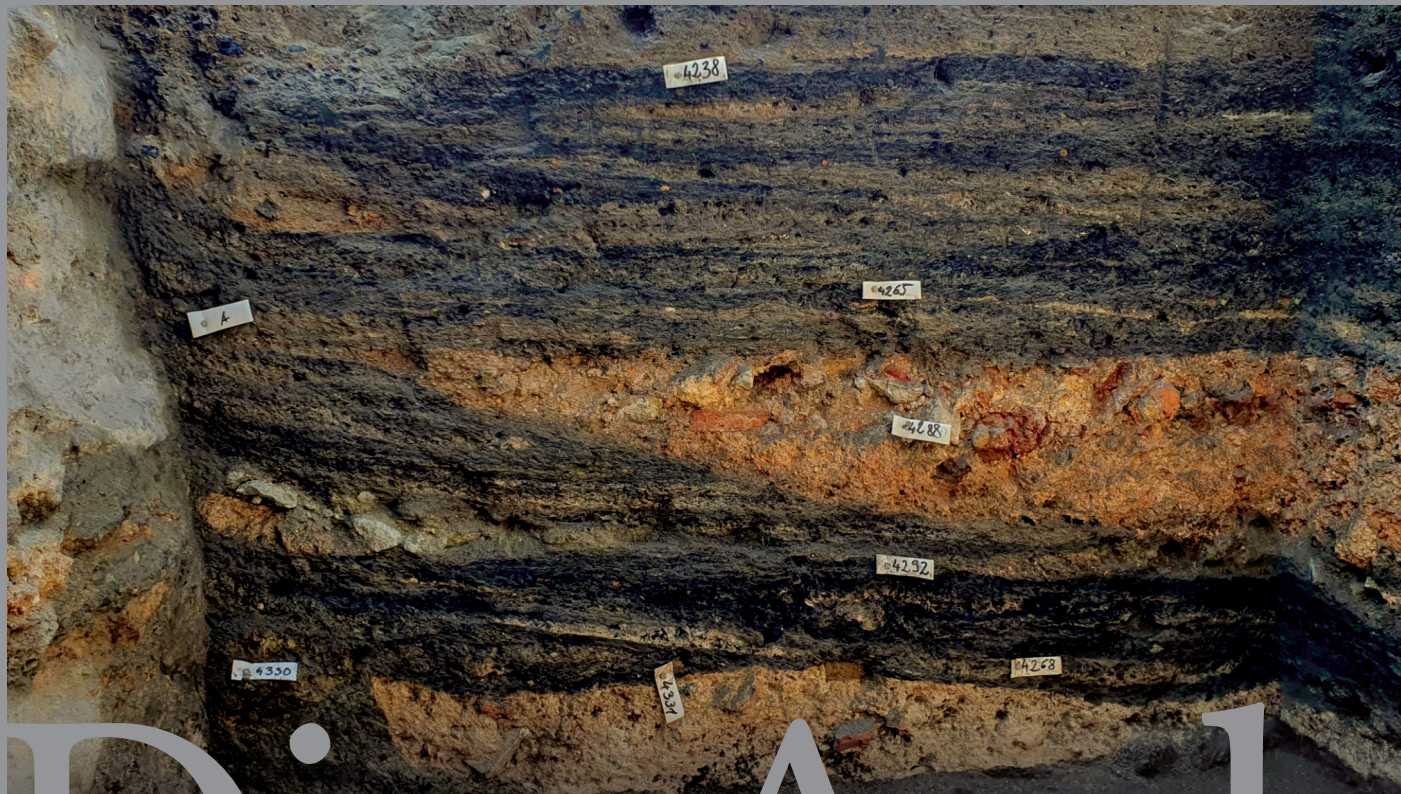


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in light of complex research

Pilisszentiván-Hárs-erdő 2024

Newly excavated remains of an Early Roman village in the northwestern hinterland of Aquincum

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Abstract: As part of a new research project and a local history research project, a team of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University and Archeovortex Ltd excavated a Roman village in the territory of Pilisszentiván. The settlement is located in the northwestern hinterland of the Roman town of Aquincum (today: Óbuda, Hungary) in a scarcely investigated area. The excavation brought to light two Early Roman buildings with stone foundations, a rich pottery record, several metal finds, and a building associated with workshop activities. New data on the topography of the village was also collected. The results suggest that the population of the settlement had already lived a Roman lifestyle around the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. In light of this year's excavation, some of the results of last year's campaign may be reconsidered.

Keywords: Early Imperial Roman Period, rural settlement, hinterland of Aquincum, dry stone wall foundation

Location of the site

The Pilisszentiván-Hárs-erdő archaeological site (82127)¹ is located on a natural terrace of the Buda Mountains near modern-day Budapest (Hungary). One of the main reasons for founding a settlement there was the Hársas Spring, the source of the Aranyhegyi Stream that discharges into the Danube at Aquincum. The site is situated on the northeastern side of Hárs Hill above a modern water pump station and a dirt road connecting Pilisszentiván and Piliscsaba in the northwest. It is probably a Roman village in the northwestern hinterland of Aquincum, one of the most important towns in Pannonia.²

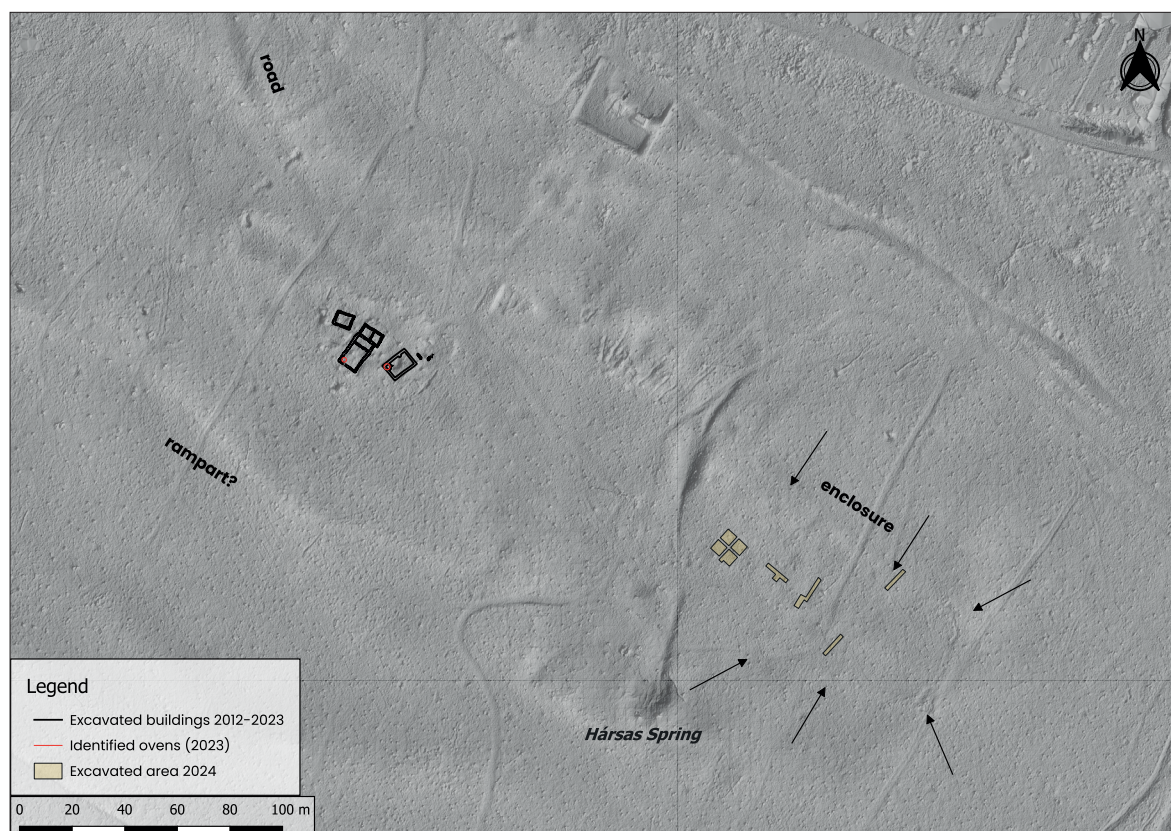


Fig. 1. Position of the trenches in a topographic survey of the Roman village (by B. Simon).

Research history of the site

The site was identified by Tamás Marlok in 2009 and entered into the National Register of Archaeological Sites of Hungary in 2012; three Roman buildings were excavated there by Tamás Repiszky in 2014–2017. In 2023, a team from the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University carried out a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey of the central zone of the settlement. In March 2023, Bence Simon, in cooperation with Lumen Drone Services, conducted an airborne laser scanning (ALS) of the area (Fig. 1).

In Autumn 2023, with the financial support of the Municipality of Pilisszentiván, the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of Eötvös Loránd University carried out a planned excavation on the site, during which some previously investigated Roman buildings were accurately documented, and

1 Site ID in the National Register of Archaeological Sites in Hungary (IVO).

2 For further research on the northwestern hinterland of Aquincum, see SIMON 2019a; SIMON 2019b; SIMON 2022; SIMON 2023.

their relative and absolute chronological positions were determined. During the excavation, many imported and local artefacts of rural life, such as local Pannonian handmade and wheel-thrown pottery, a pottery stamp, a shard of a rough-cast beaker, a glass vessel, brooches, and honing stones from the 1st–2nd centuries AD came to light.³

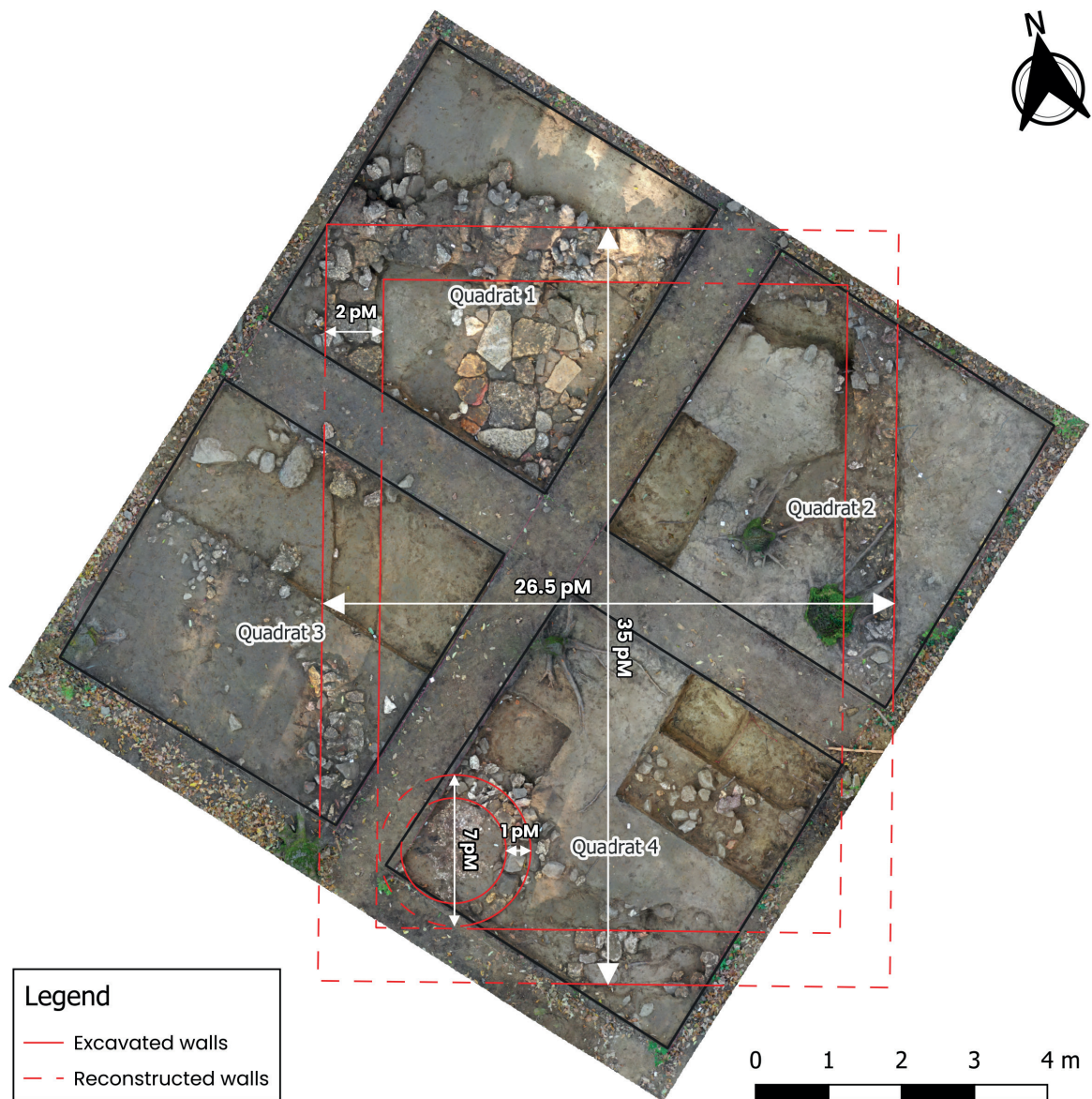


Fig. 2. Orthomosaic of the excavated building in Quadrats 1–4 with reconstructed dimensions (by B. Simon).

In 2024, the non-destructive surveys could continue with the financial support of the village.⁴ In March, the Institute of Archaeological Sciences, in cooperation with Lumen Drone Services, could determine the western extent of the Roman village through airborne laser scanning (ALS). The survey has revealed many traces of landscaping on the whole territory of the 460 m long and 80–100 m wide terrace and its slopes. Additionally, in August, a team from the Institute conducted magnetometer and GPR surveys focusing on the area east of Hársas Spring. The project aimed at

³ SIMON *et al.* 2023.

⁴ The results of the non-destructive surveys will be published in a separate article.



Fig. 3. Northern wall foundation of the excavated building in Quadrats 1–4. Top: two bottom courses of limestone (photo by B. Simon).



Fig. 4. Section of the wall foundation in the northeastern corner of the building excavated in Quadrats 1–4 (photo by B. Simon).



Fig. 5. Rectangular stone-paved floor of the excavated building in Quadrats 1–4 (photo by B. Simon).



Fig. 6. Pottery vessel fragments on the stone-paved floor of the excavated building in Quadrats 1–4 (photo by B. Simon).

mapping the supposed enclosure⁵ and identifying new archaeological features in the area. The surveys revealed several magnetic anomalies, the confines of the enclosure, and traces of three new buildings in an area of 9,410 m².

The circumstances of the 2024 excavation and the layout of the trenches

The excavation led by Bence Simon in 2024 was financed by the Municipality of Pilisszentiván and carried out by a team of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University. The excavation verifying the results of the prospection made in August was realised in cooperation with the Ferenczy Museum Centre, Archeovortex Ltd, and the Community Archaeology Association between 14 and 28 October. Trenches were laid out according to the new topographic questions. We hoped to clarify the inner layout, the construction method, the function, and the date of construction of the best-recognisable, newly identified, 10 m long and 8 m wide rectangular building and identify the supposed oven in its southwestern corner. We have opened four 4.5 × 4.5 m square trenches (Quadrats 1–4) to investigate the area inside and outside the building. Besides, Trench 1 (originally 10 × 1.5 m) was opened 10 m east of the quadrats to investigate a supposed road, a 3 m wide, linear feature. Trench 2 (originally 10 × 1.5 m) was opened to verify the building remains detected with GPR. With Trench 3 (10 × 1.5 m), we studied an extensive and strong dipolar magnetic feature, while Trench 4 was opened to excavate the enclosure wall at the northern edge of the terrace (Fig. 1).

Quadrats 1–4

In Quadrats 1–4, the highly fractured stone debris of the building has come to light already after removing a few centimetres of topsoil; also, we have discovered some of the bigger, quadratic stones of the wall foundation already in this phase. The wall foundations or their ditches have been discovered in all quadrats, which made it possible to accurately define the dimensions of the building (Fig. 2). The north-south length of the building was 10.36 m, corresponding to 35 pM (*pes Monetalis*, Roman foot = 0.296 m), and it was 7.84 m (26.5 pM) wide. The wall foundations formed a rectangle, and they were 74 cm (2.5 pM) wide. The building had an inner dimension of 30 × 21.5 pM (8.88 × 6.36 m). The sections of the wall foundations appeared to be similar on all sides: up to 25–35 cm thick, made without mortar, the lowest layer comprising two courses of relatively big, nearly square limestones (Fig. 3). Sandstone was only used in the southern foundation in the bottom layer. The layers of the foundation could be best observed in the northeastern corner, where smaller sand- and limestone pieces were laid above the bottom limestone layer (Fig. 4). The debris discovered inside and outside the building also consisted mainly of relatively small stones. The foundations were dismantled on the western side, the stones having been moved outward around the corners. We could not gather information on the rising wall and roof structure, which suggests that it was built of organic material, possibly timber or log construction on top of the stone foundation. The hand-forged nails found outside the house may have been related to the roof, but certainly not to large structural elements.

Despite our expectations, we could not identify any smaller rooms or dividing walls in the inner space of the building, but we found a rectangular, 1.8 × 3 m floor made of relatively big flat stones in the northwestern quarter, at the same depth as the bottom of the stone foundation (Fig. 5). Many potsherds lay on the stone pavement, probably at their original places (Fig. 6). The function of the paved area is debated, but it provided a good reference to identify the level of the original, supposedly clay floor in other parts where no such flooring was found. While excavating in those areas, we could not identify a change in texture or colour, but only the level and the potsherds indicated the one-time floor of the building. It was not possible to decisively determine the level of

5 SIMON *et al.* 2023, 656, Fig. 2.



Fig. 7. The oven of the excavated building in Quadrats 1–4 (photo by B. Simon).



Fig. 8. Iron knife found on the stone-paved floor of the excavated building in Quadrats 1–4 (photo by Á. Müller).



Fig. 9. Cicada brooch found in the excavated building in Quadrats 1–4 (photo by Á. Müller).



Fig. 10. Norico-Pannonian winged brooch found in the excavated building in Quadrats 1–4 (photo by B. Simon).



Fig. 11. Sandstone debris in Trench 2 (photo by Sz. Johácz)

the Roman floor outside the building either. However, it was most likely no lower than the bottom of the debris excavated in Quadrats 1 and 3, only a few centimetres higher than the top of the paved floor, indicating that the inner part of the building was not sunken.

The multifunctional oven stood above floor level in the southwestern corner of the house. Its walls, plastered floor, and stone foundation were unearthed (Fig. 7). As the stone foundation of the oven wall was at the same level as the foundation of the building's wall, both were likely constructed at the same time—a theory corroborated by the fact that the oven's wall is 1 pM wide and 7 pM in diameter.

The fill layer above the floor yielded many finds from the period. Directly at the level of the floor and the paved area, we have found fragments of fine bottles, coarse ware, and parts of a bowl with an S-shaped rim; besides, a huge bottle with a wide rim and one handle, probably imported from Italy, is also worth mentioning. The pottery is characterised by local coarse ware and pottery made in Roman style, but the absence of Samian ware is also conspicuous. A triangular, tanged knife blade (Fig. 8), a cicada brooch (Fig. 9), a Norico-Pannonian winged brooch (Fig. 10) and a boot's hobnail have also been recovered from the fill of the building, the entrance of which could have been on the eastern side, as an iron door-lock bolt was found there. Based on the recovered finds, the building was designed for residential purposes, built probably around the beginning of the 2nd century AD, during the reign of Trajan or Hadrian, and was peacefully abandoned already in the same century.

Trenches 1–4

We could not identify the road in Trench 1, only debris-like stones of the aforementioned house along its western side. Trench 2 was laid out 30 m east of Quadrats 1–4. Debris consisting exclusively of sandstone was found in its southern end (Fig. 11). Thus, we extended it another 2 × 5 m towards the south next to the southwestern corner. The dry stone wall foundation made of sandstone was



Fig. 12. Orthomosaic of the building corner found in the extension of Trench 2 (by B. Simon).

partly visible in the underbrush, but its line became clearly recognisable only when cleared from debris. We unearthed there the southwestern corner of another building, the foundation walls of which continue north and east of the opened surface. The red fill of an oven and fragments of several pottery vessels (e.g., *mortariums* and local coarse ware) came to light in the corner of the north-south and east-west walls at the foundation's bottom level. In contrast to the one discovered in the other building, the round oven was made of clay without a stone wall foundation (Fig. 12). Its red, burnt, plastered floor was clearly visible on the magnetometer survey, but more importantly, it was also located in the southwestern corner of the building, outlining a tendency among the uncovered houses of the village.⁶ A stony layer, similar to the oven floor foundation unearthed in Quadrat 4, was found at the northern end of Trench 2, next to a few pottery fragments (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Floor foundation of a supposed oven in the northern corner of Trench 2 (photo by B. Simon).

6 Based on the above, Room c of Building B, which was certified last year, may have also been a residential space, and pottery vessels which appeared below or at the level of the bottom of the foundation stones, could also be related to the original floor and the abandonment of the building (SIMON *et al.* 2023, 663, 659, Fig. 6).



Fig. 14. The *denarii* of Trajan, found in Trench 3 (photo by B. Simon).

Trench 3 was set out 17 m east of Trench 2. A massive sandstone rubble came to light in its northern part just under the topsoil, while the southern part lacked any features. Two *denarii* in nearly perfect condition of Trajan were found a few days and a few 10 cm apart while we excavated the southern edge of the rubble (Fig. 14). The coins were struck between AD 107 and 111. Some fragments of Pannonian grey ware with roulette decoration (Type Drag. 24/25) and the bottom of a 2nd-century AD footed and spouted glass beaker have also been recovered from the debris. After dismantling the debris, parallel lines of two 50 cm-wide dry stone walls have become visible along the northern side of the trench, 120 cm apart, with burnt red and black daub debris between them (Fig. 15)—probably the northern wall of the building. Due to the small

extent of the opened surface, this theory remains to be verified. The interpretation of the building is unclear, but it must be in connection with some workshop activities, such as pottery or brick firing.

Finally, Trench 4 revealed the stone enclosure detected by the laser scan. It was found in a highly degraded state in the northern third of the opened area (Fig. 16). No archaeological finds were recovered from this area.



Fig. 15. The excavated walls of the archaeological feature found in Trench 3 (photo by B. Simon).



Fig. 16. Orthomosaic of Trench 4 with the dismantled wall of the enclosure on the left (by B. Simon).

Summary

Besides identifying the supposed road, we got answers to all research questions and gained new data that enriched the Roman history of the site. East of Hársas Spring, we have unearthed remains of unusually early Roman houses with stone foundations clearly parallel to the buildings excavated in 2014–2023 more than 100 metres away. Many questions, such as the function and the floor level of the previously excavated Building B, could be reconsidered in light of the results of the current campaign. The area east of the spring appears to have been inhabited at the same time as the rest of the village, and a second archaeological feature associated with workshop activity has been identified there. The relics and finds suggest that the village was founded around the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and was abandoned peacefully at the end of the 2nd century AD. The lack of sunken houses of indigenous style and waste or storage pits is striking. Moreover, the large number of Roman-style buildings with stone foundations seems also unusual, raising the question of the origin of the inhabitants. At the present state of research, it seems conceivable that the population that inhabited the 2nd-century AD village at Pilisszentiván, lived a Roman lifestyle, and had good regional connections consisted of discharged soldiers. However, further research and the discovery of military equipment are still needed to prove this idea.

After the excavation was concluded, the wall foundations and the remains of the ovens were covered with geotextile, and the trenches were filled back with the excavated soil on 8 November.

The excavation team (Fig. 17) included archaeologists Bence Simon, Szilvia Johácz, Dániel Hümpfner, Rita Olasz, and László Rupnik, archaeological technicians Vilmos Lenár and Ákos Müller, fourteen university students, four members of the Community Archaeology Association, thirteen, mainly local, volunteers from Pilisszentiván, and three volunteers from the Duna–Ipoly National Park.



Fig. 17. The excavation team (photo by B. Bárdi).

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