

THE FRONTIERS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE – ABOUT THE HUNGARIAN SECTION OF THE DANUBE LIMES TENTATIVE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

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Since the adoption of the international convention for the protection of world heritage sites in 1972, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has inscribed 1,052 sites in 165 countries on the World Heritage List as of 2016. Hungary is in a relatively good position, since it has eight World Heritage sites, one of which (Pécs) is an archaeological site that is considered to have outstanding universal value. The Hungarian government would like to improve this proportion by nominating the remains of the over 400 km long border of the Roman Empire that is within Hungary for recognition as a part of the World Heritage. This would not be a stand-alone nomination, since the ‘Frontiers of the Roman Empire’ is an existing World Heritage site with three current elements on the list: Hadrian’s Wall, the Antonine Wall, and the Upper German and Raetian Limes. According to the most recent decision, the Hungarian section as an independent site (as a part of the Danube limes site) would be an extension of the other sections in Europe, and later sections on other continents. The existing and new limes World Heritage sites will be grouped together in a cluster.

The idea of listing the limes as a World Heritage site came about in the 2000s. The representatives of the countries affected by the nomination created the Bratislava Group, which in its Koblenz Declaration of 2004 established its professional principles. ‘The Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site should consist of the line(s) of the frontier at the height of the empire from Trajan to Septimius Severus (about AD 100 to 200), and military installations of different periods which are on that line. The installations include fortresses, forts and towers, the limes road, artificial barriers and immediately associated civil structures’ (Fig. 1).¹ This definition was accepted by UNESCO, and through this decision the sections in Germany and then Scotland became a part of this serial site.

Of great significance to the Hungarian preparations were the international projects financed by the EU with participation on behalf of Hungary by the Archaeology Department of the University of Pécs between 2005 and 2008, with the addition of the Municipal Museum of Paks and the Hungarian Office of Cultural Heritage between 2009



Fig. 1: The frontiers of the Roman Empire (Source: Zsolt Visy)

¹ Breeze, David J.: *The Antonine Wall* (Edinburgh: Brillin Ltd, 2009), 78.

and 2011. The objective of these efforts were the preparation of the World Heritage nomination for the Hungarian section of the limes including the former Roman military road stretching alongside the Danube and the series of military features found in its surroundings – Roman military forts, fortifications on the left and right banks, military settlements, watch towers, and other elements related to border defence. Within the framework of the project, the results of research up to that time

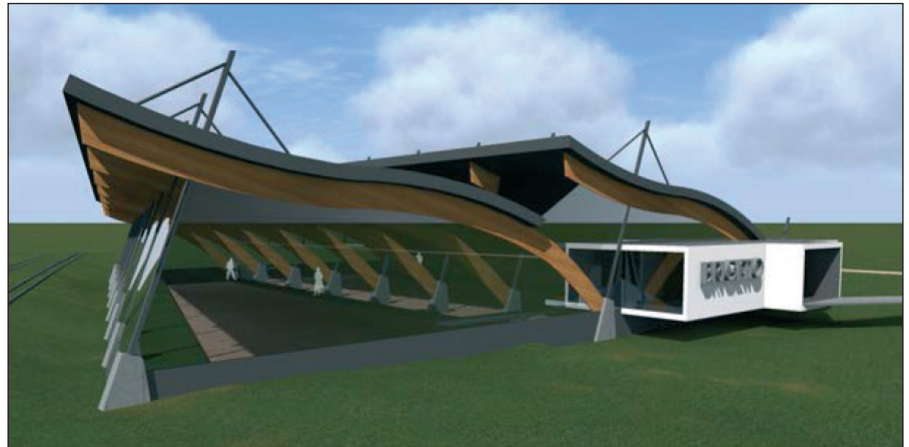


Fig. 2: One version of the design plan for the visitors centre in Komárom
(Source: József Siklósi, Municipal Head Architect, Komárom)

were processed, including the research of Zsolt Visy², which listed more than 320 Roman remains along the Hungarian section of the Danube. In 2009, Hungary named its section a tentative World Heritage site under the designation ‘Frontiers of the Roman Empire – Ripa Pannonica in Hungary’. The site contained 198 elements, including 34 sections of the limes road. During the course of the project, nomination dossier and a management plan were prepared, which contained the written description and cartographic data for 121 sites and sites complexes (more than 160 archaeological sites within the territory of 64 towns). The data from the sites were placed in an archaeological-GPS database, uniform documentation was prepared for all of the sites based on the field walks and aerial archaeological and geophysical research, and a core area and buffer zone were determined for every site.³

The law on the World Heritage (Act LXXVII of 2011) came into force on 1 January 2012, after this project had been completed. This law stipulated that only listed or scheduled protected areas could be World Heritage or tentative World Heritage sites. In other words, national-level protection is necessary for nomination, and originally was only true for about a third of the archaeological sites (the other sites had the status of being registered). In 2012, a group proposal for protection was completed, and 71 limes sites were placed under protection between 2013 and 2015, with a further 26 added in December of 2016. The publication of the decrees for protection, as well as the ministerial decree on the List of Tentative World Heritage Sites provided renewed momentum to the efforts: in 2014 the Hungarian Limes Association completed the cultural tourism preparatory plan for the planned World Heritage site; and in 2015/16 state funding was made available for supplementary verification on certain sites, geophysical surveying and test excavations on a few sites. It was possible to clarify which sites would be nominated on the basis of the results of this work. Their qualification for nomination was also influenced by the fact that while the given sites did not have to contain visible or exhibited remains on the surface, it was necessary to provide clear measures for the long-term preservation of the remains, ensure the ability to research them and afford future visitors access to the sites. These considerations significantly influenced the selection of sites to be nominated. The international system of stipulations and the UNESCO requirements had also become stricter, and as a result of this the previous principle of ‘nominating as many sites as possible’ could not be upheld. The earlier nomination documentation had to be reworked and a methodology had to be elaborated for selecting sites that took into account the considerations of significance/accessibility and ability to exhibit/long-term sustainability. On the basis of the more recent research and the aforementioned considerations, the number of sites (site ensembles) to be nominated was reduced significantly, to 67 sites.

² Visy, Zsolt: *The Ripa Pannonica in Hungary* (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 2003).

³ Fejérdy, Tamás – Visy, Zsolt – Máté, Zsolt (ed, trans. Horton, Charles): *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: Ripa Pannonica in Hungary (RPH) Nomination Statement* Vol. 1–2 (Budapest: National Office of Cultural Heritage, 2011).

To continue the project, a governmental resolution was necessary to confirm support for the nomination of the limes tentative site onto the World Heritage List. This was provided in September of 2016. The updating of the nomination documentation continued and the first draft of the reworked management plan was completed. The governmental resolution also included funding to bring the sites into a condition necessary for nomination (improvement of access, landscaping, placement of bilingual informational boards, interpretation of underground remains, conservation of surviving remains, modernization of exhibitions, and interpretation of the more significant sites through a visitors centre). On the basis of this, proposals can be submitted in 2017 to two operative programs for the development of tourism at the sites, which will serve the above objectives. Within the framework of this, improvements of varying degrees may take place at about twenty sites, such as in Komárom, where the building complex excavated between 2014 and 2016 on the site of the *Brigetio canabae* will be exhibited (Fig. 2).

Although there will be multifunctional buildings to serve visitors at only a few locations, numerous selected sites will not only have their excavated and conserved towers, fortification walls and corner or gate towers displayed, but through landscaping and the indication of internal paths the structure of the given tower, fortress or late Roman fortification will become visible. On the model of the Dunakömlőd presentation, modern methods will be used to create a volumetric reconstruction that indicates the size of the original tower as well (Fig. 3).

Following the submission of the nomination proposal, these planned developments will also serve to convince the experts from ICOMOS, who will be evaluating the nomination, that the limes in Hungary will be a worthy inclusion in the ‘Frontiers of the Roman Empire’ World Heritage group of sites. The planned date for the submission of the Hungarian nomination is January of 2018. We would like to submit the documentation together with the Slovakian party and with the Austrian/Southern German section. Prior to submission of the nomination, numerous domestic and international negotiations must be conducted. UNESCO recommended a transparent nomination strategy for the affected countries, and furthermore has ordered the preparation of a thematic study on the entire limes (stretching more than 7,500 km over three continents within 18 countries). The ten countries concerned in the European nominations have conducted negotiations several times in recent years on these issues, the most recent being the workshop/conference held in Budapest on January 10th–11th, where a decisive breakthrough was reached. The States Parties and the representative of ICOMOS agreed that the European Frontiers of the Roman Empire should be extended in three more units as independent nominations. The section affecting Hungary is within the territory of the Danube limes area; however, due to

this area’s 2,000 km length, it can be submitted in two parts. The first part stretches from Ingolstadt in Germany to the Hungarian–Croatian border. Since the countries who are concerned in this, Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary, have almost completely prepared their World Heritage proposals, all obstacles have been removed for the unified nomination to be submitted in January of 2018. If the planned schedule can be kept, then the expected date for inscription on the World Heritage List is the summer of 2019. If this comes to pass, then those interested will be able to visit a ninth World Heritage site in Hungary at that point.



Fig. 3: Paks-Dunakömlőd-Sánc-hegy, reconstruction indicating the northern wall of the fort and the gate tower (Photo: Zsolt Visy)