern, and almost 70% to ones from Gaul.

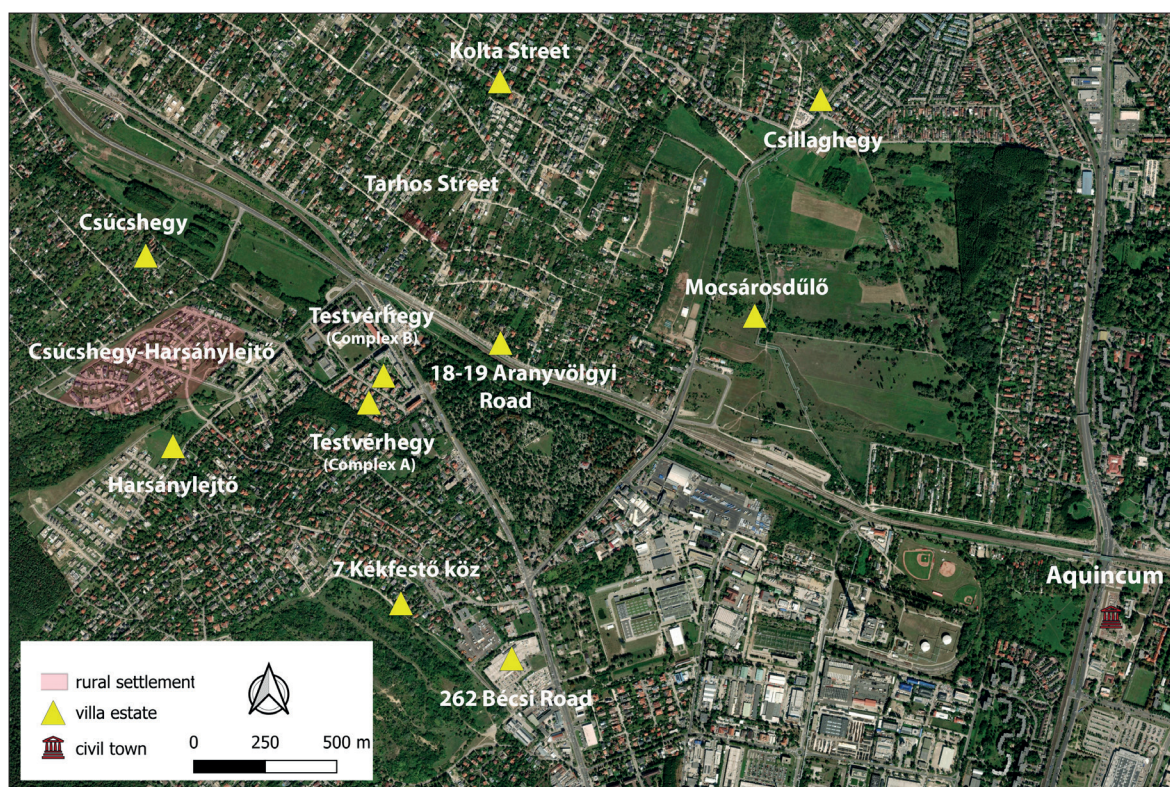


Fig. 22. Rural settlements around the villa complexes at Testvérhegy.

bicolour by the Severan period),⁴⁵ suggested by the coins issued by Nerva, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius, respectively. Evidence of Roman presence before the construction of the *villa* complex includes a silver nail-shaped brooch from between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD (Fig. 18.3)⁴⁶ and a fragment of a red-slipped hemispherical bowl decorated with distinct scales (Schindler-Kaudelka's Type 116), dated to the early 1st century AD (Fig. 18.1,4).⁴⁷

Surrounding agricultural centres

Recent research indicates that the *villae* on Testvérhegy and Csúcshegy and in the nearby regions north-east of Aquincum were embedded in a dense settlement network, a kind of suburban zone (Fig. 22).⁴⁸ Notable *villae* in this zone include an impressive complex on Csúcshegy, excavated by Lajos Nagy in the 1930s, which was established in the early 3rd century AD and remained occupied even in the 4th century AD.⁴⁹ It is the most remarkable rural complex in the vicinity of the civil town, incorporating buildings with elaborate architectural features (porticos, apses, heated rooms), decorated walls and ceilings, and 'luxury' facilities such as baths. Another significant site is a *villa* on Harsánylejtő, dating primarily to the 4th century AD, which stands out among such complexes around Aquincum: it was built on a debris island, reconstructed multiple times, and features distinct areas for rural and urban functions.⁵⁰ This complex also had some comfort features, such as terrazzo flooring, heating ducts, and a hypocaust.

45 KIRCHHOF 2011, 584.

46 GENCEVA 2004, 95.

47 SCHINDLER-KAUDELKA 1975, 121.

48 GARÁDY 1936, 96; HAVAS 2011, 187.

49 NAGY 1937, 60.

50 LÁNG 2009.

Additional architectural remains suggest the presence of rural *villae* or settlements also in the wider region, including the sites of 262 Bécsi Road,⁵¹ 7 Kékfestő köz,⁵² Tarhos Street, 18–19 Aranyhegyi Road, and Kolta Street,⁵³ with structures dating from the 2nd to the 4th century AD. The remains of these *villa* estates yielded traces of residential and utilitarian buildings, walls, pavements, and artefacts of Roman rural life.

A thoroughly excavated rural settlement lies on Csúcshegy-Harsánylejtő, only 300 m from Testvérhegy. The area was already occupied in the Neolithic, Copper Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age, as well as in the Middle Ages; separating the records of all these historical periods during excavation was, in itself, a huge task. The Roman occupation lasted from the late 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD. In its heyday in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, the site had over fifty houses and workshops but no wells, as water supply likely relied on natural springs.⁵⁴ Evidence suggests that the semi-subterranean houses and workshops had Celtic roots. During the decline of the settlement in the early 3rd century AD, a vineyard was established within the perimeter ditch, extending into the centre of the then-abandoned settlement.⁵⁵ The rows of vine pits (*vitis iugata*) dug into the rubble of the former houses follow two orientation systems. The vineyard likely belonged to a nearby *villa* estate established in the 3rd century AD that expanded its influence in the area following the decline of the village.⁵⁶

Another *villa* estate in the broader region provides an excellent parallel to the buildings excavated at Testvérhegy. The *villa* at Csillaghegy was first excavated by Márta Pető in 1987–88 and then by Lóránt Vass in 2016, who unearthed a main building with a side corridor. The only fully excavated space⁵⁷ was a courtyard covered with flat stones, similar to the one in Complex B at Testvérhegy. The Csillaghegy *villa* complex is unique for its earlier period, as reflected in both the finds and the wall foundations. Mária Pető already distinguished between the two building periods—the construction of the buildings in the 2nd century AD and a rebuilding in the 3rd century AD—and interpreted the situation she discovered as the walls of the earlier period belonged to another building

51 See ANDERKÓ 2008. The complex is situated approximately 1 km from Testvérhegy. It comprises a single-room 5 × 5 m building and a much larger, complex one with several rooms and probably terrazzo flooring. Both were scarce in finds, so the function of the complex remains uncertain, although the presence of proper flooring suggests residential use. The site aligns with the complexes of Testvérhegy along the diagonal road.

52 See LASSÁNYI 2012. This site lies between Testvérhegy and 262 Bécsi Road. The small-scale excavation could not delineate its extent. It had at least five rooms and walls with a 50–60 cm-thick foundation. The material suggests a dating between the beginning of the 3rd and the end of the 4th century AD.

53 See HAVAS *et al.* 2017; BUDAI-BALOGH 2015. These presumed rural settlement sites were found east of Bécsi Road. At 18–19 Aranyhegyi Road, traces of dismantled walls were discovered in 2015, and Roman wall remains were observed in the profile of a newly dug cellar in the previous year, when a ruined but intact Roman building (foundations and a gravel pavement) was also discovered in Tarhos Street between Szőlővész and Óvári streets. Only a single roof tile was found north-west of the ruins, indicating that the building does not continue in that direction; however, several additional objects were collected from the surface towards Óvári Street. Between 29 and 34 Tarhos Street, wall foundations laid in mortar and building debris, probably forming a coherent unit, was found. This phenomenon, extending to 350 m and including several stone structures, could have been a village-like settlement. Another Roman period stone building was discovered at the intersection of Kolta and Mácsonya Streets in 2015. It was a multi-room building with irregular stone foundations and rising walls set in yellow mortar. Its extent could be defined because there were no signs of additional walls in the surrounding streets. Roof debris and Roman period finds associated with the walls were also found in the area.

54 HAVAS *et al.* 2017, 172.

55 HAVAS *et al.* 2017, 42.

56 HAVAS *et al.* 2007, 177.

57 PETŐ 1993, 150.

which was levelled in the reconstruction phase, resulting in a layer sequence where 2nd-century AD material is scattered close to the walls but admixed with 3rd-century AD finds.⁵⁸ If she is correct, this site had building phases identical to the complex at Testvérhegy.

Summary

Perhaps even more questions concerning the complex at Testvérhegy arise today than before because the two buildings were inhabited at completely different times. Complex B, with a total of six building phases, was in use during the 2nd century AD, and the dating of its find material concludes with the end of the Marcomannic Wars. By contrast, the earliest finds and phenomena associated with the buildings of Complex A can be dated as late as the early 3rd century AD, and evidence points to inhabitation until the beginning of the 4th century AD, raising the possibility that the inhabitants of Complex B moved to Complex A because perhaps of the erosion which has significantly damaged the interior and surroundings of their home.

Both complexes were multifunctional, with no separate residential and agricultural spaces. They were also similar in design, each with a large courtyard with a floor level of scattered gravel or stone slabs. Based on the square imprints found in Room IV and the bread oven in Room I (which was used in the last period of the building), Complex B also included a commercial establishment. The economic role of the *villa* complex must be interpreted with consideration to the surrounding *villae* and rural settlements. These agricultural units, operating in such close proximity, were highly likely connected—only the level of cooperation remains to be determined.

While in the 1950s, Géza Alföldy estimated a network with 3–4 km between *villae*⁵⁹ We know of such complexes today at distances of 500 m or less. This figure is becoming increasingly common thanks to a recent upsurge in research, including excavations and archaeological surveys, which have provided abundant information on newly discovered buildings and settlements and have improved our knowledge of the suburban zone of Aquincum.

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58 VASS 2017, 32.

59 ALFÖLDY 1959, 23.

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