

THE CEMETERY OF THE ROMAN VICUS AT BUDAÖRS

Studies in archaeology

PAULA ZSIDI

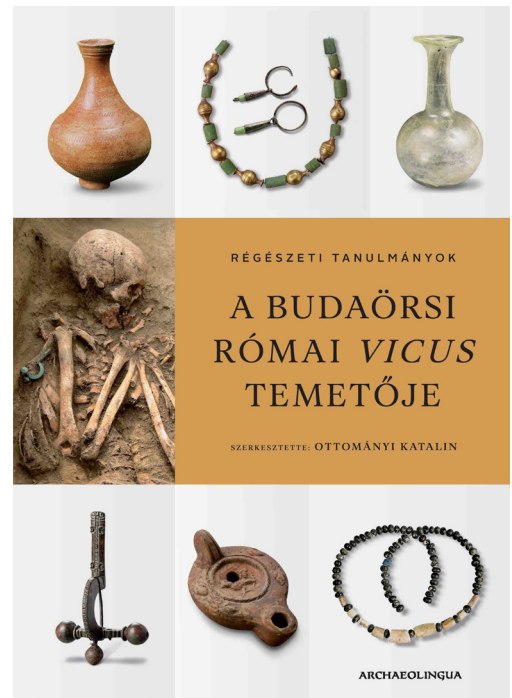
Editor: Katalin Ottományi

Authors: Katalin Boruzs, Gabriella Delbó, Mónika Merczi, Zsolt Mráv, László Rupnik, Nikoletta Sey

*Publisher: Archaeolingua Publishing
Budapest, 2016*

The latest volume of archaeological studies edited by Katalin Ottományi presents to research the finds from the Roman cemetery discovered at Budaörs. As the title indicates, the book continues the series of major publications on Roman cemeteries authored by István Bóna, Ágnes Salamon and László Barkóczi, Eszter Szőnyi and Judit Topál, and the most recent previous publication in the series by Márta Kelemen and Róbert Müller. But this volume is not a monograph but rather a collection of studies. The larger part of it consists of chapters arranged in a logical sequence that were written by the editor, who was also a field archaeologist at the site, which take the reader from the topography of the cemetery through descriptions of individual graves to the summary that closes the analytical chapters. The second part of the volume features archaeological studies—by six other authors—that analyse specific parts of the material from the cemetery as independent units. The majority of the specialist authors of those papers (Mónika Merczi, Zsolt Mráv, László Rupnik and Nikoletta Sey) had already participated in processing the material from the Budaörs *vicus* and have published on it previously. Those experts are now joined by two authors of new analyses, Katalin Boruzs and Gabriella Delbó. The only thing that readers may miss, given that the summary evaluation of the cemetery is featured before the studies, is a final summary of the findings of the studies at the end of the volume.

The scientific community had great expectations of this book, as the site has a number of extraordinary features that elevate it above the range of similar sites. It is a rare and lucky circumstance in archaeological research that in this instance, the settlement that the cemetery had belonged to is also known. As Dénes Gabler wrote in the introduction, “it is the dream of all archaeologists, regardless of the historical era they investigate, to have the opportunity to excavate, or at least find, the cemetery belonging to the habitation they research”. In the case of the Roman era, the locations of cemeteries belonging to larger towns and larger military installations, built to a rigorous plan, are usually known to research, though they may only be partially explored. The situation is more difficult in the case of the civilian, village-type settlements of the era (*vici*), where the smaller numbers of inhabitants and the less stringent rules applicable to settlement design mean that finding a complete settlement complex is much less likely. Although a relatively large proportion of the cemeteries of Pannonia are currently known, over 130 civilian *vici* have been identified (Szilvia Bíró, *Die zivilen Vici in Pannonien [Civilian Vici in Pannonia]*, Mainz, 2017), the Roman *vicus* at Budaörs is still an exceptional site due to its extent and degree of exploration. Some 50m north of the find, excavated from an area of 19,000 hectares and containing approximately 2200 objects, the cemetery of the settlement’s residents, containing almost fifteen hundred graves, has also been found. Fortunately, practically the entire area of the settlement and the cemetery have been excavated as parts of a single archaeologi-



cal season. In Hungary, the 10 to 12 years between the excavation itself and the appearance of publications can be considered quite brief.

It is a further unique feature of the site that in today's Hungary, it is the only known Roman-Age settlement for which both the *pagus* and the *vicus* designations are known. The data were preserved on an altar stone erected for Terra Mater, found in 2002, according to which the cemetery had belonged to the *vicus Teuto* settlement in *pagus Herculus*, within the territory of Aquincum. The vicus was an integral part of the network of settlements around Aquincum: it was located along one of the province's internal trade routes.

The 13,000 square metre area of the cemetery, which covers a curved hillside and is enclosed on all four sides, yielded 449 Roman era graves, most of which also contained grave goods. The cemetery was used continuously from the time of Flavius until the 4th or 5th century and, in comparison with known urban cemeteries, it features many fewer overlapping graves and grave robberies, 90% of which were identified in the late Roman section of the cemetery. It was that latter characteristic that has permitted tracking the centuries-long process of the transformation of the population within the cemetery based on rites and grave goods traditions; as the author put it: "how the native Eraviscian population was transformed into a Romanized population, and also how the two populations cohabited for an extended period in the middle third of the 2nd century". In addition to the objective data describing the graves (items found, orientation, superposition), the author also deduced dates from that data, which then formed the basis for the later cemetery analysis. The deduced temporal sequence of the graves shows that the smallest number of graves, the Eraviscian ones, originated from the early period of the cemetery, with a larger number in the part of the cemetery associated with a Romanized population, and the most intense use characterising the late Roman period. The chronology of the vicus also bears out those conclusions quite well.

The chapter analysing the social stratification of the cemetery is important and primarily interesting from the methodological point of view. In addition to the data from inscribed stones, the quantity and quality of grave goods (including precious metal items) were also subjected to statistical analysis, along with grave shapes and dimensions, to produce a sort of sociological survey. The analysis of the material indicates that the agglomeration of the province's main town was a favoured location for the homes of both urban officials and veteran soldiers from encampments along the *limes*. The author has also attempted to use this method in estimating the numbers of people belonging to the elite of the vicus in individual periods. Based on the analyses, the author estimates the elite to have amounted to 37% of the total population in all three periods, which seems to be quite a high proportion. A more nuanced definition of the 'elite' may render the picture more accurate. As regards the Eraviscian tribal elites, Zsolt Mráv's related study draws a number of new conclusions from a detailed description and analysis of the horse and dog graves and burials from the cemetery. The finds from the Budaörs cemetery have made it clear that the native tribal elite lived in villages among the village population, and that horse and carriage graves were frequent not only in the marginal parts of the area inhabited by the Eravisci, but also throughout the area. At the same time, it is a remarkable fact that where carriages were buried along with horses in harness, no human burials clearly associated with those graves were found at all, which may furnish additional information toward understanding the ritual background and practices.

The cemetery publication is supplemented with the studies that process and analyse some important object types and the anthropological material independently. Katalin Boruzs examined the glass and glass paste jewellery grave goods. In her summary, she emphasised the significance of the proximity of Aquincum, the principle town of the province, in trade relations. As regards their workmanship and materials, the Roman era ceramic vessels recovered from the cemetery match those found in the area of the vicus. However, the graves contained a lower proportion of imported items than among the finds from the settlement. In contrast, the analysis of the composition and dates of bronze objects found a similar distribution to the items from the settlement. In his review of the iron items from the cemetery, László Rupnik found that the personal effects, tools and clothing accessories had the same distribution and general characteristics as found elsewhere. He noted a particular grave from the cemetery with a wealth of iron tools, suggesting that it may be the grave of an ironworker, and also made an interesting observation in relation to the period

grouping of iron knives. Mónika Merczi analysed more than fifty fibulae, comparing the material from the cemetery with the items from the settlement. Her work revealed that only a third of the fibula types used at the settlement were also found in the graves, while there were some types that were only present in the cemetery. The indication is that the clothing pins used for burials were generally those used on everyday dress, but some types were preferred during burials. The ability to date the fibulae among the grave goods eliminated dating uncertainties associated with the material from the settlement in several cases. The analysis of the anthropological material will also serve as an important starting point for comparisons with material from other cemeteries.

The 272 pages of data and analysis on the finds, containing 1403 footnotes, 97 photos, 77 figures and 60 tables, is completed by an extensive DVD supplement. The disc features maps, further tables, charts, catalogues of objects, drawings and photos of excavations and drawings of individual objects. The rich illustrative material supplies solid documentation and support for the author's conclusions and increases the value of the material as a whole as a resource.

The volume is not only valuable because it concerns a cemetery that was in use throughout the centuries of the Roman era, that has been excavated almost in its entirety and in context, offering detailed information on variations in burial rites, material culture and transformations of society and the population. The book's significance is increased still further by the fact that, together with the existing publication about the settlement at Budaörs, it constitutes a truly complete settlement structure, an entire research unit, which can be expected to yield further studies for a long time.