

# DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

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Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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# The Social Background of Trade and Commerce in Pannonia

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**Abstract:** Review article of PhD thesis submitted in 2021 to the Archaeological Doctoral Programme, Doctoral School of History, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, under the supervision of László Borhy.

The dissertation “The social background of trade and commerce in Pannonia” aims to detect the personal relations and networks that Roman trade in the study area was based on. I attempted to define the function of the related people regarding their role in these networks, social position, and the particular circumstances in the province of Pannonia. By examining commerce-related people one by one, I tried to determine their roles in the everyday life of the province to the largest possible extent.

**Keywords:** Pannonia, trade, family network, libertus, merchant

## Introduction

The most frequent topics in the research of Roman trade and commerce are usually connected to the Mediterranean due to the massive body of data in that area, gleaned from various sources like the merchant *collegia* of Ostia or Pompeii, shipwrecks and their cargo, the use of mints, or the taxation system of Egypt. Compared to those, the epigraphic evidence in Pannonia is scarce—not just in numbers but, being way more schematic, also in information value. Characterising commerce requires more than analysing available inscriptions related to the history of economy. Detecting the social status of each person helps to define their possible roles in commerce; but, as the base of ancient trade was trust,<sup>1</sup> anyone could always expand their role, irrespective of social status. The degree of Romanisation and regional social characteristics may also influence our understanding of the role of merchants, including whether trade-related persons can be regarded as merchants at all. At this point, I have to mention a common problem of some of the previous research.<sup>2</sup> During onomastic research, names have sometimes been collected without any critical consideration, which caused the presence of a name connected to a merchant family to be counted automatically as evidence of commerce, even if the mention referred to a later descendant, for example, a soldier. The appearance of names of Northern Italian origin implies the same methodological issue: in some evaluations, all people with Italian names from 1st-century AD Pannonia were counted automatically as merchants. I tried to avoid this mistake.

1 BROEKEART 2016, especially page 232.

2 DOI: [10.15476/ELTE.2021.190](https://doi.org/10.15476/ELTE.2021.190)

M. I. Finley defined the relation of Roman society to trade based on literary sources.<sup>3</sup> The sources he applied somewhat simplified the question and classified Roman society into two distinct groups: those of a higher social status who earned money from their lands and those belonging to lower social strata, living off high-risk professions like craftsmanship or trade. In contrast, J. D'Arms drew attention to the fact<sup>4</sup> that the members of the *ordo senatorius*, *equester*, and *decurionum* also got involved in trade, but not personally: they used their freedmen and slaves to perform transactions. The roles of the two main social classes still appear as very different in J. D'Arms' work, who saw individuals and groupings of a higher social status primarily in commerce (mostly as capital owners), while those of lower social classes in trade (directly selling and buying goods and services). Based on the works by Finley and D'Arms, W. Broekaert created a new model<sup>5</sup> that was chosen to serve as a base for my research. He stated that the Roman economic system could not be divided into two distinct groups as all social statuses came with distinct legal possibilities. People of lower social status were not only involved in small trade but could also become part of large commercial networks through contracts or by the obligation a *libertus* had towards his former master. One's social position sets a limit to their possibilities because of law and customs, but it was not as strict as we may have been thinking earlier. Co-operations could be based on a *cliens-patronus* or a *libertus*-former master relation, a *societas*, or a *collegium*. In the last two forms, members were either fellows or in a subordinate relation. In describing these relations, I was leaning primarily on the works by K. Verboven,<sup>6</sup> who traced the legal differences between these groups and the obligations of members. The novelty of his and W. Broekaert's works is that they used not only ancient authors but also epigraphic evidence. Their observations provided a suitable starting point for examining the epigraphic sources from Pannonia. Besides, the evaluation required also collecting archaeological and topographical data as the rather schematic inscriptions did not contain enough information for drawing complex conclusions. It was also necessary to consider the spatial and chronological characteristics of the province and re-evaluate the results of the researchers mentioned above, who, due to an abundance of related resources, have usually focused on long-distance and maritime trade.

## The structure of the dissertation and the topics concerned

The dissertation has been divided into eight chapters (including *Introduction* and *Concluding remarks*). The structure of each chapter is different, tailored to the characteristics of the various topics concerned, to present the related results in the most effective way in every case. A chapter can be topographical, onomastic, or arranged by the social status of individuals, depending on the question in focus.<sup>7</sup> The first chapter describes the aims of the dissertation and a brief survey of the related literature. The second chapter contains a summary of social history focusing on the relation of diverse social groups to the economy and their different possibilities in commerce and trade. For example, while their status prohibited members of the senatorial order from taking part in any commercial activity, they definitely found their way to get involved.<sup>8</sup> They never became traders

3 FINLEY 1973.

4 D'ARMS 1981.

5 BROEKAERT 2011; BROEKAERT 2012; BROEKAERT 2016.

6 VERBOVEN 2002; VERBOVEN 2007.

7 Due to an overlap of categories describing the relations and roles of individuals, some persons show up more than once in different chapters of the dissertation. For example, one could simultaneously be a merchant family member and a negotiator.

8 D'ARMS 1981, 32. The basis of their trading activity was agricultural production and farming. SHATZMAN 1975, 101. For the topic, see also GABBA 1980.



or merchants themselves but, using other people, could invest in trade or the production of goods<sup>9</sup> while remaining—at least in the provinces—invisible throughout the process.<sup>10</sup> The *ordo equester* is well-known as a group of upstart businessmen, less than aristocrats but more than the average Roman citizen.<sup>11</sup> But not all of them were businessmen: when they became wealthy enough, they bought land and tried to act like members of the senatorial order.<sup>12</sup> Of course, most *equites* could not reach high political positions, but they had the capital to invest in any type of “*negotia*.”<sup>13</sup> That does not mean that the ones of lower social status could not participate in trade. Moreover, in classical marketing in the provinces, freeborn, freedmen, and slaves played the main role.<sup>14</sup>

**Tab. 1.** Chronological groups are marked by colours. Blue – 1st century CE, pink – turn of 1st and 2nd centuries CE, yellow – from the mid-2nd century CE

	Name	Date (CE)	Origin	Social status	Findspot
Pannonia Superior	Caius Trotedius	1–130	Northern Italy	libertus? ingenuus?	Neviodunum
	Publius Satellius Sodalis	1–100	Northern Italy	cives Romanus	Carnuntum
	Quintus Atilius Primus	51–100	Northern Italy	cives Romanus	Carnuntum
	Titus Canius Cinnamus	1–100	Italy	libertus	Scarbantia
	Publius Domatius Citio	1–70	Northern Italy	cives Romanus	Scarbantia
	Marcus Mulvius	71–136	Iudea	libertus	Carnuntum
	Atta	51–150	indigenous		Savaria
	Iulius Senilis	151–300	Pannonian	ingenuus?	Scarbantia
Pannonia Inferior	Titius Domninus Passer	201–250	Pannonian	ingenuus?	Brigetio
	Aurelius Hermes	151–250	?	libertus? ingenuus?	Intercisa
	Antonius Barbilus	151–300	?	libertus? ingenuus?	Mursa

The third chapter is about *negotiatores*. It has a topography-based structure as merchants (called *negotiators*) were not in direct contact with each other. To outline their network, it was essential to examine these people individually. Only 11 *negotiatores* are known<sup>15</sup> from Pannonia Inferior

9 Research has long debated this question; see D’ARMS 1981, 13–15; ROSTOVZTEFF 1957; FINLEY 1973, 50–51.

10 D’ARMS 1981, 154–155.

11 Based on the assessment of HILL 1952. Pliny also referred to the *equites* as a social group between senators and commoners: *Plin. Nat. Hist.* 33. 7. “*sed anuli plane tertium ordinem mediumque plebei et patribus inseruere, ac quod antea militares equi nomen dederant, hoc nunc pecuniae indices tribuunt.*” 33.8. “*ab illo tempore plane hoc tertium corpus in re publica factus est, coepitque adici senatui populoque Romano et equester ordo.*” However, interpreting these thoughts as Roman society having three distinct clusters (wealthy landowners, upstart businessmen, and the poor) is an oversimplification.

12 SHATZMAN 1975, 100; FINLEY 1973, 49; ROSTOVZTEFF 1957, 153.

13 D’ARMS 1981, 60. Cf. the moral contrast between being a member of the senatorial order and having profit-oriented economic activity.

14 For a concrete example related to this statement, see GRENIER 1959, 479–486 (on the *collegia* in Lugdunum).

15 CIL 03, 14354; AE 1938, 0163; AE 2009, 1051; CIL 03, 04250; CIL 03, 04251; AE 1972, 0420; AE 1962, 0383; CIL 03, 10430; CIL 03, 11045; AE 1910, 0134; ILJug 0289; AE 1978, 0635; AE 1988, 0938.

and Pannonia Superior. The number of inscriptions related to them may seem irrelevant at first, but it proves to be the highest compared to the surrounding provinces.<sup>16</sup> Chronologically, inscriptions about *negotiatores* in Pannonia can be divided into three groups (Tab. 1). The inscriptions in the first group come from the 1st century CE. As that was the beginning of the Roman conquest in the region, the *negotiatores* of this time are known from the earliest Roman settlements of the later Pannonia province.<sup>17</sup> All these merchants had Northern Italian origins,<sup>18</sup> but their dominant role came to an end in the 1st century CE. The second group of inscriptions consists of texts dated to the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. The settlements they occur in are the same as in the previous group, but the origin of the *negotiatores* is different: one was from Judea and the other indigenous. A fundamental change took place from the mid-2nd century CE. Inscriptions from this period are known not only from the territory of Pannonia Superior but also from Pannonia Inferior. The social background of the four *negotiatores* behind these sources is surprisingly homogenous: all of them were freedmen or the descendants of *liberti*. All settlements where inscriptions of *negotiatores* were found (Fig. 1) have one thing in common: a connection with the army. In some cases, troops in service (Carnuntum, Brigetio, Intercisa), while in others, the settled veterans (Scarbantia, Savaria) were the target of merchants. Two questions emerge at this point. First, why don't we

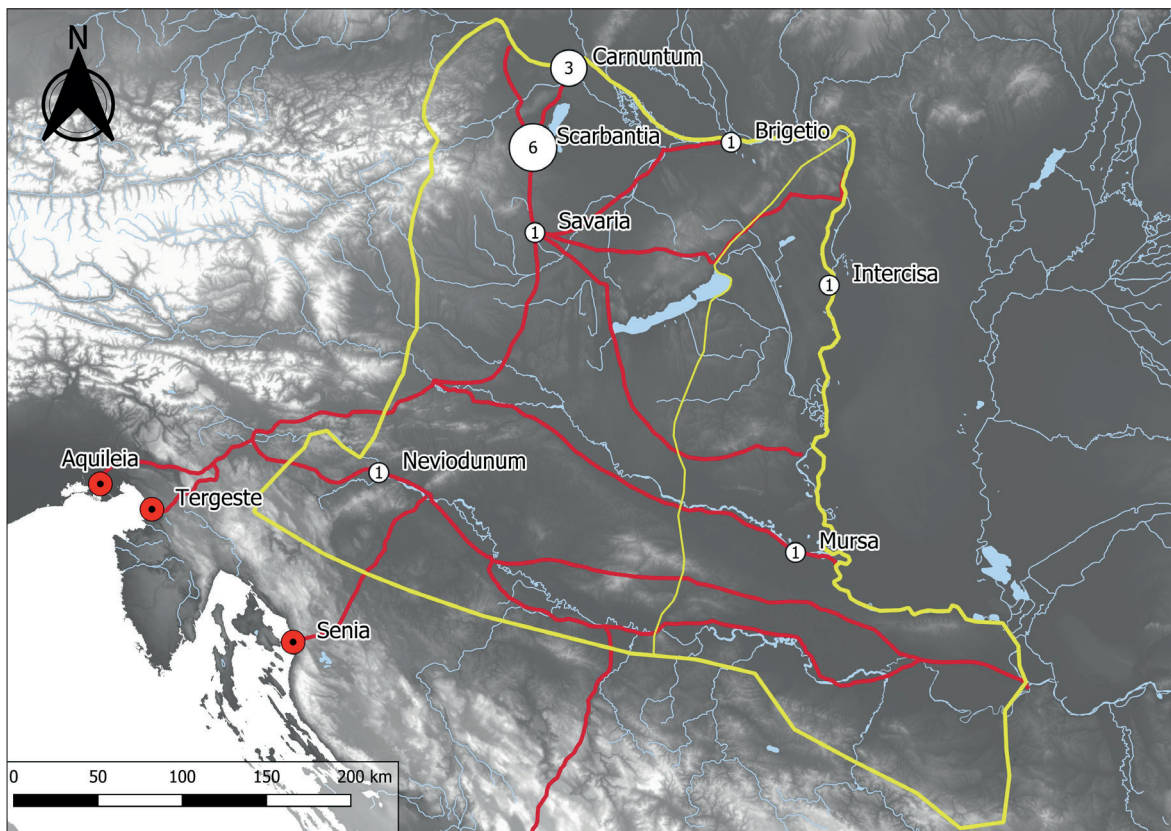


Fig. 1. Number of known *negotiatores* from the settlements (map: Bence Simon)

16 The list in DUMITRACHE 2012 mentions the following finds: Dalmatia – 10 inscriptions, Raetia – 9 inscriptions, Noricum – 4 inscriptions, Dacia – 5 inscriptions, Moesia Inferior – 1 inscription.

17 SZABÓ – BORHY 2015, 97–98.

18 Not just *negotiatores* but most merchants in Pannonia had Italian connections (especially with Aquileia) at the time (MÓCSY 1959, 94). While Aquileian partners or family members of Pannonian negotiators could not be identified, some indirect evidence, like the Mulvius or Canius family names, clearly indicates a connection.



have any inscriptions from two legionary camps, Vindobona and Aquincum? Maybe Vindobona was simply close enough to Carnuntum to cover by the *negotiatores* in the city. Although there is no known inscription of *negotiatores* from Aquincum, the record of the ancient town comprises another kind of related find. Lucius Valerius Italus raised an altar<sup>19</sup> for the flourish of the *collegium negotiantium*, which may suggest the presence of *negotiatores* also in Aquincum, despite a lack of inscriptions about them. The second question relates to Neviodunum, the only non-army-related town to contain an inscription mentioning a *negotiator*. Maybe the vicinity of the border (and the taxes) between Italy and the province were profitable for the merchants. As mentioned before, all negotiators until the mid-2nd century CE were of Italian origin. The origin of later merchants cannot be determined; maybe they were born and raised in Pannonia, so their origin is simply “local.”

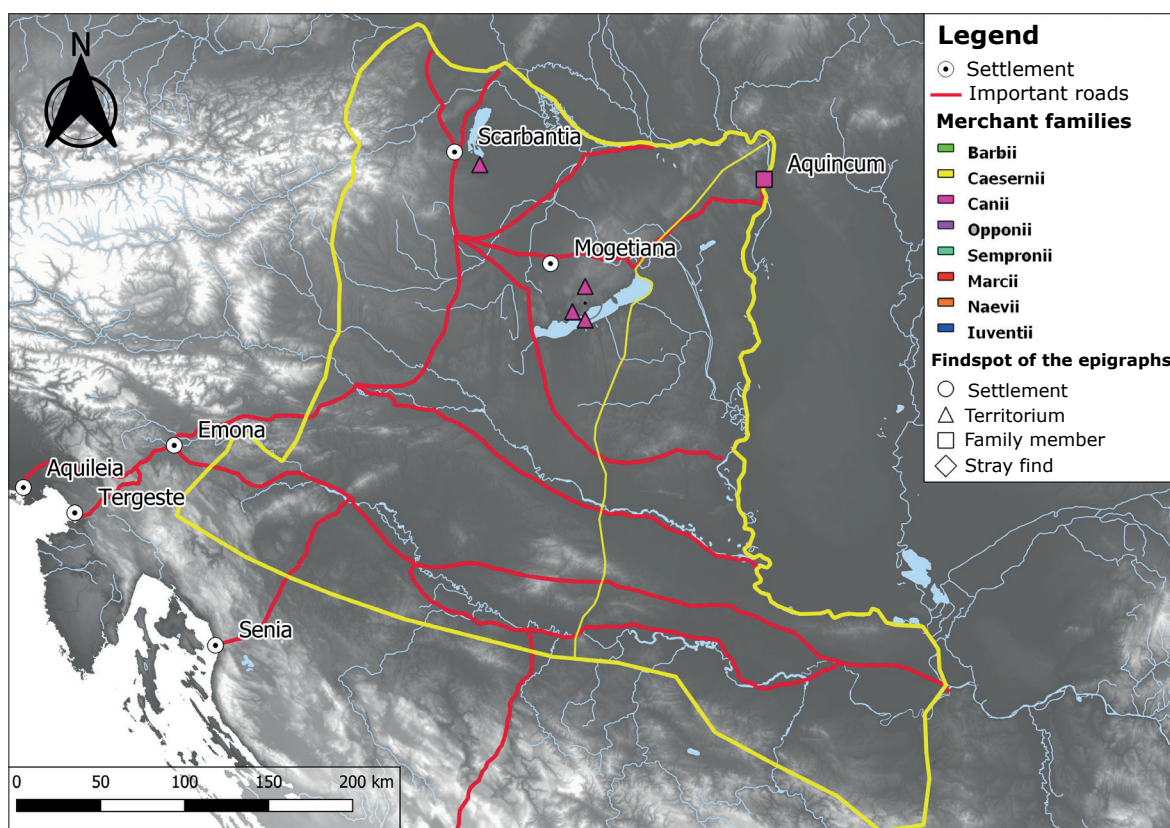


Fig. 2. Inscriptions mentioning members of the Canius family (map: Bence Simon)

Chapter four provides an overview of the merchant families of Northern Italian origin. Usually, one may find in the related literature more people classified into this category than their actual number could have been, as all people with Northern Italian names had been listed among merchants. Therefore, in the dissertation, the persons whose names were the only “evidence” of their involvement in commerce were not interpreted as merchants. The merchant families listed in the dissertation are the Barbii, the Caesernii, the Canii, the Opponii, the Sempronii, the Marcii, the Naevii, and the Iuventii. These families had different strategies for building their networks. There were some disciples shared by every family (like the legal framework or the freedmen’s possibilities), but besides, families had their own ways.<sup>20</sup> Some, like the Canii and the Caesernii, sent their freedmen

19 CIL 03, 10430.

20 It must be kept in mind that the persistence of the inscriptions is random, and differences in the number or distribution of such finds may only reflect different circumstances and possibilities the inscriptions had to survive or the state of archaeological and epigraphic research of an area.

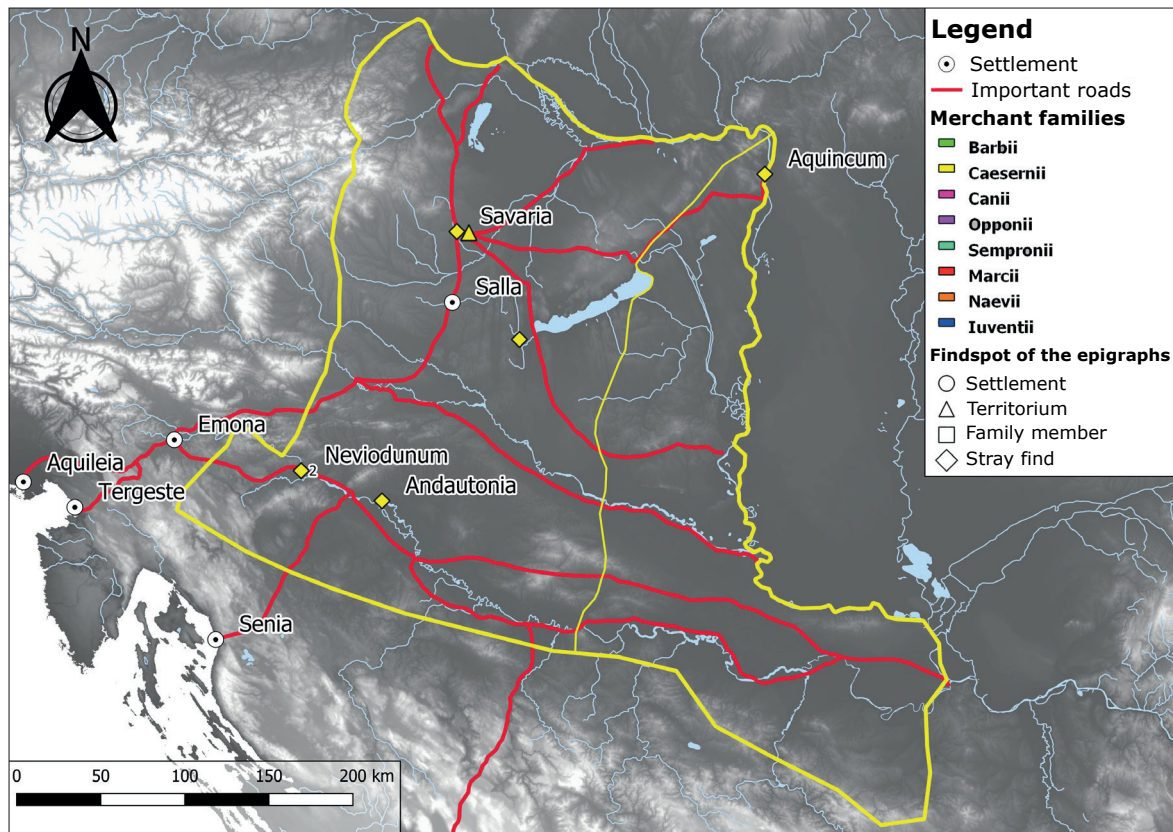


Fig. 3. Inscriptions mentioning members of the Caesernius family (map: Bence Simon)

and agents in two different directions—usually on the Amber Road and along the northern shore of Lake Balaton (Fig. 2; Fig. 3)—simultaneously. The Canii had settled merchants in Scarbantia and the middle of the northern shore of the Balaton, while the Caesernii were present in Savaria and at the north-western corner of the lake. The inscriptions about these merchants are dated to the same period, indicating that the two biggest merchant families used the same routes and maybe also the same strategy but chose different locations on the route for their headquarters. The dating of these inscriptions is important. The early ones, also appearing along the northern shore of Lake Balaton, are dated to the second half of the 1st century CE, suggesting that trade there was just as old as the famous Amber Road. Although the literature usually underlines the importance of the Amber Road in trade and the process of Romanisation, these data show that the lakeshore zone was also involved in trade during the period.<sup>21</sup> Other merchant families, like the Sempronii or the Opponii, settled their people along just one route. In some cases, a division of labour can also be defined. Settling merchants in pairs—on the same settlement or nearby ones—was common practice. As the collected evidence shows, the members of the pairs in the same or nearby towns had different roles:

21 Contrary to this statement, the maps in Póczy 2004, 48 on the distribution of imported pottery in Pannonia reflect the author's opinion that the northern shore of Lake Balaton was not part of the trade route network in 1st century CE, only becoming integrated in the mid-2nd century CE, from the reign of Septimius Severus. In these maps, the route heading to Aquincum runs along the southern shore of the lake, connecting Poetovio and Gorsium. A. Mócsy and M. Szilágyi also supposed the path of trading routes following the southern shore (see Mócsy – Fitz 1990, 121), but the collected epigraphic material seems to refuse their hypothesis, as inscriptions by merchants have only been discovered in the northern and western lakeshore areas. The related evidence raises the possibility that trade routes ran along both the northern and southern shores during the 1st century CE, the northern route being essential in satisfying the needs of veterans settled north of Lake Balaton.

one settled in the *territorium*, the other in the city. The reason behind this is their different roles in the merchant network, as demonstrated by the example of the *villa* of Zalabaksa, where one family member was possibly assigned the task of managing storage in the *territorium*, while the other half of the pair, settled in the centre of the settlement, was in charge of marketing and logistics. Of course, these categories are a bit schematic as marketing could also take place in the *territorium*.<sup>22</sup> The social status of the pairs also varied; they could consist of a freeborn and a freedman or a *negotiator* and a merchant without a title. The members of family networks show a wide social diversity. In these networks, Roman citizens, freedmen, slaves, freeborn, and barbarians could be equally present. The distribution of these groups shows (Fig. 4) that networks of Northern Italian families in Pannonia operated just like in other parts of the Empire: by agents. The system was regulated by the legal ties between a patron and freedmen or slaves. As for the origins of the members of family networks in Pannonia, 15 of the 27 people presented in the study had Northern Italian origins.<sup>23</sup> They were the backbone of this agent-based system. Indigenous people and Romans raised in Pannonia (8 people altogether) appear in the network as additional help, indicating that involving locals was also part of operating these networks, who might have been employed for their knowledge about local circumstances, markets, demand, and maybe language.

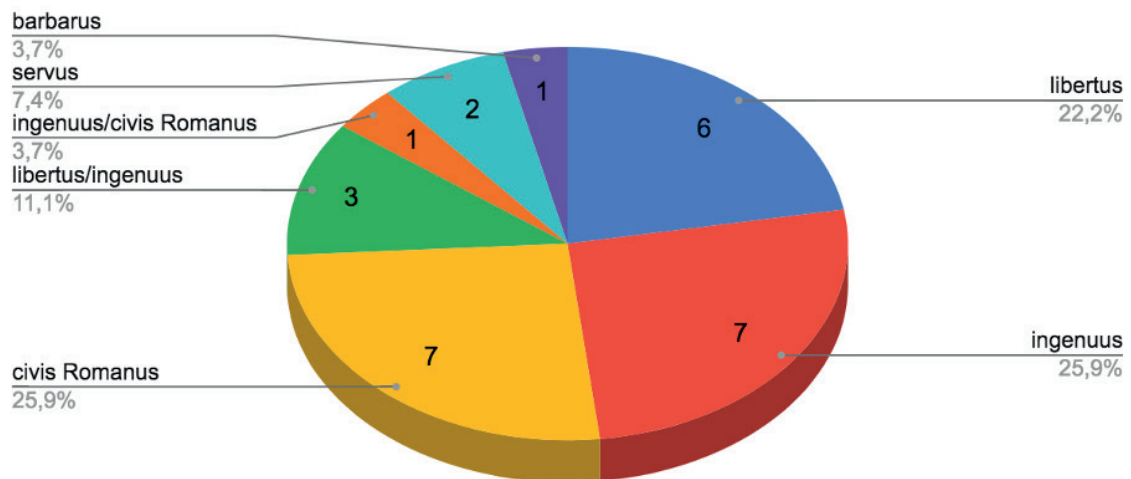


Fig. 4. Distribution of members of family-based trading networks in Pannonia by social position

In the fifth chapter, I collected members of commercial associations. This chapter is structured by association types. The main difficulty in this topic was to define the merchants of the *collegia* and those referred to as *amicus* because merchants and craftsmen in *collegia* were not clearly distinguished, and the use of the term *amicus* was very popular among soldiers, too.

Chapter six contains the inscriptions relating to fluvial trade in topographical order. Such finds in Pannonia are few: only four known inscriptions are related to commerce via the river Sava, three to the Danube, and none at all to the Drava. These numbers, of course, do not reflect how these rivers were really used in Roman times. The dating of the persisting inscriptions concurs with the expansion of the Roman Empire in this area, with earlier finds coming from areas near the Sava.

22 For example, Savaria, where the trading zone was situated in the *territorium* of the settlement (Kovács 1998, 114–115).

23 With an additional doubtful one. Those who definitely moved personally from Italy to Pannonia were classified into this category, so the members of the second or later generations of a family of Northern Italian origin were not counted as “Italians.”



An inscription mentioning the *nauclerus* from Brigetio<sup>24</sup> indicates the time when trading activities with western provinces started to flourish.<sup>25</sup> As a military use of the Drava River is documented by inscriptions, one may also presume a civilian use.<sup>26</sup> Regarding the social status of the discussed people, the two slaves recorded in the dissertation among commerce-related individuals (not counting the slaves employed in customs stations) were connected with fluvial trade, and both were indigenous people, testifying that when it came to navigating rivers, Romans relied on local knowledge,<sup>27</sup> and also that slaves could play a more important role than just being part of the crew.<sup>28</sup> Valens being depicted on the tombstone<sup>29</sup> of the family with a whip in his hand suggests his role in towing<sup>30</sup> and inland transport.<sup>31</sup> An inscription from Andautonia can also be connected to fluvial trade. It only mentions one of the referred people by name, while the others only as “*socii*,”<sup>32</sup> his co-operative partners, maybe below him in social status.<sup>33</sup> Having been interested in fluvial trade, they erected an altar for Savus.

Chapter seven discusses the staff of the *Publicum portorium Illyrici*. The related analysis aimed to reveal the role of people working at customs stations. Their role in the life of the cities in Pannonia was analysed in context with their role and rank as customs officers. The administration of the Roman customs and tax system underwent a considerable change under the reign of Marcus Aurelius. The change in the system of the customs stations did not happen suddenly, but the new organisation evolved over several years. During the time of transition, the staff of the customs station did not change: the previous *conductor* kept his experienced personnel, who remained his slaves. As the complete transformation of the customs station organisation was a slow process, replacing the staff with imperial slaves could only be undertaken little by little.<sup>34</sup>

People involved in customs services had very different social statuses: while the heads of the organisation were high-ranked *equites*, the staff consisted of slaves.<sup>35</sup> The slaves did not form a homogenous social stratum but were in diverse subordinate relationships. However, the overall wealth and possibilities of a slave working at customs services were considerably better than average ones.<sup>36</sup> Although they had to suffer legal restrictions like, for example, being prohibited from becoming

24 AE 1999, 1246.

25 GABLER 2006, 114.

26 See, for example, the inscription of a negotiator from Mursa, Antonius Barbilus (ILJug 0289, Chapter 3.4.3).

27 KNEZOVIĆ 2010, 189.

28 One of them, Medus, a member of the tribe Varcianus (cf. CIL 03, 09796 and ŠAŠEL KOS 1997, 389), could have been experienced in river navigation like the Taurisci (KNEZOVIĆ 2010, 189).

29 MIGOTTI 2008, 458–461.

30 For details on towing in this river section, see KNEZOVIĆ 2010, 191.

31 For the inland routes crossing the Sava, see KNEZOVIĆ 2010, 191.

32 CIL 03, 04009.

33 ŠAŠEL KOS 1994, 102.

34 SZABÓ 2021 (with detailed literature).

35 ROSTOVITZ 1896, 129; BRUNT 1990, 411–412; ØRSTED 1985, 319; DOBÓ 1940, 154; ALFÖLDY 1974, 165.

36 A few of them was able to erect a marble altar: AE 1986, 0571. Apollinaris *servus, tabularius*; CIL 03, 15184, 24. Epictetus and Viator, *vicarii*, AE 1899, 0075, AE 1899, 0077. Prudens, *vicarius*; CIL 03, 14354, 30. Felix, *vicarius*; CIL 03, 14354, 25. Festus, *vicarius*; CIL 03, 14354, 26. Optimus, *vicarius*; CIL 03, 14354, 33, CIL 03, 14354, 34. Primitivos, *conscriptor*, KUŠAN ŠPALJ 2015, Nr. 80. Verus, *servus ex privatis*; CIL 03, 04024. Ianuarius, *servus, conscriptor*; CIL 03, 10873. Haeliodorus, *conscriptor*; CIL 03, 15184, 4. Salvianus, *servus, conscriptor*; CIL 03, 14354, 27. Theodorus, *scrutator*.

a member of the city council, their wealth and role in customs services and taxation could provide them with some advantages—see, for example, Primitivus, who had a freeborn wife despite of himself being a slave.<sup>37</sup> His example shows that the social status and the respect someone had in a settlement were not inevitably related.

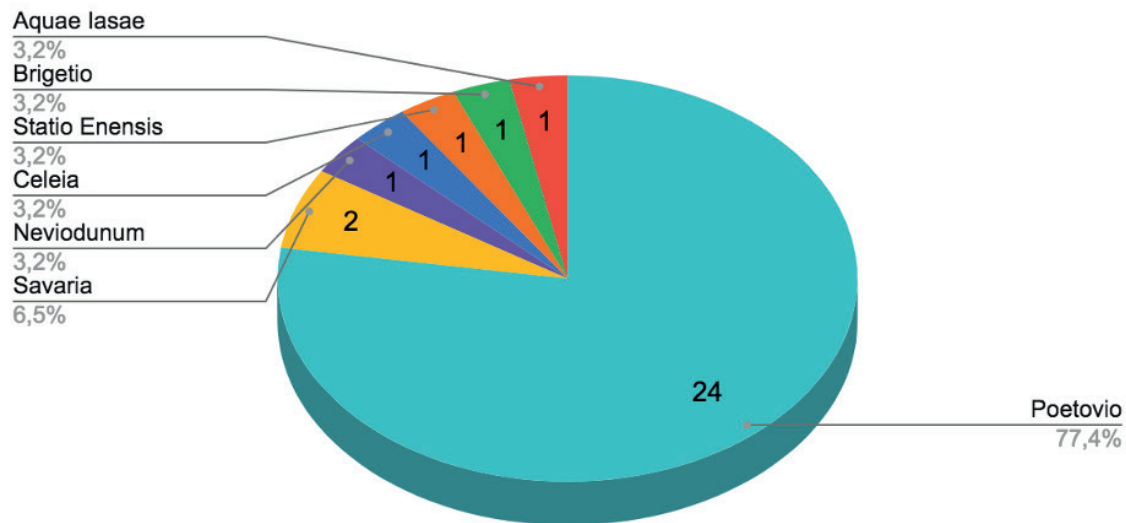


Fig. 5. Findspots of inscriptions of slaves working at customs stations in Pannonia

The inscriptions reveal that the relocation of slaves or a change of their function was possible under the authority of both the *conductores* and the *procuratores*. The centre of the *portorium Illyrici* was undoubtedly Poetovio, and all *conductores* had at least one slave in the city, irrespective of the location of the region they administered.<sup>38</sup> These slaves fulfilled a dual role: they protected their patron's interests in the customs office centre, but they were also engaged with managing the administration of the *portorium's* regions, which were in different hands at the same time. Sometimes members of the customs staff of other settlements appeared Poetovio.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of this phenomenon is not clear yet; perhaps they had to report from time to time on the progress they made in their stations, or Poetovio had a distinguished place in the cultic life of the customs offices' staff (Fig. 5).

## Main results and conclusions of the dissertation

The main goal of the dissertation was to determine the relationship between merchants and outline their role in the life of the province together with Roman trading networks and their hubs. The distribution of the related inscriptions matched the main trade routes of Pannonia, but in some points, modified the known routes and revealed new trading points and routes in the province. The most important results of the thesis include clarifying that some inscriptions, which have been accounted for as mentioning merchants (members of merchant families of Northern Italian origin, the *collegia*, or other associations), have no connection with commerce and bringing some previously neglected social groups—like the ones referred to as *amici* or *socii* in the texts—into the limelight. Previously, research dealt little with the officers of customs stations in the *publicum portorium Illyrici* and even when did, focused mainly on high-ranking officers.

37 SZABÓ 2022, 192–193.

38 Caius Iulius Epaphroditus, for example, who was in charge in the eastern parts of the *publicum portorium Illyrici* (ØRSTED 1985, 322 and CIL 03, 7434), was also mentioned in Poetovio (CIL 03, 7437).

39 For example, Fructus was mentioned in both Statio Enensis and Poetovio (CIL 03, 05146; AE 2008, 1020; CIL 03, 04017).



## Social status

The collected material is characterised by a conspicuous inequality in the number of inscriptions about different social groups. It was impossible to identify members of higher social strata in connection with trade in the cities and towns of Pannonia. No commerce-related text could be linked to the elite, the *ordo senatorius*. A few epigraphic documents mention the members of the *ordo equester* in connection with trade or commerce, but not as merchants; they appear as *publicans* or officers in the customs stations. Their bond to the local communities in Pannonia could not be strong, as they only lived in the province while serving their office. According to classical authors, there was only one knight, Postumius Leo, who obtained a traditional role in trade. His example is extraordinary, as he was the only principal to stay in Pannonia in person instead of sending only his *liberti* to the province. Climbing down the social ladder, the number of the members of the *ordo decurionum* amongst merchants was strikingly low. Only two people, members of the Canius family, could be classified into this group, indicating that in this respect, Pannonia was similar to Noricum, where the local indigenous elite remained powerful enough throughout the process of Romanisation to form and man the *ordines* of the new Roman cities, leaving the arriving Roman merchants with no opportunity to become members of the *ordo decurionum*.

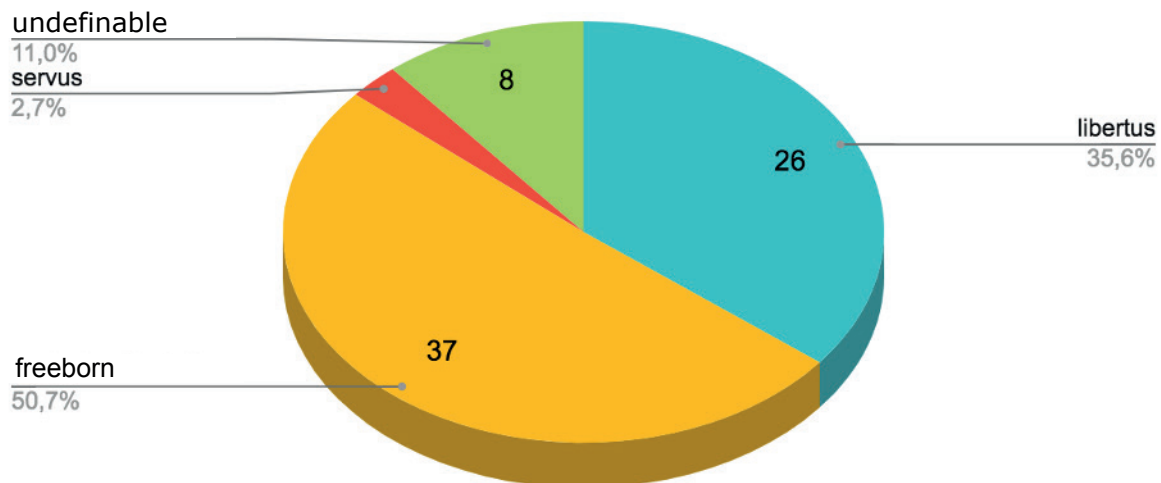


Fig. 6. Distribution of all possible merchants in Pannonia (except for slaves working at customs stations) by social position

Most people involved in commercial activities were members of the so-called “middle classes.” While—unlike the traditional *ordines* or the slaves—members of this class did not form a legally distinct group, the stratum included many people, with indigenous freeborns, either indigenous people or Roman citizens, among them. Most *negotiatores* in Pannonia could also be classified into the middle class: six of them certainly, and five more with reservations. In contrast, only two of the known Pannonian *negotiatores* were *liberti*. The picture is similar in the case of merchant families: sixteen of their members could be identified as middle-class, and only six as *liberti*. Moreover, there are seven people with obscure social positions who could be either *liberti* or freeborn. The body of information on the social position of the merchants engaged in fluvial trade is extremely small. Although we can find *liberti* among them, those mentioned in the curse tablet from Siscia could be in a co-operation of middle-class people (except for one of them). All this information testifies that the middle class was the social stratum most active in trade and commerce in Pannonia.

Due to the character of inscriptions that usually mention only a few members, precisely known commercial co-operations in Pannonia seem to have consisted of only a few people. In reality,

such co-operations comprised more people not only in Pannonia but perhaps all over the empire. The co-operations in Pannonia—popular along the Amber Road, the northern shore of Lake Balaton, and the banks of the river Sava—comprised members of the same family, both *ingenui* and *liberti*. Another form of association consisted of individual merchants; these were popular in different areas of the province, including the regions of Aquincum, Brigetio, Sopianae, Intercisa, or Siscia and Sirmium by the lower course of the Sava River. The two types of associations operated interlinked: an individual merchant could become a partner of a merchant family by contract or marriage. The role of *negotiatores* in these associations could not be defined precisely. In the case of the Canius family, the *negotiator* was also part of the family, but this arrangement seems rare at best. *Negotiatores* in Pannonia appear everywhere near both merchant families and trading associations.

As part of the middle class, the indigenous population was also involved in commercial activities—for example, as members of merchant families. In the Caesernii family, for example, indigenous people were more often appointed to be family associates than *liberti*.

Due to the legal restrictions applied to them, *liberti* and slaves were part of lower social strata. In the analysed texts, 16 mentioned people<sup>40</sup> were definitely *liberti*, and the *libertus* status of ten more could be assumed, suggesting that less *liberti* than freeborns were engaged in the trade networks of Pannonia (Fig. 6). This is surprising, regarding that research traditionally defined *liberti* as the base of these networks. The high number of mentions of slaves in the analysed texts is due to customs stations. Altogether 31 slaves attended offices related to customs services, while only two were engaged with other commerce-related duties. Of course, these numbers are not absolutely representative, as slaves are rarely mentioned in the texts.

### Geographical division

The difference between the number of inscriptions in Pannonia Inferior and Pannonia Superior is striking. Altogether sixty commerce-related texts are known from Pannonia Superior, while only 22 from Pannonia Inferior. One of the reasons behind this is related to the presence of Northern Italian merchant families in Pannonia Superior. Their number was probably not significantly higher compared to other merchants in the province, but, as indicating the profession of individuals on inscriptions was not a widespread custom in Pannonia, we cannot identify other groups of merchants, save for those sharing a unique family name. On the other hand, it is also possible that they were really in a significant majority in Pannonia Superior, and, their capacity being enough to cover the needs of the province, they left little room for other merchants to do business there. While the distribution of the related epigraphic and archaeological evidence match, both following the same trade routes, some regions and cities seem surprisingly isolated in the light of inscriptions (Fig. 7).

Trade along the Amber Road was undoubtedly in the hands of Northern Italian merchant families, who also employed indigenous people in their networks. The popular practice was settling merchants in pairs in the cities and their territories. The reason behind this practice lay in the division of functions (storage, transport, advertising). The most important trading centres along the Amber Road were the cities of Salla, Savaria, Scarbantia, and Carnuntum. In the lands at the northern shore of Lake Balaton, the customer base consisted mainly of deducted veterans. Trade was less bustling in the region compared to lands along the Amber Road as it was considerably less populated and urbanised, but most importantly, as trade in the region was one-way. While the Amber Road con-

40 The distribution of these 16 people is the following: *negotiatores* – 2, members of merchant families – 6, *amici* – 5, fluvial trade – 1, *conductores* – 2.

nected to the Barbaricum, wherefrom goods could be transported to Italy on the way back, the settlers at Lake Balaton were simply consumers. Northern Italian merchant families played a dominant role in commerce there, while other merchant networks seem to be absent, akin to the mentions of custom stations. The riverside settlements of the province could be distinguished into two groups. The cities of Andautonia and Neviodunum along the upper course of the river Sava were part of networks run by Northern Italian merchant families, the Barbii and Caesernii. Moreover, a customs station and a mention of a *negotiator* can be linked to Neviodunum and a *socius* association to Andautonia. Other riverside settlements seem to be separated geographically. This does not mean that they could not participate in the circulation of commodities but only proves that merchants in these settlements acted primarily through contract-based co-operations, representing a looser connection with other merchants from the province and all over the empire. These co-operations were based on occasional short-range contracts—for example, for just a shipping of goods—and thus do not outline complex networks like those of merchant families.

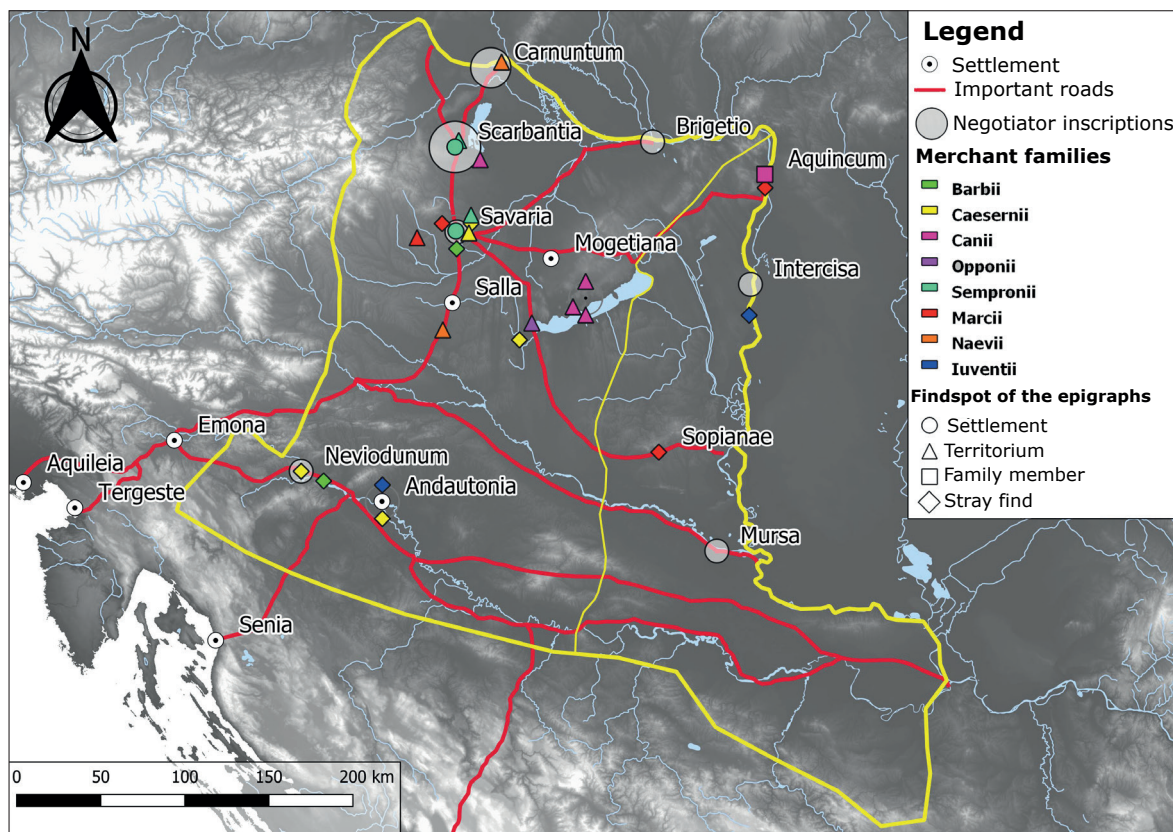


Fig. 7. Survey map displaying all members of family networks and *negotiators* (map: Bence Simon)

The most important territorial difference is related to the type of associations. While in Pannonia Superior unequivocally the merchant family networks were dominant, the picture in Pannonia Inferior is more diverse, including a broader range of other types of associations. This pattern is closely connected to a change in trade routes: as the export from western provinces increased, the new products did not arrive in Pannonia from Northern Italy on the former routes but on the rivers instead. The Northern Italian merchant families could not compete in these new routes; they could maintain their dominance along the Amber Road and had representatives in some settlements along the Danube, but the new routes were ruled by other merchants and their contract-based associations.

## Corpuses

AE – L'Année Epigraphique

CIL – Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

ILJug – Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Jugoslavia inter annos MCMLX et MCMXLX repertae et editae sunt

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