ARRC – Acculturation, Romanisation, Roman Culture: Processes of Integration Across the Roman Empire

Edited by László Borhy, Kata Dévai, Linda Dobosi, and Csilla Sáró

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Edited by
László Borhy – Kata Dévai – Linda Dobosi – Csilla Sáró

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Archaeological excavation of a new Roman-period wagon grave and its adjacent horse burial at Belvárdgyula (Baranya County, Hungary) in 2021

Interim research report

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Abstract: Discussed in this study is the discovery and excavation of a particularly fascinating Roman period burial representing a rare mortuary rite alongside its preliminary assessment. The burial was discovered by a local archaeology enthusiast on the outskirts of Belvárdgyula: the excavation undertaken in autumn 2021 brought to light a grave pit containing a carriage with a horse team and the separate burial of a harnessed saddle horse. The carriage is noteworthy not only for its Bacchic bronze sculptural ornamentation and its structural elements, but also because of the burial rite involving the partial deposition of carriage components and the yoke enabling the reconstruction of the horse team. The horse burial provided yet another example of a Pannonian saddle horse interred with an openwork bronze harness set. Both graves yielded a surprisingly high amount of organic remains (wood, leather and textile) that have enriched our knowledge of the period's horse gear and team-drawn carriages. The burials uncovered at Belvárdgyula have added new details to our overall picture of the local native population of eastern Transdanubia, particularly regarding wagon graves, a distinctive burial type that differs markedly from the funerary rites of Roman-type interments.

Keywords: Baranya County, Belvárdgyula, Roman period, saddle horse, horse burial, wagon grave, otherworld, local elite, Bacchus

One spectacular type of Roman-period funerary rite in Pannonia is represented by burials containing the carriages of the local elite of indigenous background. This burial rite differs markedly from the funerary customs of Roman-type burials.[1] The carriage and the draught horses were deposited in the grave pit as part of the mortuary paraphernalia considered indispensable for the journey to the otherworld. The local Celtic population believed that the deceased or their soul had to undertake a long journey to reach the otherworld, which they conceived of as lying in a remote region of the world, where the deceased would enjoy eternal happiness, and an idyllic golden age provided by Bacchus for his followers. The truly wealthy strove to undertake this long and arduous journey as comfortably as possible. This background accounts for the deposition of their ornate carriages in graves, which were

1 Mráv 2009; Mráv 2016.

✉ Corresponding author

both vehicles used for travel in daily life and symbols of prominent social status. Wagon graves are rare finds in eastern Pannonia: some forty graves of this type have been found since the nineteenth century, although only some of them were professionally excavated and documented with attention to the details of the burial rite. The two most recent wagon graves were discovered in two successive years at Ellend in 2020 and on the outskirts of Belvárdgyula in 2021, both in Baranya County in southern Transdanubia, a region from which only a single wagon grave had previously been known: the one found at Kozármisleny.[2] The goal of this study is to report on the discovery and archaeological in-



Fig. 1. 1 – Belvárdgyula. Soil stain of the wagon grave and the horse burial after the removal of the humous topsoil (photo by Zs. Győrffy-Villám), 2 – Belvárdgyula. The metal-framed tent erected at the start of excavation to protect the then-assumed wagon grave, 3 – Belvárdgyula. Orthophoto of the excavated horse grave (photo by Zs. Győrffy-Villám).

2 Kiss 1989.

vestigation of the Belvárdgyula grave, which has added a wealth of exciting and colourful new details to our continuously expanding knowledge of Pannonian wagon graves.[3]

The discovery of the wagon grave and its archaeological excavation

In 2020, Viktor Réger, a volunteer metal detectorist of the Janus Pannonius Museum of Pécs (henceforth abbreviated as JPM) discovered remarkable Roman-period metal finds on the outskirts of Belvárdgyula, some 1 km south of the settlement's centre. The horse teeth, the fragment of the horse bit with a rein ring, an openwork bridle mount, and a mask-ornamented decorative nail suggested that the area concealed a carriage and horse burial from the Roman period.[4] Before the excavation began, a metal-detector survey was conducted over the area, during which a few iron carriage elements, another mask-ornamented decorative nail, many tegula fragments, and several Roman coins were found. An additional result of the field survey was six so-called Budakeszi/Ellend-type bronze terret rings. These terret rings, uniform in size and shape, certainly did not derive from the wagon grave excavated in 2021. As yet, we cannot explain either their occurrence at the site or their number, which is two more than the complete set of terrets of a Roman-period yoke. Some Roman iron wagon parts found during the metal-detector survey, which have no connection with the excavated wagon grave, also require explanation. Based on the scatter of the finds, we conducted an intensive metal-detector survey over an area of 20 × 40 m; the anomalies were concentrated in a 5 × 4 m area, where the deep-search metal detector indicated the presence of large metal artefacts. We stripped away the ploughed topsoil layer by layer with a backhoe loader until a scatter of horse teeth was encountered at a depth of 20 cm, after which we proceeded to excavate the area manually until reaching the yellow, loessy subsoil, in which a clear, large, light brown soil stain could be discerned. The soil stain of the pit extended beyond the excavation area; therefore, it was expanded by removing the topsoil layer by layer using heavy machinery until the entire soil stain of the roughly rectangular feature became visible (Feature 1, wagon grave). Simultaneously, we also removed the upper humus layer mechanically in an area south of Feature 1, where the metal detector likewise indicated intense anomalies, and uncovered the soil stain of a smaller rectangular pit (Feature 2, horse burial) (Fig. 1.1). Next, a protective roof, a tent with a metal frame, was erected over the assumed wagon grave, and its excavation started (Fig. 1.2).[5] The fill of the pit was removed in 5–10 cm thick layers, all of which were meticulously documented.

The two grave pits were dug into the upper, more gently sloping southern side of the hill. As in the case of the wagon graves at Budaörs and Budakeszi, no trace could be identified of a grave mound that may have been erected over the Belvárdgyula wagon grave and horse burial.[6]

The horse burial

In addition to draught horses, wagon graves of the local native elite often contain saddle horses interred either in the grave pit of the carriage or in a separate pit close to it. The Belvárdgyula horse

3 This study is a more detailed and more richly illustrated version of a previous paper by the authors, Mráv – Neményi 2023.

4 The volunteer metal detectorist surveyed the location where the finds had been discovered and the adjacent areas under the direction of Gergely Kovaliczky, archaeologist of the JPM. As part of this survey, we georeferenced the findspot of the snaffle bit, the horse teeth, and some previously found iron carriage parts.

5 The salvage excavation was generously funded by the Prime Minister's Office. The excavation was conducted by the Department of Archaeology of the Janus Pannonius Museum in collaboration with the Hungarian National Museum. The excavation was directed by Réka Neményi (JPM).

6 On the relationship between mound graves and wagon graves, see Palágyi 1981, 10–14; Palágyi – Nagy 2002, 70, 135–137.



Fig. 2. 1 – Belvárdgyula, horse grave. S-shaped, tin bronze openwork mount attached to a cheek strap of the bridle (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 2 – Belvárdgyula, horse grave. Main mount types on the bridle of the saddle horse (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 3 – Belvárdgyula, horse grave. Openwork strap divider disc from the left side of the saddle horse's chest (photo by Zs. Győrffy-Villám), 4 – Belvárdgyula, horse grave. One of the four openwork strap divider discs *(phalerae)* (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai).

burial represents the latter type. It must be highlighted that not all horse burials can be assumed to have accompanied wagon graves. The custom of burying deceased or sacrificed saddle horses was much more widespread both geographically and socially than the aristocratic and costly rite of depositing carriages in graves.[7] Horse burials have been found across certain regions in both Pannonian provinces; however, only a portion of these burials can be linked to the local elites. The remainder of these horse burials, particularly the ones containing weapons used in the Roman army and the ones uncovered in the cemetery of a military fort, can be associated with serving or discharged cavalrymen. Obviously, there is some overlap between these two burial types, represented by the weapon burials of the Káloz wagon burial horizon.[8] Another type of burial associated with horses does not include a horse cadaver: these are graves of humans with the addition, following the *pars pro toto* concept, of only certain elements of a horse harness (see the cremation graves at Kleinwarasdorf-Steinäcker, the *ossuarium* at Halbturn-Wittmannshof 'Objekt 252', Gerulata [Bratislava-Rusovce, SK] Cemetery II, Grave 90, and Azaum/Odiavum [Almásfüzitő, H], where a grave comprising metal components of a bridle came to light during the construction of the Alumina Plant in or before 1951).[9]

The grave pit of the Belvárdgyula horse burial was dug some 5 m south of the wagon grave. The relative positions of the two pits can be determined as follows: the eastern longitudinal wall of the

7 For an overview of the Pannonian horse burials, see Palágyi – Nagy 2002, 70; Vörös 2010, 232–233; Márton 2019, 207–208. For more recent, yet unpublished horse burials, see Mráv in preparation.

8 Káloz; Várpalota-Inota, Tumulus 2; Budaörs, Grave 126; see comprehensively Mráv 2006, 53–64; Mráv 2014b, 119–126.

9 Márton 2019, 208; Mráv 2024b.

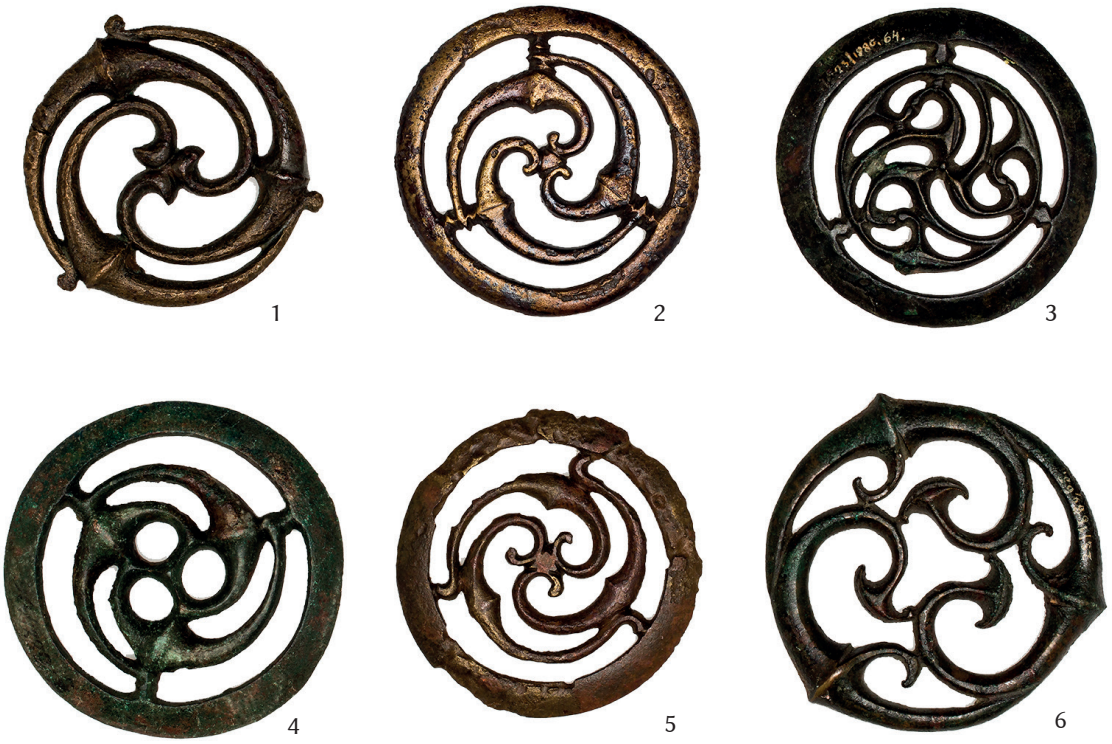


Fig. 3. Openwork strap divider discs from the Pannonian provinces, representing closest parallels to the pieces found at Belvárdgyula. 1 – Brigetio (Komárom, Szőny), Horse Grave 2, 2 – Sárbogárd-Sárszentmiklós, wagon burial, 3 – Transdanubia, perhaps Intercisa (Dunaújváros), from a destroyed wagon burial, 4 – Szomor-Somodorpuszta, wagon burial, 5 – Brigetio (Komárom, Szőny), Horse Grave 1, 6 – Transdanubia, perhaps Intercisa (Dunaújváros), from a destroyed wagon grave (Hungarian National Museum, Budapest; photo by A. Ferancz).

wagon grave pit, or more precisely its line extended southwards, is approximately aligned with the north-south axis of the horse grave pit. The east–west oriented pit of roughly 193 × 75–100 cm had a rounded trapezoidal shape. After the topsoil had been removed, parallel plough marks running north-west to south-east still scarred both the soil stains and the artificial excavation floor. One of them, disturbing the horse burial, reached as deep as the animal's skull. Ploughing destroyed the nose and mouth of the horse's skull, including its incisors. Only a few molars, stained green by the patina of the bronze rings of the bit, were preserved. They were dislocated from the jaw that had been crushed by the ploughshare. Half a horse bit with rein rings was discovered in this area in 2020.

A saddle horse with lavishly adorned harness was buried in the grave pit (Fig. 1.3). The horse's head lay at the eastern end of the pit, while its hindquarters lay at the western end. The western end of the pit was dug deeper for the horse's hindquarters. The position of the horse skeleton, especially the limbs, suggested that the animal's carcass had somehow been shoved and squeezed into the pit. During the process, one of the straps originally strung through the openwork strap divider disc on the haunch must have become disconnected, as its button was found further away. The bit found in 2020 could be classified as a snaffle bit. It consists of a jointed iron bar with double bronze rings comprising loops of dissimilar size at either end. The cheek straps of the bridle were fitted into the bigger rings, while the reins were fitted into the two smaller rings. The decorative bronze mounts of the left cheekpiece were also heavily disturbed by deep ploughing. This is the reason why one of the two identical S-shaped openwork fittings decorating the cheek straps was found during the metal-detector survey in the uppermost humus layer, while the other was found in the furrow running across the horse's head (Fig. 2.1). It is likely that illegal metal detectorists had found some of the bronze fittings of the bridle straps, dispositioned by ploughing, resulting in their permanent loss.

Nonetheless, most harness ornaments remained in their original positions on the skeleton, although the left cheek and the mounts of the bridle on that side suffered extensive disturbance.

The bridle was adorned with the following tin-bronze mounts: domed, box-shaped strap slides and bridle strap dividers, two looped strap-ends, a bronze shank button with a trilobate head on the top of the horse's head, and a rectangular stud at the last cervical vertebra (Fig. 2.2). The four strap dividers, along with the girth, used to hold the saddle firmly in place. The leather saddle cover and saddle horns made of organic materials were not preserved; iron rods bracing the saddle, such as those observed in the Nagykanizsa horse grave,[10] were not found. The most spectacular harness fittings are undoubtedly the four bronze strap divider discs *(phalerae)*, two of which were found by the haunches and two on either side of the breast (Fig. 2.3). Their openwork decoration is comprised of three S-shaped trumpet motifs *(Trumpetenmuster)* set within a pair of concentric circles (Fig. 2.4). Although the openwork pattern has no exact parallel, several strap divider discs with similar openwork decoration in a 'Celticising' style, composed of three trumpet motifs, have been published from the Pannonian provinces (Fig. 3).[11] Openwork strap divider discs of this type did not have copper-alloy loops attached to their edges; instead, the leather straps were looped directly through them; accordingly, they have no rivets on the back. A pair of bronze shank buttons with trilobate heads lay beside each disc, suggesting that two straps had passed through each disc. (The number and symmetrical position of the openwork strap divider discs in the Belvárdgyula horse burial, together with those of the buttons once fastening the straps to them, are identical to the horse gear found *in situ* in a similar feature at Nagykanizsa (Fig. 4)[12] and in the partly disturbed horse burial at Győr, Újlak Street [STR-100].[13]) A particularly noteworthy observation is that a single yarn or a bundle of yarns was threaded through the shank buttons, thereby enhancing the ornamentation of the harness straps (Fig. 5.1). The straps looped through the outer ring of the openwork strap divider discs have worn the contact surfaces thin to a greater or lesser extent, indicating that the harness was used for a longer period and/or intensively (Fig. 5.2). The haunch straps were also decorated with double S-shaped, openwork bronze mounts with an angular design (Fig. 5.3). A larger buckle of the girth used to fasten the saddle was also found. It had a simple D-shaped bronze buckle frame and an iron pin. The buckle was found at

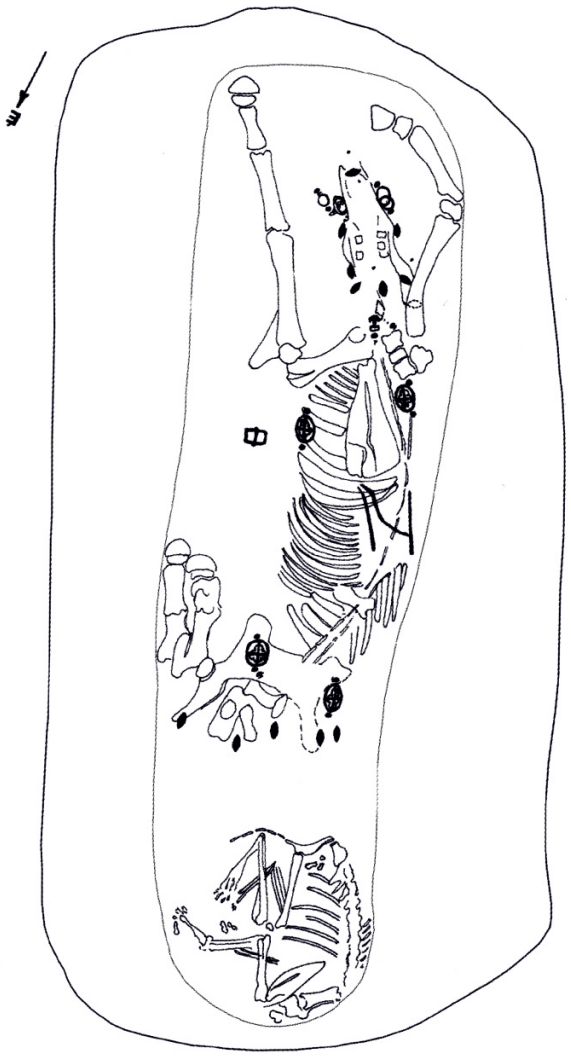


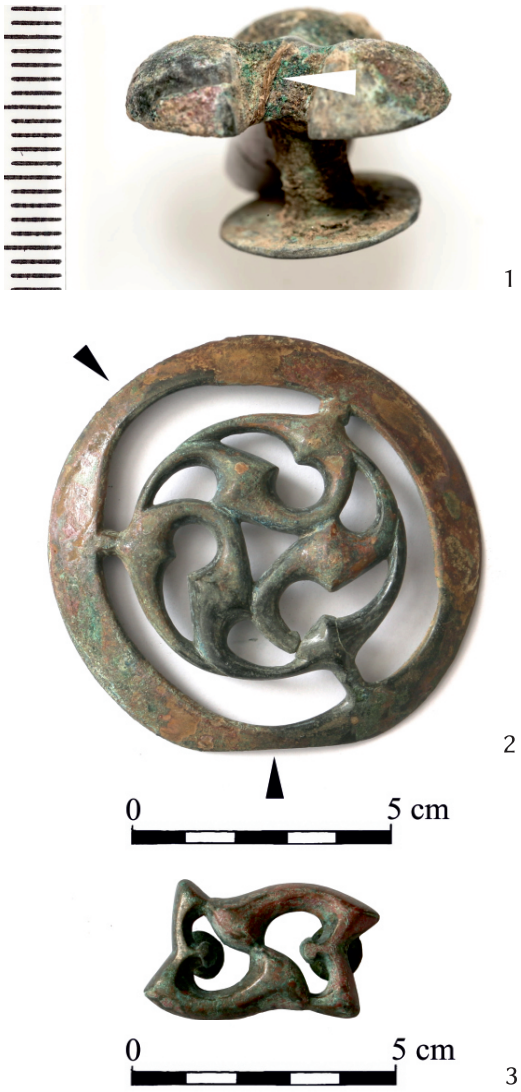
Fig. 4. Nagykanizsa, Inkey funerary chapel, horse grave. The position of the four openwork strap divider discs (after Eke – Horváth 2010).

10 Eke – Horváth 2010, 168, no. 5.1–53, Figs 12, 33–35.

11 E.g., L. Sellye 1940, 237–240, Pls 30–33.

12 Nagykanizsa-Roman cemetery I, Grave 42 (horse burial): Eke – Horváth 2010, 166–168, Figs 11–12.

13 Róbert Herbály's excavation in 2016, unpublished.



the horse's belly; however, it must have been in a secondary position there, shifted and stuck under the strap divider disc on the left side of the chest (Fig. 2.3). The decorative fittings of the horse gear from the Belvárdgyula horse burial enrich the corpus of openwork fittings from horse-harness sets from the Pannonian provinces: comparable sets, both complete and incomplete, have been recovered mostly from horse burials from the Antonine period.[14] Unlike some richly furnished horse burials, the Belvárdgyula grave did not contain any other grave good (such as weapons, bronze vessels used for hand or leg washing, *instrumenta balnei* such as oil flasks, *strigil*s, or foldable iron chairs).[15]

The wagon burial

The carriage and the two draught horses (Horses 1 and 2) were deposited in a large, relatively deep and roughly trapezoidal grave pit (Fig. 6). The south-eastern corner of the pit forms an acute angle, while the other corners are slightly rounded. The straight bottom of the vertical-walled pit dug into the hillside followed the slope of the surface, slightly decreasing southwards; it was oriented north-south with a five-degree deviation. As in the horse burial, the south-western part of its fill was disturbed by deep plough furrows running north-west to south-east, which displaced the teeth and skull fragments of Horse 2.

Fig. 5. Belvárdgyula, horse grave. 1– Remnants of piece or bundle of yarns threaded through a trilobate-headed shank button (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 2 – two worn and thinned parts of the outer ring of one of the openwork strap divider discs where the straps were looped through (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 3 – one of the two openwork mounts of the haunch straps (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai).

14 Openwork harness sets have been brought to light from the following horse burials: Brigetio-Gerhát cemetery, Horse Burials 1 and 2 (Barkóczi 1948, 169–176, Pls 29–33, cp. also Palágyi 1989, 130–131); Győr-Újlak utca STR-100 (Róbert Herbály's excavation, 2016, unpublished); Mözs-Kakasdomb (Gaál 1979, 34–36, 61–71); Nagykanizsa-Roman cemetery I, Grave 42 (Eke – Horváth 2010, 166–168); Seregélyes-Pálinkaház (Fitz 1959, 205; Fitz 1962, 101; Bánki 1972, 80–81, Cat. no. 60); Tihany (Palágyi 1990); Velence (Marosi 1937, 26; L. Sellye 1940, 237–238, Pl. 30). Aside from these horse burials, harness sets containing openwork strap divider discs were also found in the wagon graves discovered at Szomor-Somodorpuszta (Gaul 1889; Hampel 1892, 55) and Sárbogárd-Sárszentmiklós (Gaul 1890, 115, Pl. 5.6; Hampel 1892, 57; L. Sellye 1940, 238) as well as in an unprovenanced harness set from a wagon grave from Transdanubia, perhaps Dunaújváros, whose find material reached the Hungarian National Museum in a strongly incomplete condition (Hampel 1892, 61; L. Sellye 1940, 239). Horse Burial 2 uncovered at Vajta-Kisvajta-dűlő, possibly also associated with a wagon grave, yielded a harness set containing two openwork, mask-decorated strap divider discs (Fülep 1949, 42, Pl. 28.7; Bánki 1972, 82, Cat. no. 61). For the Környe, Grave 3 (horse burial) and its fragmentary openwork disc, see: Bónis 1982, 148 Cat. no. 10, Fig. 19.2 and 20.2.

15 Mráv 2006; Mráv 2009; Mráv 2013; Mráv 2024a.



Fig. 6. Belvárdgyula. Wagon burial with the horse team and part of a four-wheeled carriage after excavation (orthophoto by Zs. Győrffy-Villám).

During the funeral, the seat was removed from the wagon box and deposited first, after which the bodies of the two horses were dragged into the pit and arranged: Horse 1, yoked, was placed in the centre, while Horse 2, unyoked, was tucked in the south-western quarter. The head of Horse 1 rested partially within the seat, against the inner side of its backrest, indicating that the horse carcass had been placed in the grave after the seat. The front axle was subsequently aligned with the end of the draught pole and deposited upside down at the northern end of the pit, whereas the rear axle and rear bolster—probably together with the floor of the carriage box—were tipped into the southern end of the pit, into the empty space in front of the seat. The construction consisting of the rear axle, the rear bolster, and the carriage box was squeezed into a diagonal position due to the limited available space. As a result, the rear part of the carriage body and the iron components of the rear axle were positioned so high that most of them had already been removed by ploughing, and only some elements survived in situ (see below). Two bronze ornamental nails decorated with satyr masks, recovered during the metal-detector survey preceding the excavation, also originated from the rear part of the carriage body.

The functional structural elements, such as the front and rear axles and the seat, were deposited separately and at some distance from one another. In addition, many components of the carriage were absent from the grave, suggesting that the vehicle had been dismantled into its structural elements before burial and interred with numerous parts missing, without particular attention being paid either to the careful arrangement of the components or to the efficient use of the available space.

The draught horses

The body of Horse 1 was dragged to roughly the centre of the grave pit and laid on its belly, tilted onto its left side (Fig. 7.1). Its spine is slightly curved. Its posture is slumped, with its left hind leg and foreleg pulled beneath it. Its right hind leg was bent beside its body, while its right foreleg was extended forwards. Its cervical spine followed an S-shaped curve. Its head, tipped onto the backrest of the seat, rested on the chin. Horse 1 was deposited together with the yoke attached to the pole. The horse was yoked, as indicated by the U-shaped iron element of the yoke, attached to the wooden pads by iron hooks and found *in situ* under the cervical vertebrae, and by the yoke collar, which had slipped over the top of the head in front of the forehead. Based on the position of the horse, it occupied in the team the left side in the direction of travel. A jointed iron bit with a pair of rein rings lay in its mouth. The cheekpieces and the browband of the bridle had been connected to each other by a simple iron ring on both sides, which had slid in front of the horse's eye sockets.

Horse 2 lay in the south-western quarter of the grave pit, tilted onto its right side, with the withers against the pit's wall (Fig. 7.2). Its front legs were bent, and the left front leg was slightly turned out. Owing to its high-held head and the erosion affecting the hill slope, its skull extended into the upper plough zone and was destroyed. Only a few horse teeth pulled out by the ploughshare were collected from the furrows. The possibility that the half iron bit found near the grave during the metal detector survey was the bit of this horse cannot be completely ruled out. Since it had a ring of larger diameter than the bit of Horse 1, this can hardly be verified with absolute certainty. Its left hind leg extended above the yoke, which shows that Horse 2, of the two draught horses, entered the pit later.

The yoke

One major result of the investigation of the Belvárdgyula wagon burial was the excavation of the double yoke (Fig. 7.3–4), which had quite certainly been attached to the pole when deposited in the grave. Based on the position of the metal parts of the yoke by the skull of Horse 1 (see below) and the presence of U-shaped iron bows of the yoke construction *(Unterhalsbügel)*, the Belvárdgyula



Fig. 7. 1 – Belvárdgyula. Wagon burial in excavation (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 2 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Skeleton of Horse 1 (yoked) at the centre of the grave pit (photo by Zs. Mráv), 3 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Skeleton of Horse 2 (unyoked) in the south-western quarter (photo by Zs. Mráv), 4 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Horse 1 (yoked) and the yoke fittings (photo by R. Neményi), 5 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Metal parts of the yoke at the skull of Horse 1 (photo by Zs. Mráv), 6 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. One of the rein terrets of the yoke *in situ* (photo by Zs. Mráv).

piece can be classified as a neck yoke. The iron bows found at Belvárdgyula represent the single bow type, which ended in T-shaped hooks with a downturned end (Sigrid Alföldy-Thomas's Type NG1a, including bows with E-shaped ends [*Unterhalsbügel mit E-förmigen Hakenenden*][16]). They were at-

16 Alföldy-Thomas 2008, 334–335.

tached to a pair of ovoid wooden plaques by two iron hoops that were preserved in their original position inside the hooks of the U-shaped bow under the neck of Horse 1.[17] The underside and both edges of the wooden yoke collars were covered with lead sheets that were secured with bronze rivets. The double pair of rein terrets represents the simplest type: round rings with a downward-widening neck and a semicircular strap loop (Fig. 7.5).[18] The rings of the mounts attached to the yoke tip have an identical shape, the only difference being that their base has a projection. The pin connected the yoke to the draught pole, and the finials attached to the two peaked centres of the double yoke had rings suitable for guiding the reins, making it possible to hitch one leader (unicorn hitch) or even two leaders hitched side by side in front of the wheelers (four-horse hitch). The closely spaced decorative dome-headed bronze nails accurately outlined the middle section and the two terminals of the yoke centres, which, on the evidence of these finds, had a peaked centre, while its lateral arms had upturned ends. Similar types of double yokes are depicted in some stone reliefs belonging to funerary monuments,[19] and their miniature versions can be seen on the double (or single) yoke-shaped fibulae, which are known from the Gallic-Germanic provinces (Fig. 8.1–7).[20]

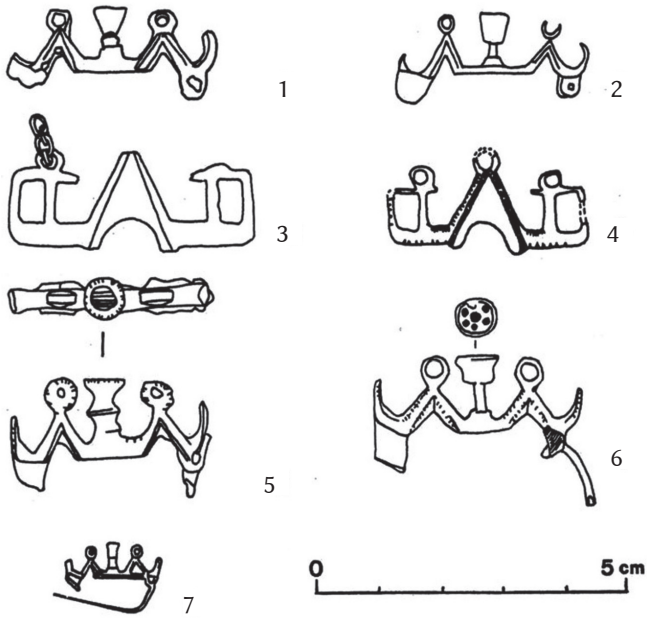


Fig. 8. 1–7 – Brooches in the shape of miniature yokes of western types (after Coulon – Fauduet 1990).



Fig. 9. 1 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Textile remains from under the yoke (photo by K. Pápay and I. Füzi), 2 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Textile remains from under the yoke (photo by K. Pápay and I. Füzi),

17 For the structure of yokes of similar types, see Raepsaet 1995; Raepsaet 2002, 237–247; Alföldy-Thomas 2008, 331–344; Simon 2009, 94–95, 102–103; Raepsaet 2016; Brownrigg – Crouwel 2017, 199–205.

18 For very similar terrets, see for instance Palágyi 2003, 28–29 (from Enying).

19 Raepsaet 1982; Raepsaet 1995; Raepsaet 2002, 237–247; Brownrigg – Crouwel 2017, 199–205.

20 Coulon – Fauduet 1990, Fig. 65. For the yoke finds and reconstructions from the Pannonian provinces, see comprehensively Palágyi 2000.

Textile remains were preserved on the yoke of the draught horses (Fig. 9.1–2). The fabrics most likely belonged to the cushioning placed between the neck of the horses and the lead cover of the yoke.

The carriage

The two axles and the presence of other components of specifically four-wheeled vehicles are a clear indication that a four-wheeled carriage had been deposited in the Belvárdgyula grave. The front axle was laid in the northern end of the grave pit, parallel to its northern wall. This is why the clouts wedged into the bottom of the wooden axle arms were found on top. At the base of the axle arms, on their upper surface, a shorter iron clout was also recessed where the inner nave rings of the wheels rotated. The two ends of the axle were covered with iron axle caps. The distance between the outer ends of the axle caps determined the total length of the axle, which here is 216 cm. Two iron nails with almond-shaped heads found with their heads downward were also part of the traction arm construction. These distinctive nails secured the connecting rod perpendicular to the two traction arms, which ensured the correct distance between the traction arms and kept them parallel.[21]

One remarkable aspect of the Belvárdgyula carriage is that the remains of the decayed pole could be identified as a darker soil stain that preserved its form and revealed that it had a forked end (Fig. 10.1–2).[22] An oval draught pole band *(Deichselmanchette)* lay at the forking of the pole, whose function was to hold together three wooden elements: the pole itself and the separately made two pole-ends.[23] This structure, reconstructed in 2005 by Zsolt Mráv,[24] is also supported by Wagon Burial C, excavated in Mikri Doxipara-Zoni (Evros, GR). In this wagon grave the oval iron band was also found *in situ* on the carriage pole at its bifurcation (Fig. 10.3).[25] The pole had quite certainly been dismantled because the draught bolts that ensured that the traction power of the horses was transferred from the pole to the traction arms[26] were not deposited in the grave. Of the iron fittings of the rear axle, only the left side clout and two iron plates secured with cotters above the axle arm survived in their original position. Due to the erosion of the hillside, the iron parts of the rear axle, which lay high in the grave pit, eventually reached the ploughing level, so they had already been ploughed out by the time of excavation and—except for the right rear bottom clout[27] found during the metal-detector survey—were certainly lost. The plates were protective devices, but they lacked collars that would have prevented mud whipped up by the wheels from lodging between the wheel hubs and the axle. The rear axle and the rear bolster were shoved into the grave pit upside down, as indicated by the fact that the bronze ornamental mount adorning the left arm of the Y-perch lay with its ornamented side facing downwards (Fig. 11.1). The rimmed bronze mount was secured to the rear left end of the Y-perch with three baluster-shaped rivets. Of these two bronze mounts with figural decoration, only the one on the left survived; the one on the right had either fallen off and been lost already in the Roman period or was found and removed from the site after it had been ploughed out. The most profusely ornamented part of Roman four-wheeled vehicles was the rear side of the rear bolster,[28] which also holds true for the Belvárdgyula carriage. A shorter iron strap ending in a horizontal S-shaped loop or hook was nailed to both ends of the upper edges of the

21 Mráv 2005, 40.

22 Mráv 2005, 28–31.

23 Mráv 2005, 21–35.

24 Mráv 2005.

25 Τριαντάφυλλος – Τερζοπούλου 2005, 1–9; Triandaphyllos 2010, 36–37; Trantalidou 2010, 65–66.

26 Mráv 2005, 37–40.

27 Clout is an iron strip deepened into the bottom of the tapered wooden axle arm to reduce its wearing.

28 Mráv 2014b, 134; Mráv 2016, 506, 518.

rear bolster. Iron parts very similar to this, ending in a loop, were used on the rear bolster of the Kozármisleny carriage.[29]

Regarding the carriage box, only this much seems certain: it was not suspended but fixed, since there was nothing to indicate the use of iron stake braces or iron-clad wooden bolster stakes from whose hooked ends the carriage box would have been suspended (strap/cord halters; *Gurthalter auf Kipfen*). The suspension rings of the carriage box were also absent. It also seems likely that the carriage box was thrown upside down into the grave pit together with the rear axle and the bolster, attached to the latter. The box was constructed from a row of wooden planks held together by perpendicular wooden rods. The bronze ornamental nails or appliqués with satyr heads were riveted to the two long sides of the floor plate. The distance between the two opposite decorative nails preserved in their original positions gave the width of the floor plate of the carriage box, which was 75 cm.

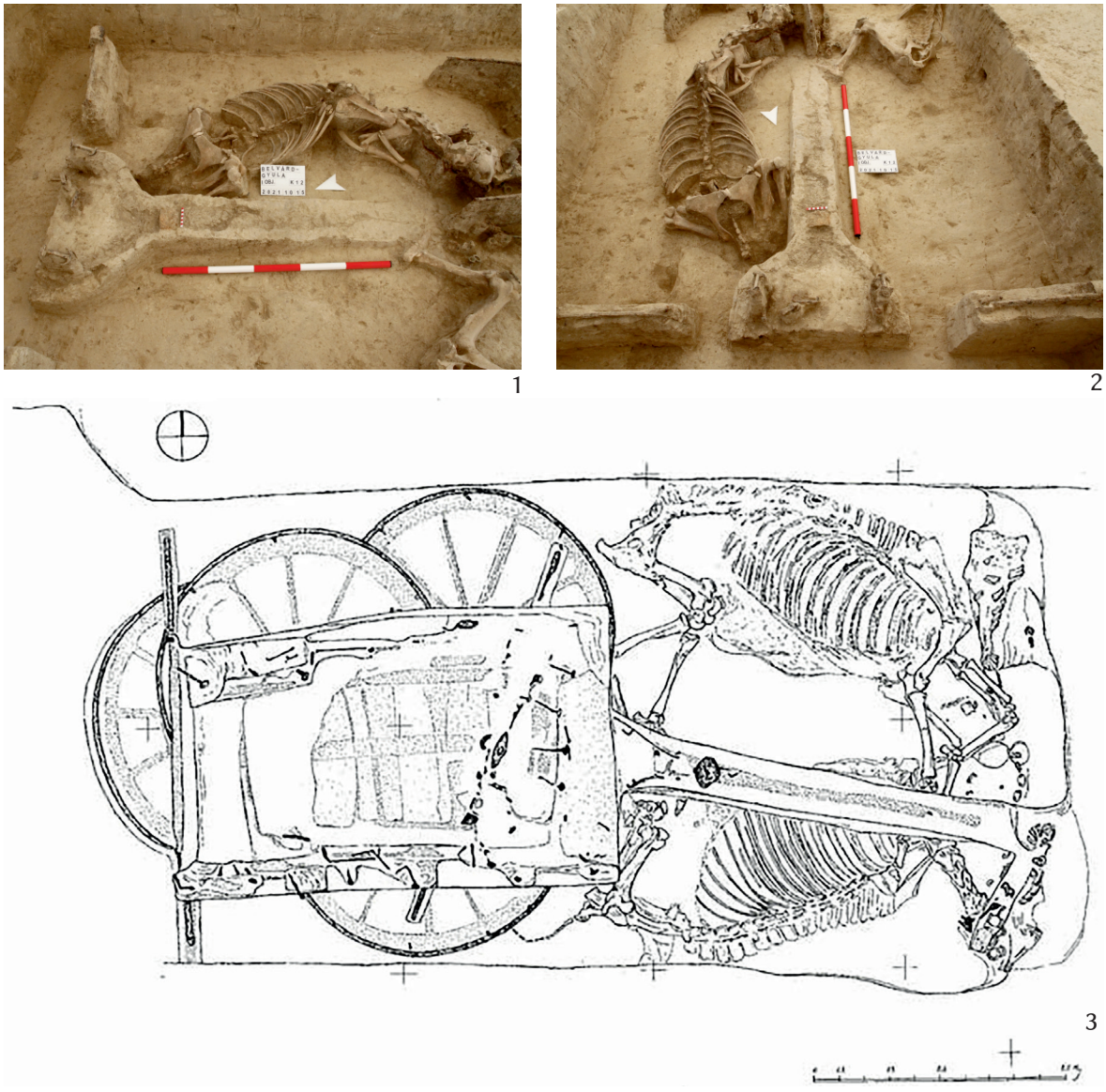


Fig. 10. 1 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. The draught pole with a forked end and the iron draught pole band (photo by R. Neményi), 2 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. The *in situ* draught pole and fore axle (photo by R. Neményi), 3 – Mikri Doxipara-Zoni (Evros, GR), Wagon Grave C. *In situ* position of the oval draught pole band and the darker soil stains of the draught pole (after Trantalidou 2010).

29 Kiss 1989, 20, Nr. 20.

The carriage seat had been removed and laid separately on the grave floor. Its form, type, and dimensions could be reconstructed from the five vertical iron bars of the armrests and backrest of the seat. Two had been attached to the front of the armrests, two to the rear corners, and one to the middle of the backrest (Fig. 11.2). The iron bars, curved at the bottom and leaning slightly outwards at the top, were attached to the seat board with two nails. Iron corrosion on the surface of the bars preserved the imprints of wickerwork, an indication that the seat rests had been of the wickerwork type (Fig. 11.3). These imprints provide the first archaeological evidence for the use of wickerwork seats on Roman-period carriages that have hitherto only been known from various depictions.[30]



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Fig. 11. 1 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. *In situ* bronze mount with a lion figure, upside-down, covering the terminals of the Y-perches (photo by B. Simon), 2 – Belvárdgyula. *In situ* iron bars of the wickerwork seat (photo by M. Szabó), 3 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. A bar of the carriage's seat with traces of wickerwork (photo by Zs. Mráv).

As noted above, only certain structural elements of the carriage had been deposited in the grave pit: the front and rear axles of the undercarriage, the latter together with the bolster, the floor plate, and the seat of the carriage box. Absent from among the structural components were the iron supports of the front bolster, the pivoted front axle, and the reach pole,[31] meaning that they had not been placed in the grave. The lack of the massive king bolt and the draught bolt is not surprising because these were generally also missing in the case of graves containing carriages that had been previously disassembled.[32]

30 Zsolt Visy reconstructed the Kozármisleny carriage as having a wickerwork seat woven around a metal frame (Visy 2013, 111, Fig. 18). Zsolt Mráv proposed a similar reconstruction for the four-wheeled carriage from Graves 1 and 2 in Környe (Mráv 2016, 510, Fig. 13.4).

31 The reach pole is a straight pole connecting the fore-carriage with the hind-carriage, transferring traction power from the front axle to the rear axle.

32 Mráv 2016, 514.

By contrast, it is quite unusual that none of the four wheels had been placed in the grave, even though there was ample space for them.[33]

In this respect, the grave uncovered at Belvárdgyula is the single Pannonian wagon grave to contain no wheels at all. This is even more odd because wheels are what made a vehicle a functional means of travelling. An animal-drawn carriage is useless without wheels. It remains a matter of speculation whether there was a practical rationale for leaving out the four wheels, namely that wheels were expensive components that could be re-used and the descendants and/or heirs therefore decided to retain them instead of depositing them in the grave. Alternately, it is possible that the grave reflects yet another, rather extreme example of the *pars pro toto* practice in Pannonia, in which preserving the functionality of the deposited carriage, or at least its most important outward traits, was not a consideration. The two rationales may well have operated simultaneously. From this point of view, a wagon burial excavated in the cemetery of the *canabae* of the Aquincum legionary fortress under 96b Bécsi Road (District 3 of Budapest) represents an interesting analogy. The carriage placed into the grave pit was dismantled into parts; iron parts and stripped-off decorative bronze elements were thrown onto the bottom of the pit without any order (Fig. 12.1).[34] Although parts of the wheel hubs were buried here, the iron tyres were not, which indicates that the wheels were also broken, destroyed, and only some parts were deposited in the grave pit.



1 2

Fig. 12. 1 – Bécsi street 96b (District 3 of Budapest). Wagon grave from the cemetery of the *canabae* of the Aquincum legionary fortress, with the skeletons of the two draught horses and the remains of the destroyed carriage (photo by Zs. Mráv), 2 – Intercisa (Dunaújváros). Depiction of a family travelling on carriage, with a saddle horse accompanying them. The carriage drawn by a horse team, buried at Belvárdgyula, was a similar vehicle (Hungarian National Museum, photo by O. Harl).

Owing to the lack of certain components, the Roman-period carriage from Belvárdgyula can only be partially reconstructed. Nevertheless, if one wishes to envisage its former appearance, one shall imagine an elegant light carriage with a wide wheel track, small dimensions, and fixed bodywork lacking sideboards, with a wickerwork seat accommodating two persons (Fig. 12.2).[35]

Decorative programme of the carriage

The Belvárdgyula carriage has provided additional evidence for one of the recurrent traits of Pannonian carriages, namely that if the carriage was enhanced with bronze figural decoration, this

33 It could be excluded that the wheels were deposited in a separate pit nearby: neither the geophysical survey nor the deep-search metal detector survey detected any anomaly in the vicinity of the wagon grave indicating that.

34 Mráv 2009, 84.

35 For representations of wagons of a similar construction from Pannonia, see Visy 1997.



Fig. 13. The satyr mask adorning an edge of the box of the Belvárdgyula carriage (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai)

was invariably drawn from Bacchic mythology. The visual programme of the Belvárdgyula carriage also reflects a consistent Bacchic mythological theme. The decorative nails or appliqués attached to both longitudinal sides of the bodywork's floor plate depicted masks of satyr boys (Fig. 13). The three surviving satyr masks, all very similarly modelled most probably made by the same craftsman, are characterised by a round, almost chubby face, a broad nose at the nostrils, and tall, pointed and hairy animal ears. Their brow is furrowed with massive frowning folds over each eye. There are frown lines between their eyebrows. Their hairline runs in a slightly wavy line across the top of the forehead, with locks of hair standing straight up or slightly waved above it, and one longer lock in the centre. The use of decorative appliqués depicting masks is not unprecedented in the decorative art of Roman carriages. The sides of the bodywork's floor plate of carriage No. 3, unearthed at Znepole (near the town of Tran, Sofia District, Bulgaria) in 1997, were also decorated with bronze appliqués attached to an iron band covered by a bronze sheet. These appliqués represented theatrical masks recalling gods (perhaps Dionysos and Attis) and goddesses (Demeter and Aphrodite).[36] The rear side of the rear bolster was adorned with a single bronze decorative bust and three discs bearing masks. All four figurative bronze representations evoked figures of the Bacchic mythological world. The bust occupied the visual focal point of the composition. A disc with a mask was placed both to the right and to the left of the bust, while a third was nailed beneath the bust (Fig. 14.1). Leather remains were preserved on the reverse of the discs. There appears to have been a predilection for decorative schemes based on three bronze discs in the adornment of the rear side of Roman-period carriages, although these were usually arranged in a row on the seat's back frame.[37] In contrast, compositions made up of six or even more bronze discs dominated the decoration of the rear bolster: six cast bronze discs—two larger and four smaller ones in symmetrical arrangements—were nailed to the carriage in Grave 162 in the Budaörs cemetery (Fig. 14.2–3),[38] and six or seven cast discs decorated with Bacchic busts adorned the Kozármisleny carriage (Fig. 14.4–5).[39] In Thrace, the rear bolster of Carriage B found at Mikri Doxipara-Zoni in Thrace (Evros, Greece) was decorated with five simple bronze discs; three smaller ones were attached to the upper part of the bolster and two larger ones to the lower part, below the smaller discs (Fig. 14.6).[40] Another carriage discovered in the same region at Vinarovo (Chirpan, Bulgaria) was equipped with at least five bronze discs with Bacchic busts, the exact position of which remains unknown in the lack of any archaeological observation.[41]

All three discs attached to the rear bolster of the Belvárdgyula carriage bore somewhat severely and clumsily modelled masks of more elderly satyrs, the *sileni*, or of Silenus himself (Fig. 15.1–2). The Silenus masks were modelled with significantly weaker artistic skill than satyr masks. The difference

36 Vladimirova-Paunova 2002, 34–35; Ignatov 2018, 151–152.

37 Mráv 2009, 85–86.

38 Mráv 2014b, 130-137; Mráv 2016, 506.

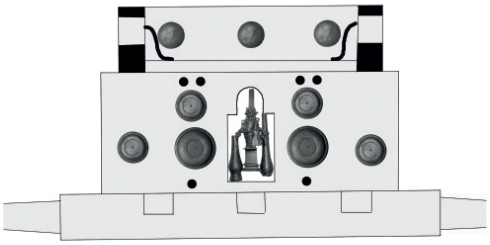
39 Kiss 1989, 25, Figs 34–35.

40 Triandaphyllos 2010, 33, 35, Fig. 15.

41 Ignatov 2018, 85–86, 152, Cat. no. 5.8.5.



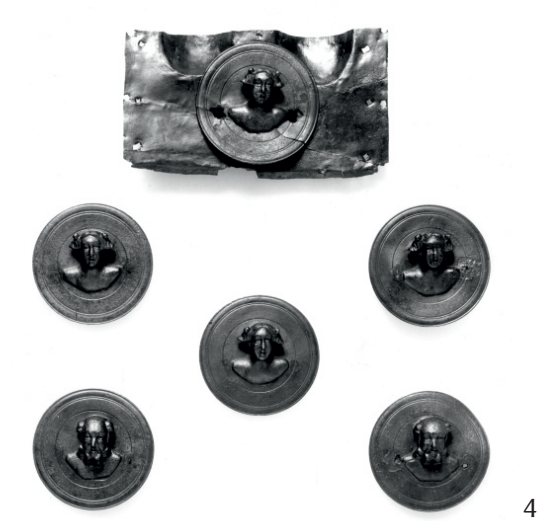
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Fig. 14. 1 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Arrangement of the bronze discs adorning the rear bolster of the carriage (photo by Zs. Mráv), 2 – Budaörs-Kamaraerdei dűlő, Wagon Grave 162 from the cemetery of the Roman-period *vicus*. Cast bronze decorative discs once nailed to the backside of the rear bolster (reconstruction and drawing by Zs. Mráv), 3 – Budaörs-Kamaraerdei dűlő, Wagon Grave 162 from the cemetery of the Roman-period *vicus*. Reconstruction of the carriage, 2003 (reconstruction by Zs. Mráv; model built by L. Gyürki), 4 – Kozármisleny, wagon burial. Six Bacchic decorative busts on discs (after Kiss 1989), 5 – Kozármisleny, wagon burial. Reconstruction of the carriage, back view, 2024 (reconstruction by Zs. Mráv; 3D graphics by Pazirik Studio), 6 – Mikri Doxipara-Zoni (Evros, GR), Wagon Grave B. Decoration of the backside of the carriage *in situ* (after Triantaphyllos 2010).

is so great that one must assume that the satyr and Silenus appliqués were modelled by different craftsmen. The features and characteristics of the Silenus masks are highly schematised. They have stylised beards and hair with strongly articulated curls. Their moustaches are set high and asymmetrically. Silenus, the oldest satyr, who was also Bacchus's tutor, is often portrayed as a demonic or ridiculous deity when seized by drunkenness or, more rarely, as a wise god knowledgeable about the truths of existence.[42] Although Silenus generally appears as a bald old man in Roman Imperial period art, his 'younger version' with luxuriant hair is occasionally also depicted.[43]

A Silenos(?) mask with a physiognomy very similar to that of the Belvárdgyula examples was applied to the *discus* of a terracotta lamp from Tác (Fejér County, Hungary)[44] (Fig. 15.3). The degree of similarity is so great that it could have directly inspired the master who modelled the Silenos masks from Belvárdgyula.



Fig. 15. 1 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Silenus mask on a disc that adorned the rear bolster of the Belvárdgyula carriage (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 2 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Another Silenus mask on a disc (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 3 – Gorsium (Tác). Terracotta oil lamp decorated with a mask on its *discus* (Saint Stephen Museum, Székesfehérvár).

The central decorative bust of the composition was found in a strongly fragmentary and incomplete condition. Only its two fixing iron nails remained, the ends of which were bent down on the front side of the rear bolster. On the other end of each of the two iron nails a small broken bronze statuary detail was preserved. One preserves a smooth fragment of the chest, while the other depicts the left shoulder of the bust and above it the knot of the *nebris* with a deer's foot. The larger part of the bust between the two nails may have been broken off and taken away in Roman times, certainly before the burial of the carriage. The bronze of the bust was cast onto the iron nails; consequently, when an attempt was made to pry it off, it broke. Neither the circumstances nor the exact reason for this destructive intervention can be determined. Based on its central position, the decorative bust wearing *nebris* most probably represented Bacchus himself.

A recumbent lion figure with its head held high, holding a bull's head between its front paws, was secured to the rear, outward-curving end of the left arm of the Y-perch (Fig. 16.1–2). The densely incised lines on the neck imitating a mane are the only indication that the rather clumsily modelled

42 Barr-Sharrar 1987, 84–91.

43 Regarding the Silenus appliqué of the Belvárdgyula carriage, it is perhaps not mere chance that in the early Imperial period, similar portrayals of Silenus with a luxuriant hair are principally attested on the handles of bronze vessels and the handles of marble *krater*s and basins (Grassinger 1991, 40–42, 324–325). It seems quite possible that the Silenus masks found at Belvárdgyula had been modelled after the handle attachment of a bronze vessel.

44 Fitz n. y., 4.

large felid was intended to depict a lion. The lion tamed by Bacchus often took part in the ceremonial processions *(thiasos)* and the god himself often took the form of a ferocious lion when facing his enemies.[45] Dionysus was once captured by pirates, whereupon he turned into a lion to rid himself of them. His captors were so frightened that they threw themselves into the sea. Behind the image of the lion of the Belvárdgyula carriage, one may also recognise Bacchus, who, transforming into a terrible beast, forces the robbers to flee in panic, just like the pirates. These mythological meanings and hidden messages could have been the reason why lions were included in the carriage's Bacchic imagery. However, it must also be borne in mind that the image of lions with a bull's head or the head of another creature under or between their paws drew on a long tradition in the art of Antiquity and it can also be traced in other cultures.[46]



Fig. 16. 1 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Figurine of a recumbent lion from the rear terminal of the rear Y-perch (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 2 – Belvárdgyula, wagon burial. Backside of the lion statue (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai).

The deceased associated with the graves

Regrettably, the wagon burial and horse burial uncovered at Belvárdgyula have not brought us closer to solving the greatest enigma relating to Pannonian wagon burials, namely the lack of a human burial associated with these graves.[47] No burial was found in the immediate proximity of the Belvárdgyula grave pits that could be clearly associated with the wagon grave. It is possible that the principal burial or perhaps a family graveyard lay somewhat farther from the wagon grave. In this case, this could likely be the pit (Fig. 17.1) uncovered some 20 m from the wagon burial; in addition to an antler burr and a pork trotter, this feature yielded a bronze pan (Fig. 17.2), an *ascia* (axe or hoe) (Fig. 17.3.a–b), and an iron knife. The presence of an *ascia* among the grave goods of this burial deserves special attention, as it may have had an additional sepulchral/symbolic meaning. This iron tool, primarily used for woodworking *(ascia lignaria)* and perhaps for stone carving *(ascia lapidaria)*,[48] was often depicted on tombstones as a symbol.[49] In Lugdunum

45 Horn 1972, 107–108.

46 The paws of the two lions often crowning the funerary monuments of the Middle Danubian provinces often rest on the heads of various prey animals (Scholz 2012, 315–320). Some of the lion statues recovered from sanctuaries of Mithras hold a bull's head (e.g., those in the Fertőrákos *Mithraeum* and *Mithraeums* I and III of Carnuntum in Pannonia), symbolising the triumph of divine power over evil, the latter represented by the bull. In a Mithraic context, the lion was a symbol of the Sun (Mastrocinque 2017, 60–61). The lion and the bull's head appear on four coins minted under Gallienus. The scene itself perhaps refers to Odaenathus's victory over the Persians (Manders 2012, 297–298).

47 For a discussion, see Mráv 2016, 520.

48 Gaitzsch 1980, 38–42; Duvauchelle 2005, 43–45; Rupnik 2014, 65–72.

49 In Pannonian provinces: Rupnik 2014, 64–65.

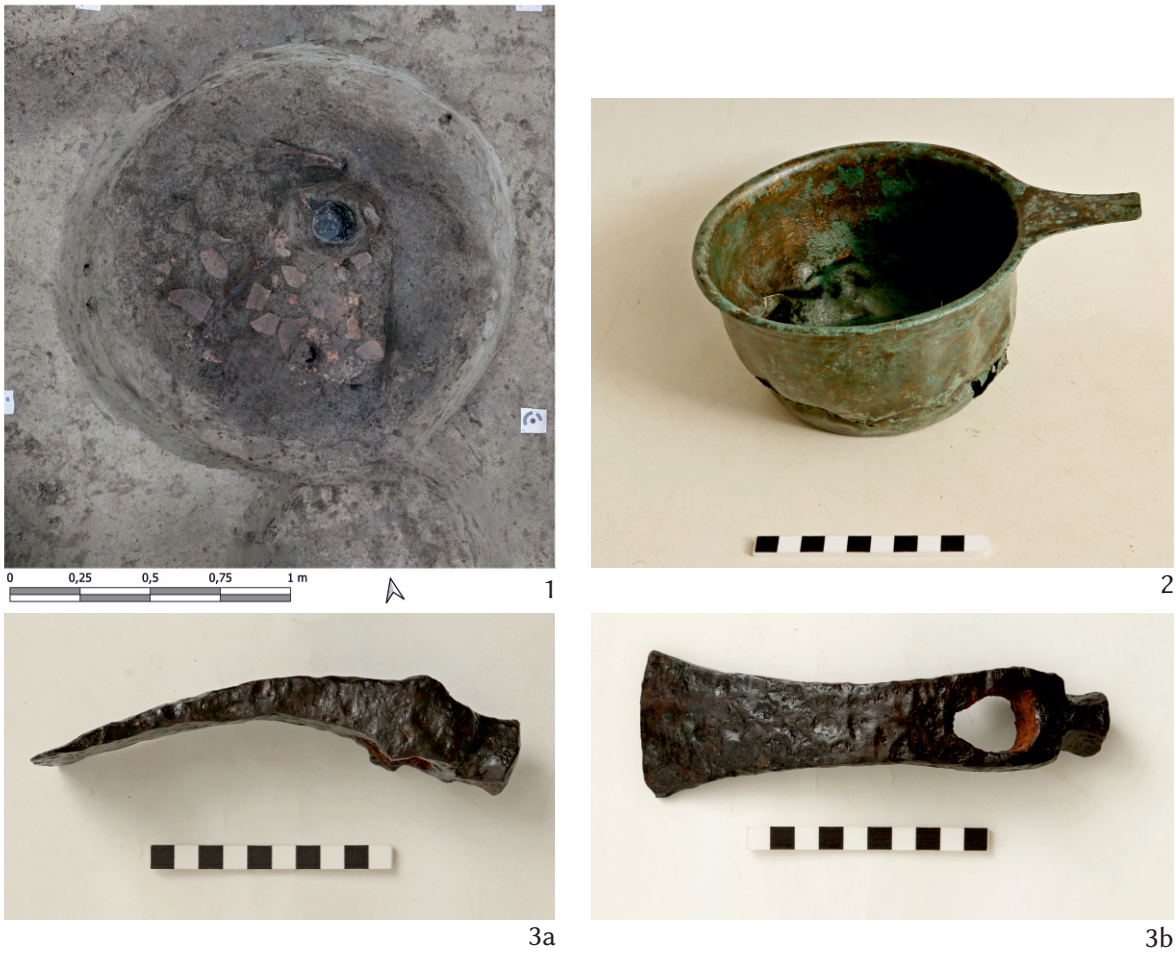


Fig. 17. 1 – Belvárdgyula, Feature 3. Cremation grave with a bronze vessel and iron implements (orthophoto by Zs. Győrffy-Villám), 2 – Belvárdgyula, Feature 3. Bronze pan from the cremation grave (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai), 3.a–b – Belvárdgyula, Feature 3. *Ascia* from the cremation grave (Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; photo by M. Helesfai).

(Lyon, F) and its surroundings, the phrase *sub ascia dedicavit* appears particularly frequently in funerary epitaphs, although its interpretation is still problematic.[50] The *ascia* was also used as a grave good. We know one example of this practice from Augst (Switzerland),[51] and a cremation grave in Cemetery II of the civil town of Brigetio in Pannonia Superior (Komárom-Szőny, H); the latter find today is part of the Kállay collection.[52] The possibility that the deposition of the carriages and the horse was part of a mortuary rite that was not always performed after the death of their owner as part of the funeral ceremony cannot be excluded either. If an actual human burial was connected with the wagon and the horse burial, then the deceased—as in the case of other wagon graves[53]—could only be a man or perhaps a young boy. The harnessed saddle horse is considered a gender-specific grave good due to men.

50 For the meaning and interpretation of the phrase *sub ascia dedicavit* in funerary epitaphs, see De Visscher 1963, 285; Audin 1986, 23–31; Mattson 1990; Carroll 2006, 81.

51 Duvauchelle 2005, 44–45, Fig. 27, Pl. 17.92.

52 Rupnik 2014, 70.

53 Mráv 2009, 84.

The broader area and the local context of the wagon grave

Following the rescue excavation, a magnetometer survey was conducted in the broader area of the wagon grave.[54] To date, an one-hectare area was surveyed north and west of the wagon grave, and almost thirty archaeological features were identified. While some of these features could perhaps be interpreted as graves, the anomalies were not strong enough to suggest another undisturbed wagon grave with iron components.

The location of the settlement that can be associated with the burial ground is also known: a Roman-period site, a village or perhaps a villa, lies north-east of the graves.

The regional context of the Belvárdgyula wagon burial and the local elite in southern Transdanubia

Southern Transdanubia does not abound with lavishly furnished burials or wagon graves from the Roman Imperial period that can be associated with the local elite. The first wagon grave came to light in 1969 at Kozármisleny, east of Pécs,[55] and remained the only example of this remarkable funerary rite in Baranya County until recently. Only the grave pit into which the four-wheeled carriage and its horse team were deposited is known from the Kozármisleny burial (Fig. 18.1). The Kozármisleny carriage is one of the most outstanding vehicles known from Pannonia Inferior, owing partly to the magnificent Bacchic imagery of its figural ornamentation and partly to the superb artistic quality of its sculpted decoration.

Several decades elapsed before the discovery of the next wagon burial in Baranya County in 2020, when archaeologists from the Janus Pannonius Museum of Pécs uncovered on the outskirts of Ellend a grave containing a two-wheeled cart, two draught horses, a saddle horse, and two hunting dogs (Fig. 18.2).[56] Similarly to the carriage from Sárbogárd-Sárszentmiklós (Fejér County) and the cart from Zsámbék (Pest County),[57] two *beneficarius* insignia mounts had been



1

2

Fig. 18. 1 – Kozármisleny. Wagon grave uncovered in 1969 (photo by A. Kiss), 2 – Ellend, chariot grave discovered and unearthed in 2020 (photo by G. Kovaliczky).

54 We to thank Zsombor Győrffy-Villám and Róbert Lóki for conducting the survey.

55 Kiss 1989.

56 The excavation was conducted by Gergely Kovaliczky.

57 Mráv 2011; Mráv 2012.

applied to the Ellend cart, indicating that in addition to being a member of the local elite, its owner had served as a junior officer in the governor's office of Pannonia Inferior.[58] With the discovery of a new feature at Belvárdgyula, the number of Roman-period wagon burials known from Baranya County rose to three.

In addition to the north-eastern and southern Pannonian group identified previously, a new group wagon burials, comprising the two recently found wagon graves, can now be outlined in south-eastern Transdanubia. The presence of a native local elite in what is eastern Baranya County today is also indicated by a lavishly furnished burial dating from the late 2nd century, found in the area of Bóly in 2020.[59] In addition to a gold finger-ring with an *intaglio* depicting an eagle in its bezel, the cremation burial yielded a toiletry set consisting of bronze vessels forming a hand-washing and bathing set, strigils, and a folding iron chair, all of which had been deformed on the funerary pyre.[60] For the time being, it remains a matter of speculation whether any relevance can be attached to the fact that richly outfitted burials reflecting the presence of a local elite in Baranya County are concentrated in the southern Baranya Hills east and south-east of Pécs (Fig. 19), or whether this merely reflects our current knowledge and the unpredictability of archaeological discoveries.[61]

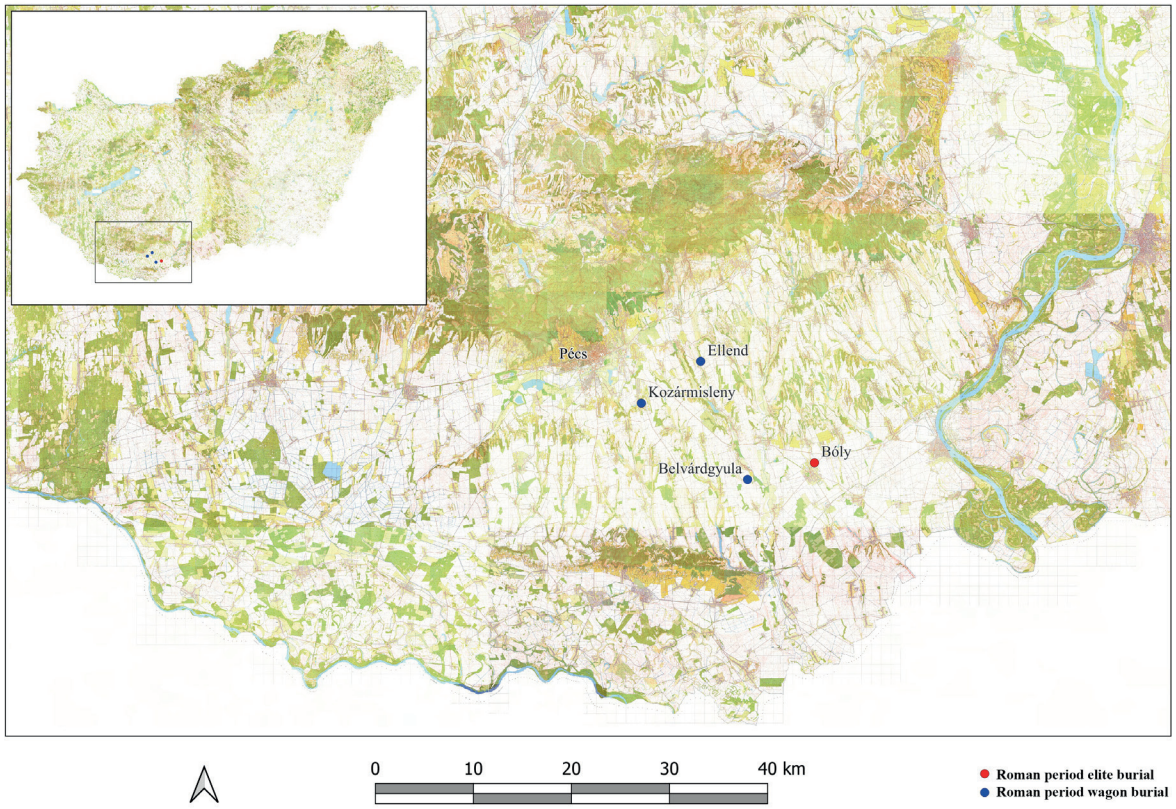


Fig. 19. Burials of the local elite in south-eastern Transdanubia (map by R. Neményi).

58 Mráv 2011, 32–39, 43–46.

59 Kovaliczky 2022, 39–52; Mráv 2024a, 135–137.

60 For a discussion of the role of iron folding chairs in bathing and personal hygiene and their function in the burials of the local elite, see Mráv 2013; Mráv 2014a; Mráv 2024a.

61 The examination of the textile and leather remains with a polarising microscope is currently still in progress; the results will be published later.

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