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## EVERYDAY-LIFE ON THE PANNONIAN LIMES: HOUSES AND THEIR INNER DECORATION IN ROMAN BRIGETIO (KOMÁROM/SZŐNY, HUNGARY)

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**B**rigetio, currently known as Komárom/Szőny in Hungary, was one of the 4 legionary fortresses situated on the Danubian limes of the Roman province of Pannonia. The military complex was partially excavated in the first half of the 20th century, but the civilian settlement was archaeologically wholly untouched until 1992. This means, apart from the nearly 300 Latin inscriptions which belong to the approximately 400 years of Roman history of Brigetio and give important information on the administrative, religious, civilian, and military life of this town, we had absolutely no archaeological data on what this settlement looked like. The excavations that were started nearly 20 years ago have brought new light not only on the general system of the Roman municipium (insulae, streets and alleys, water and wastewater systems, houses and courtyards, public buildings), but also on their particular features. One of the most important discoveries of the excavations are the abundant wall paintings of very high quality from the middle of the 3rd century AD, which represent interesting symbolic themes, for example of time and space on a ceiling of a dining-room, or the representation of a feast on a wall painting. In addition, Dionysian themes appear which, together with the stucco-decoration of the side walls, are very impressive. On the basis of these discoveries, we can state that Brigetio, in spite of the fact that it was situated on the periphery of the Empire, in the north-eastern corner of the frontier of the Imperium Romanum, did not lack high-quality productions of Roman art.

**Keywords:** Pannonia, Brigetio, municipality, Roman houses, painted vault and wall, Andromeda, Pegasus, Four Seasons, feast, iconography

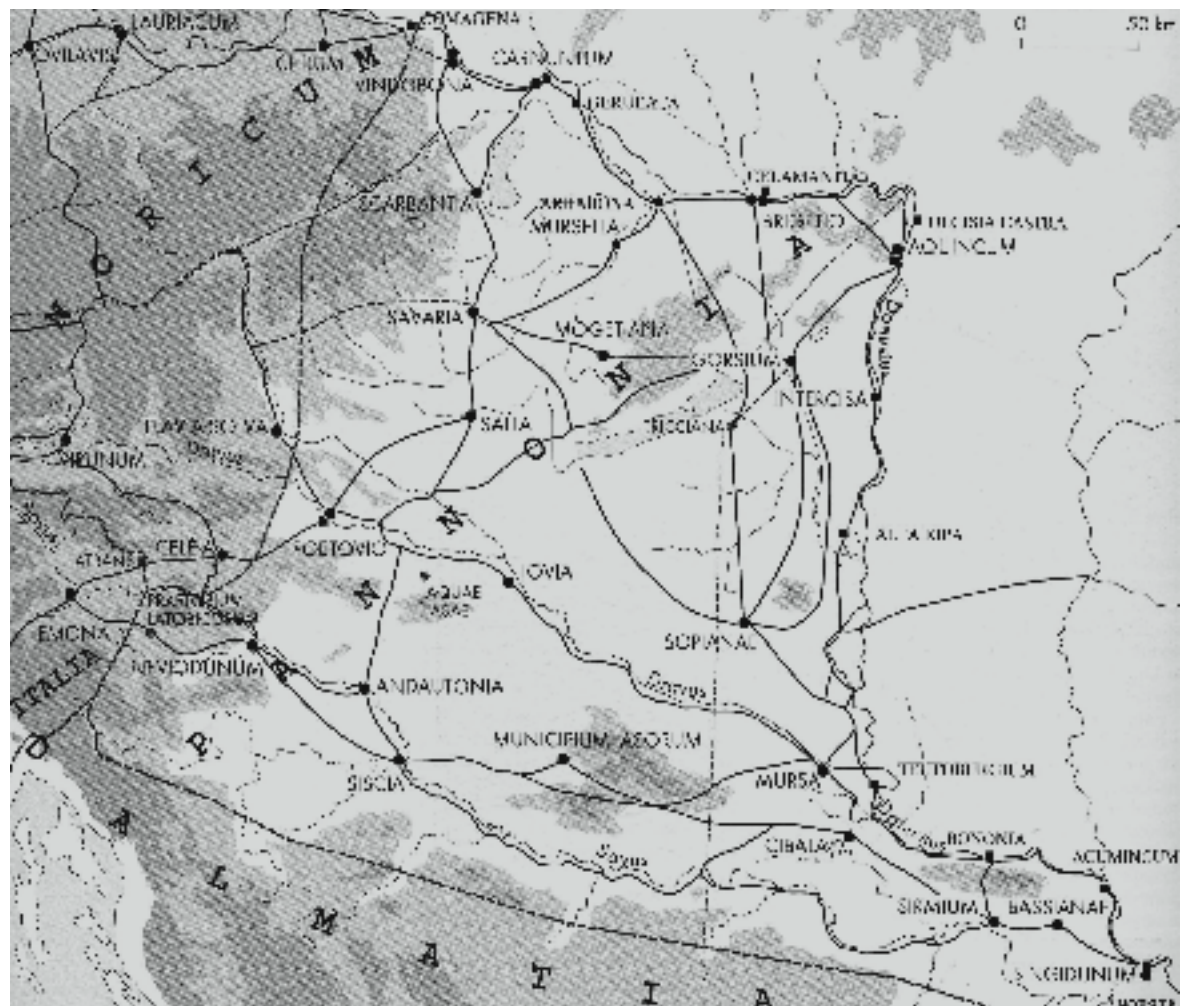
The name of *Brigetio* (fig. 1), one of the four Roman legionary fortresses in Pannonia, today's Komárom at the southern bank of the Danube in the north-western Hungary, has always been well known in the illegal market of antique art as an enormously rich site of small objects like coins, gems, jewels, glasses and ceramics. This is the result of two facts: first, Brigetio was an extended and rich Roman settlement, comprising three different agglomerations (legionary fortress, *canabae* and *municipe*), second, there had been only non sys-

tematic archaeological excavations in Brigetio until the beginning of the 1990-ies<sup>1</sup>.

In the course of the gradual occupation of the territory from the south of the later province Pannonia since the Emperor Augustus, by the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Brigetio had become a Roman military base at the fluvial border of the Roman Empire. At the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD the stone fortress of the *legio I Adiutrix* was established to defend the frontier of the Roman Empire between *Aquincum* (today's Budapest

<sup>1</sup> The Project is supported by the European Union and co-financed by the European Social Fund (grant agreement no. TAMOP 4.2.1/B-09/1/KMR-2010-0003); History of the excavations in Brigetio: I. Paulovics 1941; L. Barkóczi 1944–1951; E. Számadó 1997; L. Borhy 1994; L. Borhy 1999; L. Borhy 2004c; L. Borhy 2006; L. Borhy 2006a. Indigenous populations (*Azalii*) of the territory of Brigetio: L. Borhy 1994; CIL IX 5363; A. Mócsy 1962, p. 608; *AnnÉp* 1937, nr. 138. Military history of Brigetio: B. Lőrincz 1975; J. Rajtár 1992; L. Borhy 1998; L. Borhy 2005; L. Borhy – E. Számadó 2003a; L. Borhy – E. Számadó 2003b. Religious life of Brigetio: F. Láng 1911; RIU 377. Roman industry in Brigetio: É. Bónis 1977; É. Bónis 1979. History of Brigetio L. Borhy 2001, pp. 12–17; L. Borhy 2004c; L. Borhy 2006a.

fig.1 Map of Roman Pannonia with Brigetio (after M. Šašel Kos, P. Scherrer (eds.), *The Autonomous Towns of Noricum and Pannonia. Pannonia II. Situla 42*, Ljubljana 2004, p. 9)



in Hungary), the base of the *legio II Adiutrix* and *Carnuntum* (today's Bad-Deutsch Altenburg in Austria), the base of the *legio XIII Gemina*. The legionary fortress was surrounded by a military town (*canabae*). Many of the inhabitants of the *canabae* became members of the city council *ordo decurionum* in the civilian settlement, situated 3 km to the West from the military town. This civilian settlement became *municipium*<sup>2</sup> and *colonia*<sup>3</sup> in a relatively late period, during the late-Severian dynasty. Right after this period began the decline of this formerly flourishing settlement, which had always been exposed to the attacks of the Barbarians (*Quadi* and *Marcomanni*) living on the northern bank of the Danube in today's Slovakia. The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the whole 4<sup>th</sup> century were characterized by continuous attacks from the north. By that time the civilian settlement probably had already been abandoned. The last reference to Brigetio in antique sources comes from Ammianus Marcellinus, who describes the visit of the Emperor Valentinianus I to Pannonia through his campaign against the *Quadi*. In November 375 he stopped in Brigetio to discuss the conditions of a peace treaty

with the Quadian legates, who infuriated him so much that he died of a stroke a few days later, on November 15<sup>th</sup>, in the legionary fortress<sup>4</sup>.

In comparison to *Aquincum* or to *Carnuntum*, *Brigetio* has a relatively short history of research. Some archaeological excavations were started in the territory and the vicinity of the legionary fortress as late as the 20-ies and 30-ies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were interrupted by World War 2. Apart from some occasional rescue-excavations, until the beginning of the 1990-ies there had been no systematic excavations in Brigetio. Since 1992 excavations have been managed by the Department of Classical and Roman Provincial Archaeology of the University Eötvös Loránd in Budapest in cooperation with the Museum Klapka György in Komárom. The newly started explorations in the centre of the civilian settlement have quickly brought their first and important results: in 1996, i.e. four years after the beginning of the excavations, a new archaeological museum was founded, established exclusively from the findings that our excavations had brought to light.

We were able to determine that as early as the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. the houses (fig. 2) had

<sup>2</sup> CIL III 11007 = RIU 450: *municipium Brigetionensium Antoninianum*.

<sup>3</sup> CIL III 4335 = RIU 604; CIL III 4353 = RIU 740: *colonia Brigetionensium*.

<sup>4</sup> Amm. Marc. 30. 5. 15-6. Notice: Latin authors will be abbreviated after *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, Greek authors after H. G. Liddle - R. Scott: *Greek English Lexicon*.



fig. 2 Ground-plan of the excavations in the centre of the civilian settlement of Brigetio (1992-2010) (drawing by Linda Dobosi)

been equipped with heating systems (*hypocaustum*) (fig. 3), that a regular network of the streets (fig. 4) in the municipality had been established, separating the *insulae* and the *domi* of the city. The east-west extension of the first *insula* is approximately 50 m, the limits of the north-south extension are not known precisely. The houses inside the *insulae* had been separated by arrow alleys (*angiportus*). In the northern part of the houses there had been the living parts, in the southern tracts we found extended courtyards with economic and

partially agricultural purposes (fig. 5). In 2009 we excavated a perfectly preserved cellar (fig. 6), this year we found some traces of a sewage system (fig. 7).

From the diverse, multicoloured material of the excavations I would like to present one segment, the inner decoration of the houses, i.e. the wall-paintings, which have become our most important profile in the last 20 years, confirming that real high-quality Roman art was present even in this very north-eastern edge of the Roman Empire<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Generally: L. Borhy 2006.

fig. 3 Detail of the heating system (hypocaustum) in one of the houses (photo by L. Borhy, 1995)



fig. 4 Detail of a street in the centre of the civilian settlement of Brigetio, the western limit of the 1st insula (photo by L. Borhy, 1998)



fig. 5 System of courtyards in the southern tract of the houses in the 1st insula in the centre of the civilian settlement of Brigetio (photo by L. Borhy, 2008)

fig. 6 A completely preserved cellar, with traces of the staircase in the northern wall (photo by L. Borhy, 2009)



fig. 7 Detail of the sewage in one of the courtyards of a house in the centre of the civilian settlement of Brigetio (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)

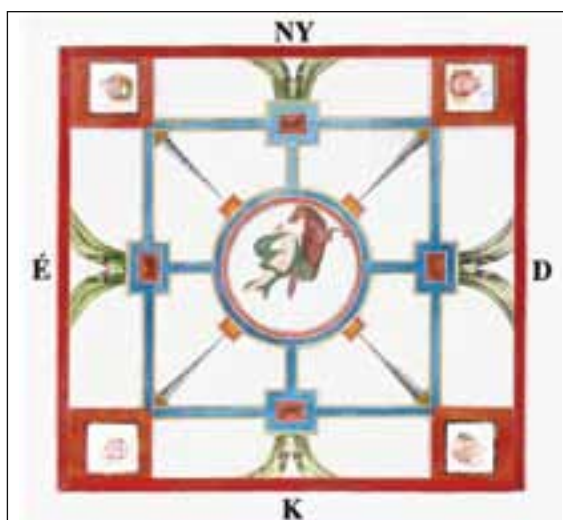


fig. 8 The painted vault in the exhibition of the Klapka György Museum in Komárom (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)

fig. 9 Reconstruction drawing of the painted vault (drawing by E. Harsányi and Zs. Kurovsky)



fig. 10 Reconstruction of the room with the painted vault (drawing by E. Harsányi and Zs. Kurovsky, computer animation by Z. Fuchs)

fig. 11 The central motif of the vault (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)

## The cosmological vault<sup>6</sup>

In the years between 1994 and 1996 a coherent surface of bigger and smaller fragments of wall-paintings in the house Nr. I, in Rooms Nr. 1. and 2. was uncovered. Although the fragments were found in two different rooms, they belonged - as we were able to determine in the course of the restorations, in the summer of 1998 - to the same surface, i.e. to the barrel-vault of room Nr. 1. (figs. 8, 9, 10)<sup>7</sup>.

In the middle of the vault (fig. 11) on the white surface there is a circular motif (diameter: 160 cm), surrounded by a blue (outside) and a red (inside) circle. In the middle of this composition there is a half-nude female figure and a depiction of a horse. The body of the woman and that of the horse are partially covered by the same green drapery, which floats behind the woman's back. The horse is depicted while galloping, in an unusual position, from below: in this position

the disagreeable sight of the genitals is covered by the same green drapery which covers the woman's body. The head of the horse is turned backwards, facing the woman, who is holding the horse by its bridle.

In the four corners of the vault there are four female busts (figs. 12a, b, c, d): they are the personifications of the Four Seasons (*Horae*). In the middle of each side of the vault we can see a panther upon a red surface, each of them running to the right. Below them there are four symmetrically opened green curtains, corresponding in colour and pattern to that of the drapery which covers the bodies of the woman and the horse. Below this motif a red stripe runs along all four sides of the vault: this is the closing motif of the vault, beneath which the vertical walls of the room begin.

The key to the interpretation of this unique representation lies in the personification of the Four Seasons<sup>8</sup>. Topologically they belong to the "female portrait-busts", wearing fruit in the hair as attributes corresponding

<sup>6</sup> The wall-paintings were excavated between 1994-1996. The restoration was done by Eszter Harsányi and Zsófia Kurovsky.

<sup>7</sup> L. Borhy 2001 and L. Borhy et alii 2010 (catalogue of wall-paintings from the excavations in Brigetio since 1992 in the Klapka György Museum).

<sup>8</sup> L. Abad Casal 1990; Ch. Bauchhens-Thüriedl 1999; Th. Heinze 1998; D. Parrish 1984; M. Schleiernacher 1991.

fig. 12 The personification of the  
Four Seasons  
(photos by L. Borhy, 2010)

- a Springtime (Ver)
- b Summer (Aestas)
- c Autumn (Autumnus)
- d Hiems (Winter)



to each season. The fragmentary head of “Springtime” (Ver) wears a flower-wreath, that of “Summer” (Aestas) is crowned by wheat, while from the hair of “Autumn” (Autumnus) bunches of grapes are hanging. Since the fourth season, “Winter” (Hiems), due to climatic conditions cannot be represented by agricultural produce, her attribute is a scarf, covering her head. In keeping with the antique sources describing the Four Seasons, they are young and beautiful, with pinkish skin, wearing golden earrings decorated with a pearl<sup>9</sup>.

The personifications of the Four Seasons are present both in the official imperial art and in the personal sphere. In the official art they emphasise the security of the Empire and its citizens. In the late antiquity they had acquired a rather allegorical meaning, which can be explained with the aid of the central pages of the *Notitia Dignitatum*<sup>10</sup>: the allegorical representation of

the *Divina Electio* is decorated on its four corners by the personification of the Four Seasons, which provide a visual representation of the eternal existence of the immovable Roman Empire. Their position, function and importance correspond exactly to those of the Four Imperial Virtues (*Scientia rei militaris*, *Virtus*, *Auctoritas*, *Felicitas*) on the opposite page, symbolising the *Divina Providentia*. In the personal sphere, i.e. in mosaics, on painted sidewalls, ceilings or vaults - depicted mostly in *triclina* - the Four Seasons represent the wealth of the householder<sup>11</sup>.

But what could the representation of the Four Seasons on the vault of Brigetio mean?<sup>12</sup> Are they merely - but still ideal - corner decorations, do they symbolise the immovable security of the eternal Roman Empire, or do they simply show off the wealth of the householder? As we will see, none of the above. Regarding

<sup>9</sup> Q. Smyrn. 1. 50-51., 4. 135.; Pollux 8. 106.; Anth. Pal. 5. 70. 1-2.; Nonn., Dion. 11. 487., 47. 90.; Ov., Met. II. 25-30.

<sup>10</sup> ND Or. XLV; P. C. Berger 1981, pp. 134-141, figs. 44-45; C. Neira Faleiro 1997, pp. 40-42; L. Borhy 2003, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> H. Brandenburg 1968, pp. 62-64; D. Parrish 1984, p. 13; D. Parrish 1995; E. Schwinzer 1979, pp. 87-90; M. Schleiernacher 1991, pp. 213-218.

<sup>12</sup> L. Borhy 2002; L. Borhy 2004; L. Borhy 2007 with detailed Latin and Greek sources.

the surface of the vault on which the Four Seasons are depicted, we can see the motifs of the four opened curtains on the same level: together with the Four Seasons they guide the viewer's look through the world of thought to a higher sphere, i.e. the sphere of the sky and heaven. This sphere will be separated from the lower, earthly sphere - and from the vertical side-walls - by the red stripe, from which the opened curtain (*katapetasma*)<sup>13</sup> leads through to the curved surface of the barrel-vault. In this sphere the Four Seasons symbolise the cyclical, annual renewal, i.e. the "Year", the abstract idea of which used to be represented in Roman art by a complicated, allegorical and symbolical pictorial language. According to antique sources, the "year" (*annus*) was understood as "space" (*spatium*), in which the "sun" (*Sol*) consumed the "seasons" (*annua tempora*) through its "course" (*cursus*). The best definition can be found in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*: "*Annus ... id spatium ... annua Sol in quo consumit tempora cursu*"<sup>14</sup>. In terms of the antique astrological concepts, the space of the circular motion of the "time" was situated in the heaven.

In antique astrological views, the heaven was a part of the universe. The heaven covered everything. Its highest sphere was called *aither* (ether)<sup>15</sup>. This highest sphere of the sky, the ether, crowns (Cicero: *coronavit*) the universe. In Roman art this sphere is sometimes represented in the form of a circle (*circulus*): the red circle in the middle of the vault of Brigetio can be identified exactly as this highest, most distant part of the universe, i.e. ether (*aither*). This red - fiery - circle (*pyr technikon*)<sup>16</sup> is usually adorned, both inside and outside, with two other unique motifs: outside by a blue circle, which might represent the lower sphere of the sky, in antique sources called *aer*, i.e. air. Inside we can see a kind of wreath, composed of blue and black leaves: this can be identified as the wreath (*corona*) which crowns the universe. And, finally, here, at this very edge of the universe the eternized figures of Greek mythology are situated in the form of fixed stars.

On the vault of Brigetio, in the middle of the red circle - which we identified as a representation of the *aither* - we can see - in accordance with the antique astrological concepts, expressed by Arathos in his *Phainomena* - the highest fixed stars of the northern hemisphere of the sky: *Andromeda* and *Pegasos* (fig. 11)<sup>17</sup>. The iconographical similarity of this composition to the iconography of the Nereids on the back of e.g. sea-horses or on other marine animals is indisputable. The closest parallel to this can be found in *Stabiae*, in the repre-



fig. 13 The figure of Perseus (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)



fig. 14 The Cosmological vault of Cosmas Indicopleustes (Cosm. Ind. Top. Christ. IV. 2.)

sentation of the so-called *Nereide bruna*<sup>18</sup>. How can we explain this unquestionable similarity of *Andromeda* to the *Nereide*? We can find the solution in a partial motif of Greek mythology<sup>19</sup>: *Cassiopeia*, the mother of *Andromeda* (another fixed star herself), compared the beauty of her daughter to that of the *Nereids*, for which *Andromeda* was punished by *Poseidon*, who was himself married to *Apmhitrite*, i.e. to a *Nereide*. *Poseidon* chained *Andromeda* to a rock on the seaside, and gave her to the sea-dragon, *Ketos* (another fixed star in the vicinity). It was because of this parallel that on the vault of Brigetio *Andromeda* was represented, unlike her usual iconography, chained to the rock by hands. I must add that *Andromeda* had been thus captured by *Perseus*, who also became a fixed star as a participant in

<sup>13</sup> J. Wilpert 1916, pp. 300-301, Figs. 91-92.; K. Lehmann 1971, pp. 241-242; p. 256; M. Weber 1990, pp. 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Lucr., *De r. nat.* V. 618-619.

<sup>15</sup> Cic., *De nat. deor.* II. 41; 57.; Sen., *Nat. quaest.* I. 2. 1.: hunc (i.e. circulum) Graeci halo vocant, nos dicere coronam aptissime possumus; Plin., *Nat. hist.* II. 98.: circa solis orbem ceu spicae coronae ... Existunt eadem coronae circa lunam et circa mobilia caeloque inhaerentia. See further A. Le Boeuffle 1987, p. 106.: s.v. Corona.

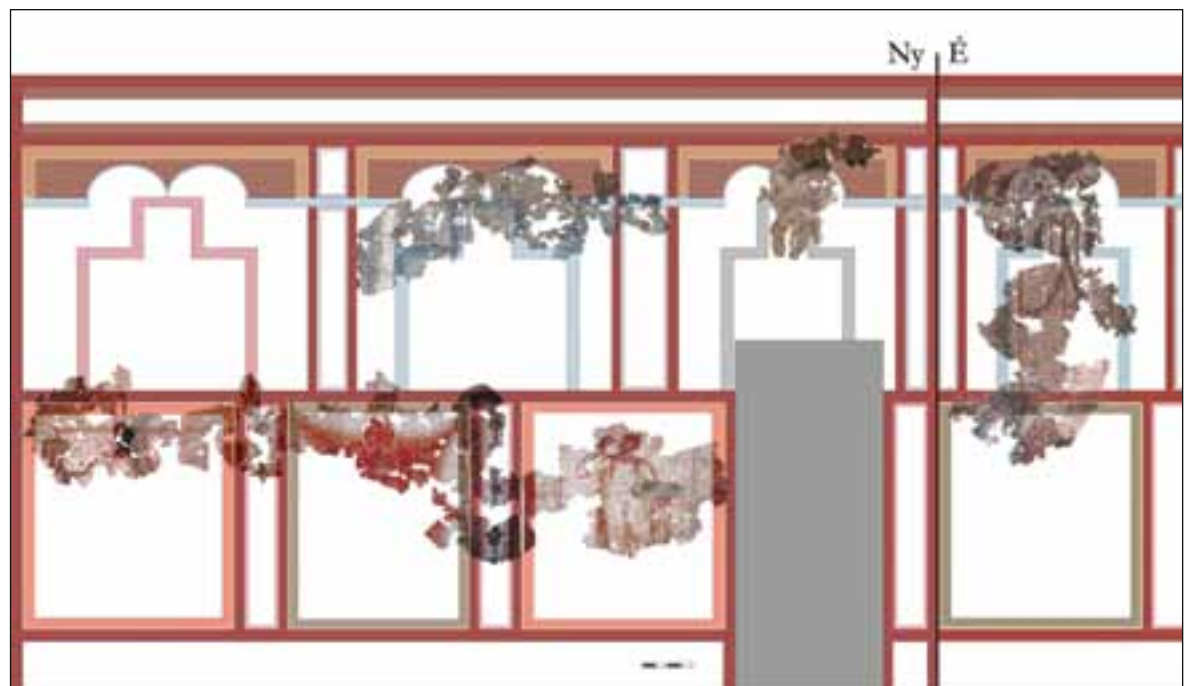
<sup>16</sup> Cic., *De nat. deor.* II. 41; 57.

<sup>17</sup> Manil., *Astronom.* V. 616.: hic dedit *Andromedae* caelum; Ov., *Fasti.* V. 114.: illa (i.e. *Capella*) dati caelum praemia lactis habet; Claudianus 28. 20-21.: *Caelicolae cum celsa tenent summoque feruntur / Cardine nec radios... recordunt.* Cf. Ps.-Arist., *De mundo* 399a, 28ff.; G. M. A. Hanfmann 1951, p. 109. *Arat.*, *Phainom.* 485-486.; Avien., *Arat.* 459-469. *Stars on the northern hemisphere of the sky:* F. Boll - W. Gundel 1924-1937, pp. 869-934. Manil., *Astronom.* 2. 35-36.: ... astra / aethera per summum ... fixa; cf. the position of *Andromeda* at Manil., *Astronom.* 1. 614-617.; 5. 656-657.

<sup>18</sup> O. Elia 1957, pp. 66f.

<sup>19</sup> Ov., *Met.* V. 1-235.; G. P. Goold 1959, pp. 11-12.; K. Schauenburg 1981; Eratosth., *Cat.* 15., 16., 17., 22., 36.

fig. 15 Reconstruction drawing of the wall-painting with the representation of a feast (drawing by E. Harsányi and Zs. Kurovsky)



this story: we excavated a fragment of the ceiling (fig. 13) probably representing *Perseus* from the neighbouring room (i.e. room Nr. 2.) of the same house of *Brigetio*. However, let us return to our central motif, i.e. the iconographical identification of the horse as *Pegasos*. Two facts are helpful: first, that of the representation of the golden harness (*chrysampyx chalinus*) - correspondig to *Pindaros'* XIIIth Olympic Ode<sup>20</sup> - which was given to *Bellerophon* by *Athena Chalinitis* to help him capture *Pegasos*, and second, that of the representation of *Pegasos* in a very unusual position, viewed from below, as a star (fig. 11).

The circular motif in the middle of the barrel-vault has close parallels in architecture: circular openings on domes, called *opaion* in Greek or *oculus* in Latin. The hemispherical dome the cross-section of which forms a semicircle used to express since the time of *Nero* and *Hadrian* - according to ancient beliefs - the perfect form of the universe.<sup>21</sup>

The drawing of *Cosmas Indicopleustes* in his *Topographia Christiana* (fig. 14)<sup>22</sup>, which expresses his ideas about the shape of the universe with the aid of a particular, rectangular room-like drawing can be added to this series of decorations and descriptions of vaults and domes. This space - called by *Cosmas oikos* and *tholos* - is evidently closed above by a barrel-vault (called *kamara*, *kamaroeides*), thus representing the universe (called by him *Ouranos*). In *Cosmas'* world the heaven is depicted with golden stars on a dark blue surface, a representation also well-known from Late Roman or Early Byzantine dome mosaics.<sup>23</sup>

In both cases (figs. 10; 14) we can observe the limits of the representation, the depiction of domes with the aid of artistic methods: while the illusionistic dome of *Brigetio* is depicted on a barrel-vault as a horizontally laid out *tholos*, in *Cosmas* the same dome is represented in the form of a room, covered above by a barrel-vault, explained by controversial terminology as *oikos*, but also as *tholos*, dome-like covered (*kamaroeides*). In the words of *K. Lehmann*: "All these expressions of the systematic Byzantine mind. But the basic idea of this vision of an intellectualized and spiritualized heaven on the dome, like that of many of its individual elements, is clearly rooted in a now aging antique tradition"<sup>24</sup>.

## A wall-painting with the representation of a feast<sup>25</sup>

In the years between 1999 and 2001 we had a rescue-excavation in the garage of the house belonging to *Mrs. Emese Számadó*, Director of the Museum *Klapka György*, which is located right in the vicinity of the excavations in the centre of the civilian settlement of *Brigetio*. In the course of the excavations we discovered four coherent surfaces, which used to decorate the side walls of a peristyle house destroyed by the end of the first third of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>26</sup>.

Although only three of the four surfaces have so far been restored, it is already possible to read the pictorial programme and produce a provisional interpretation.

<sup>20</sup> *Pind.*, *Ol.* XIII. 65.; *M.-H. Quet* 1985, p. 873.

<sup>21</sup> *L. Borhy* 2004a; *L. Borhy* 2004b; *L. Borhy* 2006b; *L. Borhy* 2007; *L. Borhy* 2009. All with detailed further literature and sources.

<sup>22</sup> *Cosm. Ind.*, *Top. Christ.* IV. 2, 3, *W. Wolska* 1962; *W. Wolska-Conus* 1968. Cf. further *B. Hendrickx* 1984, p. 15; *O. A. W. Dilke* 1985, pp. 171-172; *M. J. Suff* 2003.

<sup>23</sup> *Io. Gaz.* II. 29-44, 314-343.; *Paul. Sil.*, *Ekphr.* 308-310, 466-467, 471-472, 481-491, 506-508, 529-530; *Codex Vaticanus Syriacus* 95., fol. 49-50. *P. Friedländer* 1912; *O. Demus* 1947; *A. Dupont-Sommer* 1947; *A. Grabar* 1947; *L. Hautecoeur* 1954; *J. Fink* 1958; *K. Lehmann* 1971; *R. Gulli - G. Mochi* 1997.

<sup>24</sup> *K. Lehmann* 1971, p. 252.

<sup>25</sup> The restoration was done by *Eszter Harsányi* and *Zsófia Kurovsky*.

<sup>26</sup> *L. Borhy et alii* 2010a (cf. the description of the excavations by *E. Harsányi*, *Zs. Kurovsky* and *L. O. Kovács*; interpretation of the architectural circumstances by *Lo. O. Kovács*; iconographical interpretation by *L. Borhy*; interpretation of the clothes by *A. Schieck gen. Paetz* and *J. Pásztokei-Szeőke*; restitution of the decoration system of the side walls by *E. Harsányi* and *Zs. Kurovsky* in it). For the iconography cf. *L. Borhy* 2005a; *L. Borhy* 2007.





fig. 16 The skin of the lioness from the wall-painting with the representation of a feast (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)



fig. 17 The fragmentary painting of skin of the panther from the wall-painting with the representation of a feast (photo by E. Számadó, 2011)



fig. 18 The figure of the first servant holding a bronze vessel (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)



fig. 19 The figure of the second servant holding a silver tray (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)

The surfaces can be divided into two groups (fig. 15). The first consists of animal skins, hanging on the wall: one of a lioness (fig. 16) and that of a panther (fig. 17 – which has been only partly restored). The second group includes two male figures, probably alternatively represented with the animal skins. Both figures are dressed in white clothes, both have dark skin and black, short, curly hair, all of which create a negroid impression. Both are holding something in the hand: the figure on the surface Nr. 1. is probably holding a bronze vessel (fig. 18), the figure on the surface Nr. 3. is holding something flat, a bright blue object, decorated with white pearls along the edge (fig. 19). This object is probably a silver tray. There are three elongated objects lying on it (fig. 20). The figure, which certainly depicts a servant, is lifting up his arm and lowering into his mouth a fourth object of the same kind as those on the silver tray.

Both servants give rise to further questions, i.e. what are they holding in their hands? What can be lying on the silver tray? What is in the bronze vessel? Since one of the four objects is about to be eaten by the servant, we can be fairly certain that the objects must be a kind of food. Another question is, are they of vegetable or animal origin? Regarding the form, they look like small, longish fish, such as small anchovies, young eels<sup>27</sup>. But, if the painter wanted to render, for example, a fish such as an eel, it would have had at least eyes and/or fins. If we consider the representation of sea-animals in Roman



fig. 20 Detail of the silver tray with elongated objects lying on it (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)

art, we can find that such representations were always very specific, that it was always easy to identify them as fish, crabs, or shell-fish. The best example is a mosaic from the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD in Pineda (Vila.seca) exhibited in the Museu Arqueologic in Tarragona, which shows 47 different fishes and crabs each of which can be precisely identified<sup>28</sup>. Even food leftovers can be identified in artistic representations, as on a mosaic in the Vatican, which shows discarded grapes, chicken, crab, parrot-fish, shell-fish, walnut etc<sup>29</sup>.

We can also reject the theory of interpretation of the objects as food of animal origin. The forms and colours of the objects on the silver tray are more important for their identification. If we wanted to give an exact description of the objects, we should say that they are green and white, their white part is lightly swollen, while the green part is elongated. An exact description

<sup>27</sup> Cf. recipes by Apicius: Apic., *De re coq.* 10.2.1-6; Representation of fishes on wall-paintings and mosaics: A. Dosi – F. Schnell, *A tavola con i Romani Antichi*, Roma 1990, pp. 201, 268, 319.

<sup>28</sup> X. Aquilé et alii 1992, p. 98.

<sup>29</sup> E. Moorman 2000, p. 88, fig. 27.

fig. 21 A company,  
eating calçots in Zaragoza  
(Restaurant "La Teja", March 4th,  
2011)



fig. 22 Grilled calçots, served on  
imbrex with a dip in the restaurant  
"La Teja" in Zaragoza, Spain  
(photo by L. Borhy, 2011)



of the same phenomena can be found in Latin poetry, in Martialis, a Spanish poet from Bilbilis in Zaragoza, who sang of all the regional specialties and delicacies of the Roman Empire in his book XIII<sup>30</sup>. There he dedicates his 19<sup>th</sup> epigram to a kind of onion, called *porrus capitatus* (a kind of leek), which he praises as follows: *Mittit praecipuos nemoralis Aricia porros: in niveo virides stipite cerne comas* [in English translation: "The woody Aricia has sent delicious leek: Look at the green leaves on its snow-white back!"]. This literary evidence is identical to the objects represented on the wall-painting, which are certainly these leeks, the *porri capitati*.

However, was this leek so delicious that one would eat it like the servant in the wall-painting at Brigetio? We come closer to the solution if we open the cookery book by Apicius, which will help us realize through his numerous recipes on how to cook and grill the *porrus capitatus*<sup>31</sup> and serve it with different, but always simple dips that this leek wasn't eaten raw. And through this particular detail the unusual posture of the servant's head can be explained: that is to say, boiled or grilled leeks of this kind become so soft in texture that it is impossible to eat them using a hand in any other way than in the posture shown in the wall-painting at Brigetio.

This custom of eating boiled or grilled leek survived antiquity and still exists. Traditionally on the last Sunday of January a big feast, the "*calçotada*" (i.e. "the feast of the *calçots*", a kind of spring-onion) takes place in north-eastern Spain, in Catalonia. This delicious vegetable grows in late winter or early spring and can be eaten only using hands, in the posture like the servant's in the wall-painting of Brigetio (fig. 21a, b, c, d, e)<sup>32</sup>. The Catalan *porrus capitatus* is grilled on a grate (*a la brasa*) and served everywhere, in restaurants and on the street in Catalonia and elsewhere in Spain in springtime. A dip, called "*salsa al romesco*", made of garlic, olive oil and a kind of mayonnaise goes well with the leek (fig. 22): since Apicius probably describes something similar, purely hypothetically can we suppose that such a sauce was in the bronze vessel held by the servant on surface Nr. 1.

And finally, we need to turn our attention to the last particular detail, namely a series of short, 4-5-cm-long wall scratches to the right of the servant's shoulder. Though this surface is mostly fragmentary nevertheless 23 scratches are preserved, and we can add at least 20 more. We can suppose that originally about 40-42 such scratches must have been there. If we remember that

<sup>30</sup> Mart., Ep. XIII.19.

<sup>31</sup> Apic., De re coq. 3.10.1-2.

<sup>32</sup> During my stay at the University of Zaragoza on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 I was invited to eat calçots by Prof. Francisco Marco Simon, whom I'd like to express my thankfulness. These pictures should preserve the memory of this unforgettable event. Cf. further the interview of Ignasi Aragay with the author: Calçots a la romana. Avui, August 6<sup>th</sup> 2008, pp. 38-39.



fig. 23 The scratches on the wall-painting (photo by L. Borhy, 2010)

the four painted surfaces structurally belong together and that both fields with their servants refer thematically to each other, we can at least theoretically suppose that these scratches might have had some reference to the servant holding in his hand a kind of “*salsa al romesco*” in the bronze vessel. To support this hypothesis, let’s consider the “*calçotada*” again. There are various competitions associated with the feast of the spring-onion: a competition in preparing the dip (*concurso de salsa de calçots*), a beauty parade of the *calçots* (*vista de manats de calçots*) with a prize (*primer premi*). Finally, there is also a competition in eating the onions (*concurso de menjar calçots*). The winner gains a huge prestige in his community: his new record, having eaten more than 238 pieces (which corresponds to a weight of more

than 2700 grams), as did a certain Ramon Fores Sans in 2006, will be reported everywhere in the newspapers - and nowadays on the Internet as well. Therefore it is possible to propose that the 40 or so scratches on the wall-painting of Brigetio could be a message from the end of the first third of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD immortalizing such an achievement of somebody having eaten a large quantity of onions in this room. Of course, a certain interpretation of this detail cannot be given, but it is possible to produce an iconographical analysis and a plausible interpretation of the scenes, which can be understood using ancient sources and explained in view of ancient customs probably existing in the Mediterranean since the antiquity.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ActaAntHung	Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae
ActaArchBrig	Acta Archaeologica Brigetionensia
AnnÉp	L'Année Épigraphique
AntTard	Antiquité Tardive
AW	Antike Welt
CahArch	Cahiers Archéologiques
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
DissPann	Dissertationes Pannonicae
FolArch	Folia Archaeologica
KEMÖMK	Komárom-Esztergom Megyei Önkormányzat Múzeumainak Közleményei
KölnJbVFGesch	Kölner Jahrbuch für Vor- und Frühgeschichte
LIMC	Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae
NP	Der Neue Pauly
PACA	Proceedings of the African Classical Associations
PWRE	Pauly-Wissowa, Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft
RA	Revista de Arqueología
RIU	Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns
RQ	Römische Quartalschrift

## SAŽETAK

**SVAKODNEVICA NA PANONSKOM LIMESU: KUĆE I UNUTARNJE UREĐENJE U RIMSKOME BRIGETIJU (KOMÁROM/SZŐNY, MAĐARSKA)**

László BORHY

Brigetio, današnji Komárom/Szőny u Mađarskoj, bio je jedna od 4 legionarske utvrde smještene na dunavskom limesu rimske provincije Panonije. Taj vojni sklop djelomično je iskopan u prvoj polovini 20. stoljeća, ali je civilno naselje bilo u arheološkom smislu netaknuto sve do 1992. Što znači da, osim gotovo 300 latinskih natpisa, koji pripadaju 400-godišnjoj rimskoj povijesti Brigetija i pružaju važne obavijesti o upravnom, vjerskom, građanskom i vojnom životu ovoga grada, nismo imali apsolutno nikakvih arheoloških podataka o tome kako je ovo naselje izgledalo. Prije gotovo 20 godina započeta iskopavanja bacila su novo svjetlo ne samo na opći ustroj rimskoga municipija (insulae, ulice i aleje, sustav vodovoda i odvodnje, kuće i dvorišta, javne zgrade), već također i na osobitosti istoga. Jedno od najvažnijih otkrića predstavlja mnoštvo zidnih slika vrlo visoke kvalitete iz sredine 3. stoljeća po. Kr. koje prikazuju zanimljive teme poput simboličnosti vremena i prostora na stropu jedne blagovaonice, ili prikaz gozbe na jednoj zidnoj slici. Javlja se također i dionizijačke teme, koje su – zajedno sa stucco dekoracijama na bočnim zidovima – vrlo upečatljive.

Na temelju ovih otkrića možemo naglasiti da u Brigetiju, usprkos činjenici da se nalazio na periferiji Carstva, u “sjeveroistočnom kutu” pograničnog područja Imperiuma Romanuma, nije nedostajalo visokokvalitetnih proizvoda rimske umjetnosti.