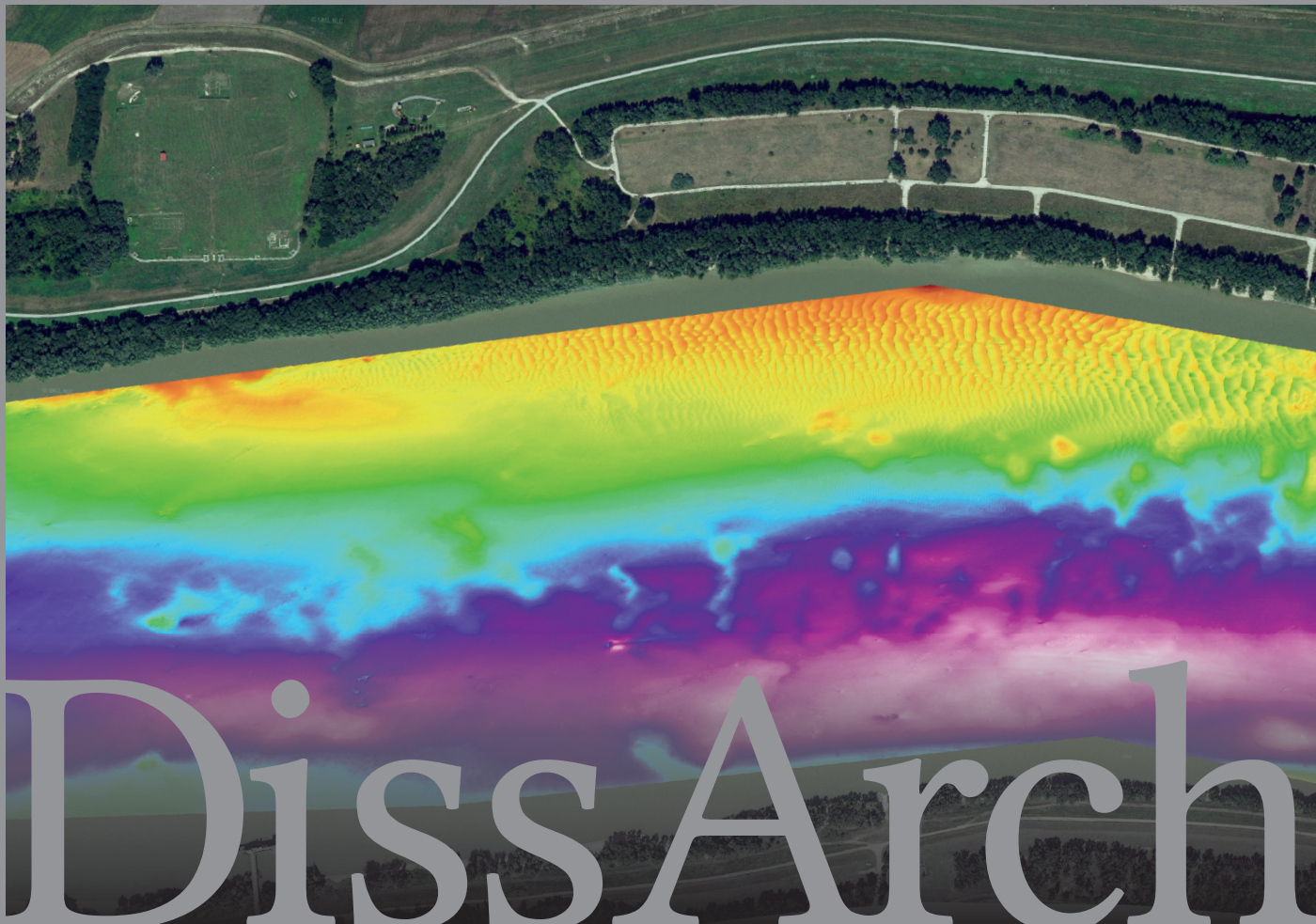


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Pilisszentiván-Hárs-erdő 2025

New buildings and finds from a Roman village in the northwestern hinterland of Aquincum

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Abstract: A team of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University have opened new areas for excavation at the Pilisszentiván-Hárs-erdő Roman village site. The investigation uncovered the entire area of Building D, which was a rectangle structure with stone foundations and an oven in the southwestern corner. East of this, Building E proved to be more extensive than previously anticipated. Another two buildings were identified in the excavation trenches. Besides the regular residential pottery, fragments of *terra sigillata* bowls were found which indirectly date the building of Building D before the Marcomannic War, and the abandonment of Building E to the beginning of the 3rd century.

Keywords: woodland archaeology, Roman rural settlement, hinterland of Aquincum

Location of the site and its brief research history

The Pilisszentiván-Hárs-erdő site is located on the low, natural, mid-mountain terrace of the Buda Mountains geographical micro-region, in the vicinity of Hársas Spring, the source of Aranyhegyi Stream. The Roman village is in the direct hinterland of the nearby provincial capital, Aquincum (Óbuda, Hungary), with which the population have maintained strong economic and social ties.¹

1 [SIMON 2022](#); There is still no direct proof, but we can assume, that a Roman road has crossed the valley below the settlement ([BÖDÖCS – SIMON 2025](#)).

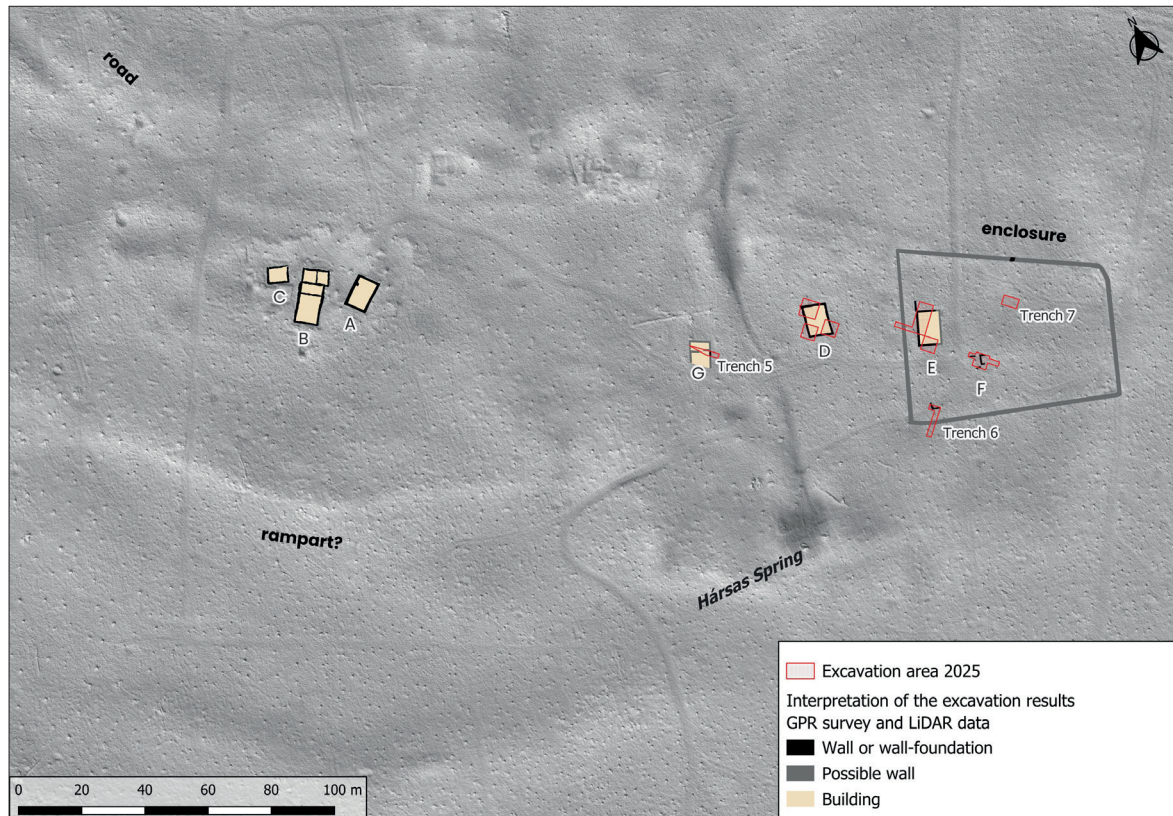


Fig. 1. The interpreted data on the layout of the Roman village at the Pilisszentiván-Hárs-erdő archaeological site (by B. Simon).

Based on the previous findings, three buildings with stone foundations dating back to the Roman period were identified between 2014 and 2018. In 2022–2024 teams of the Institute of Archaeology at Pázmány Péter Catholic University and the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University conducted ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and magnetometer research in the site's central area, and in March 2023 and March 2024, Bence Simon led an airborne laser-scanning survey (LiDAR) of the site. The geophysical research has revealed anomalies indicating the presence of additional stone buildings and strong bipolar features, indicating burnt layers or roof debris. At the same time, the latter identified a sunken road leading to the settlement, a stone enclosure closing off the settlement from the east, and further traces of human alteration of the surface.

In the fall of 2023, ELTE's Institute of Archaeology, with financial support from Pilisszentiván's local government, planned and conducted an excavation and geodetic survey of the previously excavated buildings to refine their relative and absolute chronology. In addition, they found numerous local and imported objects (local pottery, glass vessels, wheel-thrown pottery, brooches, a pottery stamp, and honing stones), most of which date to the 1st–2nd centuries.²

In 2024, the non-destructive research continued with the town's financial support. The study showed evidence of human activity near and below the surface across the entire 460 m-long, 80–100 m-wide plateau. In August, the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of ELTE, funded by the town, conducted magnetometer and GPR surveys on a 9410 m² area, mainly east of the Hársas Spring. Their results revealed numerous magnetic anomalies and three new buildings adjacent to the enclosure.

The excavation in October 2024 was primarily organized to review the research results from August. During the excavation, we identified and examined the walls of three new buildings with

2 SIMON *et al.* 2024.

stone foundations, ovens, and the settlement's enclosure. The finds uncovered in the buildings date to the 2nd and 3rd centuries and refer to everyday life.³

The circumstances of the 2025 excavation and the layout of the trenches

The excavation led by Bence Simon and conducted by a team of the team of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University from 8th September to 23rd September 2025 was planned based on last year's results. Our goal was to gain a better understanding of the floor plans, construction dates, and functions of the buildings/structures partially excavated in 2024, and open smaller trenches to clarify issues related to the settlement structure. Continuing with the 2023 designations, we marked the buildings identified last year with the letters 'D', 'E', and 'F' from west to east (Fig. 1).



Fig. 2. The unearthed oven in the SW corner of Building D (by B. Simon).

Near Building D, which we studied last year in Quadrats 1–4, we opened two new 4.5×4.5 m trenches, encompassing the SE and SW corners. In addition, we reopened Quadrat 1 and demolished the shared section walls with Quadrats 2 and 3, thereby expanding Quadrat 1 to 5×5 m.

We planned to examine the eastern and northern extensions of Building E, using a 4.5×4.5 m SE quadrat and an L-shaped, irregular NW trench which widens on the east side. The latter was shifted 1 m east during the topsoil removal and expanded by 4 m to the north. We further investigated Building F, extending last year's Trench 3 at the eastern and western sides to an irregular form. Based on the geophysical survey, we planned to investigate the structure west of Building D and the shallow gully of the Hársas Spring with the 10×1.5 m Trench 5, but to preserve the integrity of the tourist trail, we were only able to stake out a trapezoidal trench. We examined the southern enclosure wall and the phenomena located here with the 10×1.5 m Trench 6, and the magnetic anomaly located NE of Building E and north of Building F with the 3×5 m Trench 7. We have excavated a total of 215 m^2 this year.

3 SIMON *et al.* 2025; MÜLLER *et al.* 2025.

Building D

As last year, in the case of Building D, after removing a few centimeters of the topsoil layer from each trench, the building's finely crushed stone rubble, or the trench of the removed walls, appeared. In the SE corner, the north-south wall was uncovered under the leaf litter. However, the east-west wall was almost completely removed, with only the lowest row of limestone blocks on the outside of the building remaining visible. In the southwestern trench, we uncovered a stone oven made of stones of various sizes and types in the SW corner of the building (Fig. 2). Compared to last year's observations, it became clear that the oven's bottom row of stones comprises large sandstones which protrudes from the plane of the rising oven wall. We observed a gap in the row of these stones on the northeast side, so we can assume that this is where the oven's mouth was. Our assumption is further supported by the fact that the ground was burnt red at the same level as the bottom of the stones, at the depth where the floor level can be inferred from the archaeological finds and the stone slabs identified in the northwestern part of the building. On the oven's ascending wall, we have also found a reused piece of a broken hand-drawn millstone (Fig. 3).

We excavated the entire stone-paved floor in the NW area, which was a 2.8×1.8 m rectangle. In 2024, we have found a pit under the stone slabs, which, after removing the slabs, proved to be a shallow square feature measuring 2.5×2.5 m (Fig. 4). The pit contained some domestic pottery and a fragment of a



Fig. 3. Millstone in the wall of the oven of Building D (by Á. Müller).



Fig. 4. The NW part of Building D with the rectangle stone pavement, and the partly excavated square feature under it (by B. Simon).



Fig. 5. *Terra sigillata* bowl fragment from the square feature of Building D (by Á. Müller).

terra sigillata vessel from La Graufesenque, Central Gaul. The Drag. 37-shaped bowl, produced in the workshop of Divixtus, was made between 140 and 160 AD and then discarded in Pilisszentiván (Fig. 5). Based on this, the stone-paved interior floor was built no later than before the Marcomannic Wars, therefore the stone-based building cannot be dated to a later period either. The interpretation of the square pit is problematic, and its residential function is questionable, as we have found no traces of structural elements; meanwhile, a large amount of charcoal was unearthed in the southwestern corner of the feature, where the fragments of the *terra sigillata* bowl were also found.

We have achieved only a few modest results regarding the structure of Building D: we uncovered dry-laid foundation walls again this year, and the whereabouts of the entrance remains unresolved (Fig. 6). The lowest row of stones of the building's foundation was missing only on the western side. Still, we were unable to excavate the wall down to the lowest row of stones on the eastern side due to the trees' roots. We cannot determine whether the entrance was located on this side or on the eastern side. The uninterrupted line of the northern and southern walls makes it unlikely that the entrance was located along these shorter sides of the building. The previously assumed regularity of the structure was modified only to the extent that the building does not have a regular rectangular floor plan, as the walls do not form right angles with one another, following the excavation of the NE and SE corners.



Fig. 6. View of Building D from the West (by B. Simon).



Fig. 7. View of Building E from the West (by B. Simon).

Building E

In the area of the opened trenches around Building E, we uncovered the western and southern foundation walls. In the west extension of the NW trench, we sought to verify the presumed line of the north-south enclosure wall based on the LiDAR data. We were unsuccessful in the latter case due to the incorrect evaluation of the data or the circumstances. Perhaps the large amount of sandstone under the tree could have revealed the continuation of the enclosure wall. Still, we did not have the opportunity to shift the western extension of the trench to the north or south to obtain more accurate data on this issue.

However, further exploration of the trench revealed that Building E is larger than D and contains more rooms (Fig. 7). The findings from last year's Trench 2 failed to demonstrate the 10-meter length of the oven-heated room in the SW corner, nor did they indicate that it continued further to the north. On the southern and northern walls of the heated room of the building, the foundation built of large sandstones was interrupted; the interrupted sections, approximately 1 m wide, could be interpreted as entrances. We have excavated precisely the northern section in last year's trench. The eastern outer wall of the building lies beyond the opened trenches, so determining its location will be a task for the next season. We have completely excavated the oven in the living quarters, whose hard floor outlined the egg-shaped form of the heating device (Fig. 8). Based on the shape of the hard floor, we assume that the oven's mouth faced east. We could not clearly determine the floor level in this room.



Fig. 8. The excavated oven of Building E (by Á. Müller).

The artifacts near the oven were found at the same level as the base of the dry-laid walls or near them. The Drag. 37 *terra sigillata* pottery rim-fragment, found 15 cm SE from the oven, may indicate the time when the building was abandoned. The fragment could be dated to the early 3rd century and was imported from the southern part of present-day Bavaria.

In the next room to the north, we have determined the extent of a stony floor, which we had earlier identified as a furnace floor. It was not connected to the wall shared with the southern room but began slightly north of it and extended across the entire east-west width of the room (Fig. 9). A rubble of stones were lying on the floor, under which several fragments of large household pottery vessels were found. We also collected soil samples from the walkway because we noticed charred remains there.

The foundation walls of Building E were built exclusively of sandstone, which may indicate a later construction date compared



Fig. 9. The stony floor of the northern room of Building E under cleaning (by Á. Müller).



Fig. 10. View of Building F in the extended Trench 3 from the North (by B. Simon).

to Buildings A, B and D. In the case of Building B, we have observed that during the extension of the building, the foundations of the annex rooms were built from sandstone, which may indicate a change in the source of building materials.

Extension of Trench 3

In the extensions of Trench 3 opened in the area of Building F, we have found new walls this year, but we were still unable to comprehend the floor plan completely (Fig. 10). We had to proceed slow-

ly within the area bounded by dry, sandstone walls due to the rubble and hard fill. It turned out that what we thought was the ‘western’ dividing wall last year was actually rubble, underlain by a hard, burnt layer mixed with red clay. The same type of fill appeared to the east of the 40 cm thick wall identified last year as the ‘eastern’ dividing wall, although the presence of red clay was perhaps less pronounced here. The fills were closed off by a wall approximately 55 cm thick, interrupted by a 1.2 m gap to the east. We were able to delimit the structure on the east and south sides. However, due to the uncertain continuation of the inner walls, the small excavated area, and a wall branching off in the north, the plan cannot be reconstructed. We were still unable to clarify the floor plan and function. On top of the red-clay fill, we have found numerous metal objects, including chains, nails, and pottery fragments, indicating that the structure dates back to Roman times.

Trenches 5–7

We opened Trench 5 to verify the geophysical results and found the eastern closing wall of a new building, which was built of large limestone blocks like the foundation walls of Buildings A, B, and D (Fig. 11). The interior floor level and western closing wall of the building could not be determined in the irregular trench. After the building’s discovery this year, it was named with letter G.

In Trench 6, we investigated a large, but weaker anomaly detected by the magnetometer and an enclosure presumed to exist based on the LiDAR survey. We did not find a stone enclosure in the trench as it was previously anticipated, but in the middle, a shallow feature approximately 4 m wide, running



Fig. 11. View of the eastern wall of Building G in Trench 5 (by Sz. Johácsi).

east-west, light brown in color, and dotted with charcoal was found (Fig. 12). Underneath it lay a 27 × 20 cm oval column base. As no artifacts were found, the Roman age of the layers is uncertain. We took soil samples for further scientific analysis. On the north side of Trench 6, a wall corner similar to the masonry of Building D and F was uncovered, built of sandstone and approximately 75 cm thick. The two branches of the exposed corner did not appear to meet in a right angle, though we could not confirm this due to the small surface area. The same applies to the interpretation of the feature, although, given its thickness, it is most likely a building corner.

At the western end of Trench 7, we have found the continuation of the extensive ashy layer which has appeared at the southern end of last year’s Trench 4. We identified it as a bomb crater’s fill based on the shrapnel fragments found. For this reason, we divided the area in half and dug deeper on its eastern side. In the SE corner, as expected, we found a red-burnt feature without any artifacts (Fig. 13). Half of the rectangular feature with rounded corners, fell within the area of the opened Trench 7, and its fill consisted of red clay and whole pieces of charcoal. It can be considered as a kind of a sunken industrial structure rather than a building. There wasn’t any slag in the vicinity of the feature.



Fig. 12. The northern part of Trench 6 (by B. Simon).

Metal detector survey results

Metal detector searches conducted in parallel with the excavation in the settlement area were also successful, yielding a modest number of iron finds, a few coins in need of restoration, and a well-preserved crossbow brooch. Two pieces of this type of fibula are on display in the village's Roman-era exhibition; they are among the finds indicating the site's use in the 3rd and 4th centuries. However, we are not yet able to link any archaeological features to this period.

Summary

During this year's excavation season, the results in each of the investigated areas were on par with our expectations. Based on the metal detector finds, the settlement's existence will likely be pushed ahead to the 4th century, but during the excavation, we generally uncovered 2nd- and 3rd-century pottery and metal artifacts. It was the first time, that fragments of 2nd–3rd-century *terra sigillata* pottery were



Fig. 13. The excavated rectangular, burnt feature in Trench 7 (by Á. Müller).

uncovered, which continues to support the presence of a solvent population fully integrated into the Roman economy in the settlement. Based on the findings, we concluded that Building D was built no later than the Antonine period and that Building E was a multi-room residential structure abandoned during the 3rd century. This year, we excavated the first settlement feature immediately preceding the surface buildings. A noteworthy result is that we have identified another building to the west of the spring and a wall corner on the other side of the spring. In the eastern excavation area, we were unable to confirm the southern and western lines of the presumed enclosure. However, we have found traces of it in both directions, which, based on later research, may explain the pro-

trusion outlined in the LiDAR image. The features east of Building D may be classified as belonging to a later phase and, excluding Building E, are most likely to be related to industrial activity. After the excavation was completed we used manual labor and a rubber-tracked excavator equipped with a 90 cm wide bucket to rebury the geotextile-covered walls and oven remains.

The team of the excavation

The excavation team consisted of archaeologists Dr. Bence Simon, Dr. Szilvia Johácz, Dániel Hümpfner, Rita Olasz, and Bence Párkányi; archaeological technicians Vilmos Lenár, Fanni Majorszki, Ákos Müller, Lilla Németh, Julianna Ray-Bene; and Bence Baukó, Karina Fodor, Veronika Kiss, Szonja Kiss, Anni Kőhegyi, Brúnó Reményi, Boglárka Szalai, Flóra Tardi, and Ákos Zemjanszky archaeology students, as well as Levente Bondár, István Borsan, Nóra Csillag, Eszter Hámos, Attila Jakus, Zsombor Kolozsi, Tibor Magyar, Balázs Soós, László Kovács, Zoltán Kovács, Zsófia Péchyné, Béla Radványi, Gergő Sipos from the Community Archaeology Association. In addition, the following individuals participated primarily as regional volunteers: Nándor Bárdi, Attila Brandhuber, Attila Cseresnyés, László Dinnyés, Lizett Farkas, Dorottya Gál, Szilvia Hadfi, Péter Koczóh, Zoltán Kovács, István Kreisz, Erika Laczkó, Tamás Marlok, Erik Richolm, Péterné Richolm, Áron Szalai, Eszter Szundy, Gábor Tóth, and Katalin Tóthné Becsei and Réka Karlne Menráth from the Duna-Ipoly National Park.

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