

## THE BIATORBÁGY HOARD

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Reports on the Roman Age coin hoards from Biatorbágy found by the archaeologists of the Field Service for Cultural Heritage during the archaeological excavation preceding the development project on the lakeshore have already appeared on various Hungarian homepages on archaeology and ancient history.<sup>1</sup> The cleaning of the coins now enables their further study. The perhaps most important question is whether the coins were part of the same hoard or whether they come from two separately deposited hoards. This question is all the more justified because the two assemblages were found a few meters apart in the same room of a Roman villa. One reliable starting point for resolving this issue is the date of the latest coins in the two hoards: if the closing date of the two hoards is identical, it seems likely that the denars had been concealed at the same time, but were packed separately for practical reasons. But even in this case, the circumstances under which the coins had been accumulated may have differed.

The latest coins in both hoards are the pieces issued by Salonina, wife of the Emperor Gallienus, whose rule between 253 and 268 AD can be divided into two main periods, the first lasting until 260, when his father Valerian, who ruled over the eastern half of the Roman Empire, was taken prisoner during an ill-fated eastern campaign. Gallienus thus remained the sole emperor of Rome, a turn of events that was also reflected in the depictions and legends of his coins.

During the reign of Gallienus, the Roman imperial mints began a system of putting *officina* marks on coins. An *officina* was a workshop within a mint; many larger mints had several different workshops of this type operating parallelly. This tendency can sometimes be noted during the final years of the joint reign of co-emperors, but usually becomes a general practice during an emperor's sole reign. In the Cuneito Hoard, the largest assemblage of Roman coins found in Britain, the first coin types on which *officina* marks appear can be dated to 258–259. The custom of putting *officina* marks on coins became a widespread practice from Gallienus' sole reign. However, none of the coins in the Biatorbágy hoards bear *officina* marks.

Another difference between the coinage of the two periods of Gallienus' reign is that the coins struck during his sole reign were fairly uniform and were characterised by a fairly simple titulature: *gallienvs avg* for the Emperor and *salonina avg* for the Empress. One difference in the legends on the reverse is that during the seven years when Gallienus was a co-emperor, the plural genitive form of *augustorum* (abbreviated as *avgg*) indicated the rule of the two emperors. Only about 10 per cent of the coins have the singular form (*avg*) in the legend on the reverse. Salonina's coinage followed that of her husband, with the plural genitive form of *avgg* appearing on the *pietas*, *concordia*, *salus*, *felicitas*, *moneta* and *oriens* types, although in this case the plural did not refer to Gallienus, but to Valerian. Only in the case of expressly "feminine" coins does the singular form appear (*pvdicitia avg*, *fecvnditas avg*) because neither modesty,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://sirasok.blog.hu/2009/05/29/ket\\_erekinck\\_biatorbagyrol](http://sirasok.blog.hu/2009/05/29/ket_erekinck_biatorbagyrol)  
[http://www.mult-kor.hu/20090408\\_szarmatak\\_elol\\_rejtettek\\_el\\_az\\_ezustermeket](http://www.mult-kor.hu/20090408_szarmatak_elol_rejtettek_el_az_ezustermeket)

nor fecundity were part of Valerian's ideological messages. After 260, when her husband remained the sole ruler on the Roman throne, the genitive on all her coins became *augusti* (avg).

One general trait of Roman imperial coinage is that the changes in form and design can be traced through a series of transitional types and variants in the series issued by the mints. Apparently, a few weeks or even months were necessary until new coins attained their final form and became a standard element of the period's coinage. Both hoards from Biatorbágy contain transitional coins of this type among Salonina's issues: on some pieces, the obverse refers to the joint rule of the two emperors (corn salonina avg), while the reverse to her husband's sole reign (pietas avg). Although the P(rima) officina mark should appear on the issue, it does not, as can be seen on two coins from each hoard (no. 232 from Hoard 1 and no. 540 from Hoard 2; *Figs 1–2*). The two Vesta type coins (so called after the depiction of the goddess and the legend *vesta b.* on the reverse) represent similar transitional types: one type is inscribed with a longer legend, *corn salonina avg* on the obverse (nos 221 and 230 from Hoard 1; *Figs 3–4*), the other bears the shorter, *salonina avg* titlature (*Fig. 5*).

Even though the latest coins in both hoards thus date from the same brief period, the months in late 259 or early 260, the two coin assemblages were not parts of the same hoard because the frequency distribution of coin types in the two hoards differs significantly (*Fig. 6*). Both hoards have good analogies in terms of their composition among the other coin hoards concealed at the same time in the broader area. The composition of Hoard 1 resembles that of the coin hoards from Dunaújváros and Tác, while the frequency distribution of coins in Hoard 2 is more or less the same as in the hoards from Budaörs and Pélföldszentkereszt (*Fig. 6*), suggesting that there was some pattern to the way hoards were accumulated. Hoard 1 is made up of 247 coins representing the coinage of the preceding 20–21 years and includes also issues from the period immediately before its concealment, suggesting that it represented a currency hoard of coins used as cash in daily transactions. In contrast, Hoard 2, made up of 551 coins, contains the issues of the preceding 45 years and has few issues from the time prior to its deposition, probably an indication that it represented the savings of a longer period. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by the presence of a few good quality coins struck 45 years earlier.

Aside from the hoards mentioned in the above, several other coin assemblages from Pannonia have a closing date around the 260s, reflecting an incursion by the Roxolans, a tribe of the Iranian Sarmatians living in the Hungarian Plain. The raids brought devastation to the Roman settlements such as Biatorbágy lying along the Danube. A comparison of the two hoards from Biatorbágy with the percentage



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

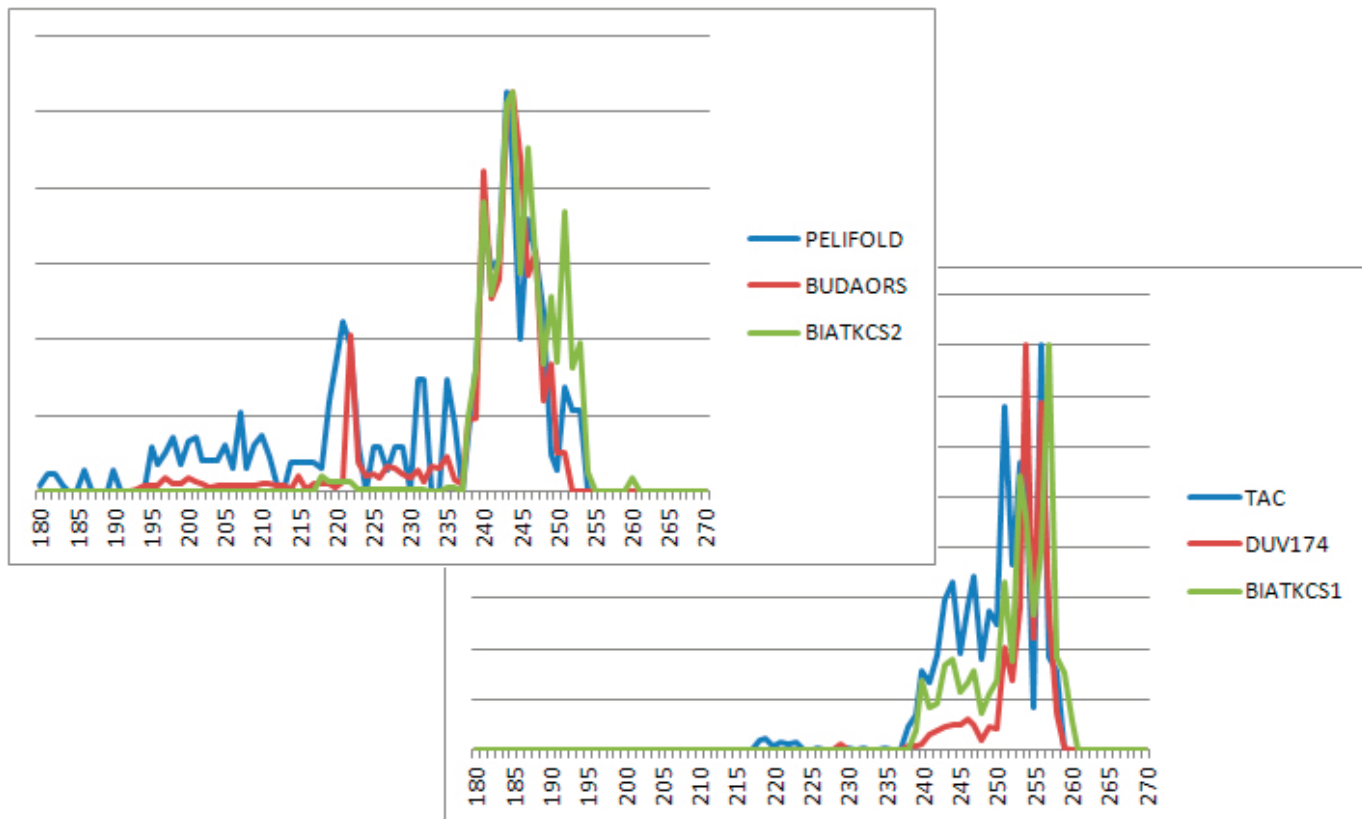


Fig. 7.

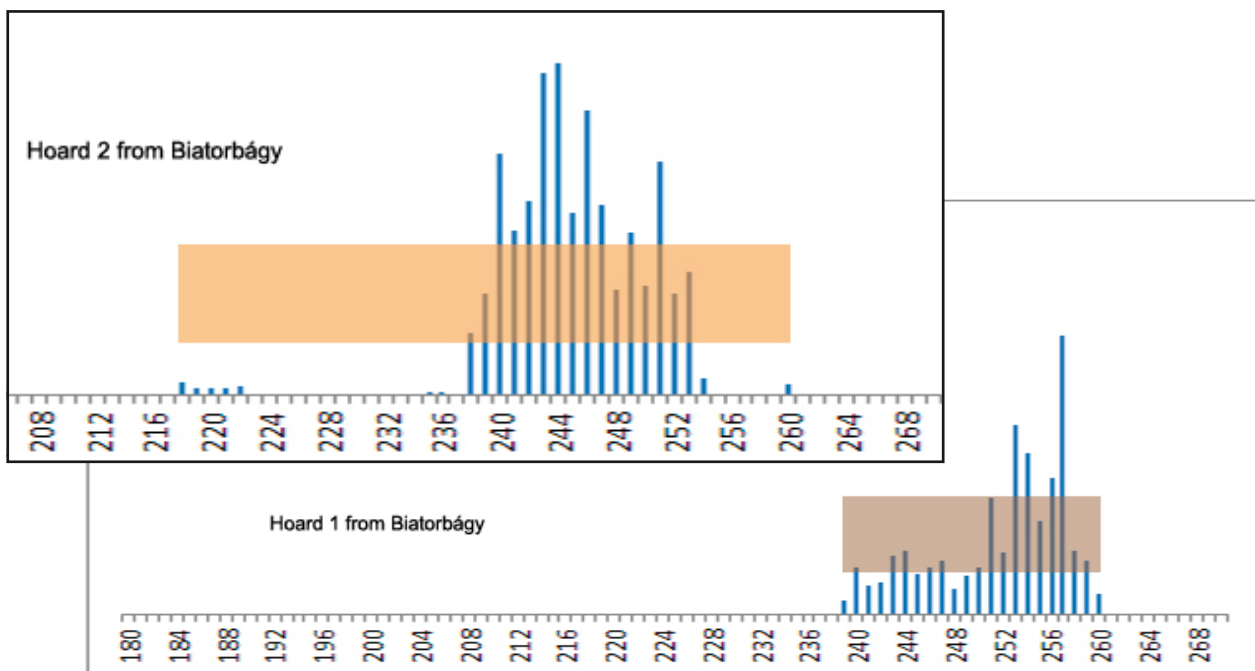


Fig. 6.

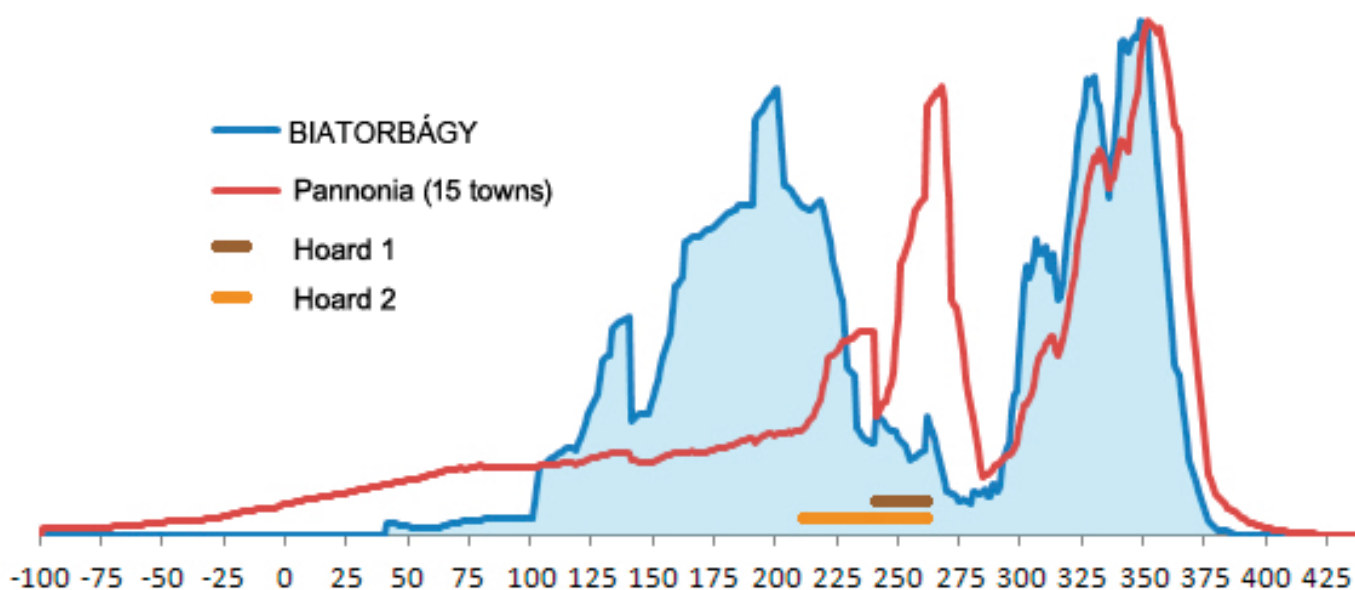


Fig. 8.

distribution of all the coins found at the settlement and the composition of other hoards from the province's towns (Fig. 8) clearly shows that the concealment of the two hoards reflected a time of crisis. The coin circulation in the province was undergoing a boom at the time the two hoards were hidden in the Roman villa at Biatorbágy. While the circumstances prompting the concealment of the two coins hoards were the same, the two sets of coins had been hoarded for different reasons and they thus allow an insight into different aspects of the finances of a Pannonian villa economy.

The Roman settlement on the lakeshore did not perish. Life continued on the settlement after the major imperial reorganisation around the turn of the 3rd and 4th centuries, as reflected by the villa's Roman coins from the ensuing century.