

THE EARLY AND LATE  
ROMAN RURAL CEMETERY  
AT NEMESBŐD  
(VAS COUNTY, HUNGARY)

Editor in chief

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## Introduction

# The Szombathely – Vát project and the excavation of the Roman cemetery at Nemesbőd

Gábor Ilon

The writer of these lines, as the archaeological project director of the Field Service for Cultural Heritage, and later the regional director of Centre No. 2 at Szombathely, led the rescue excavations at thirteen sites where Main Road 86 was to be widened to four lanes at the sector of Szombathely–Vát (between the 89+250 – 82+270 km sections).

The fieldworks were conducted between 17 July 2008 and 18 May 2009 by myself and my colleagues. Altogether 152,256 m<sup>2</sup> were excavated. The operations were conducted by Ágnes Dobozi (2008-2009) as field director of Sites 1, 3 and 9; Csaba Kálmán Kiss (2008) as director of the test excavations of Sites 2 and 4; Péter Skriba (2008) as field director of Sites 10, 11 and 12; Krisztina Varga (2008), and later Zoltán Basticz (2009) as field directors of Site 13; Ciprián Horváth (2009) as my colleague at Sites 5, 7 and 8; and myself (2008-2009) as field director of Sites 5, 6, 7 and 8.

The work on site was aided by fourteen archaeological technicians and one field-assistant, and by Lajos Sándor who conducted the metal detector survey. The geodetic surveys at the sites and the documentation were prepared under the direction of Zoltán Tóth by Geomontan Kft. (Székesfehérvár). The aerial photos were taken by Gábor Rákóczi. Mechanical and hand excavation was supported by our subcontractors, Leveller Kft. (Kecskemét) and Platina-Bau Kft. (Pécs); this meant the involvement of 5-6 mechanical shovels, 10-14 trucks, 2-3 bulldozers, and 40-90 workers.

On 25 May 2009 – six days before the expiry date of the contract – all of the excavated sites along the whole area of the planned line of the road were handed over to the contractor, National Infrastructure Developing Ltd. – NIF Corp. I should like to mention that the roadworks only began in May 2010, but stopped in the autumn of that same year and had still not continued at the time of the writing of these lines; thus, not a shadow of suspicion can fall on the archaeological excavations that they hindered the construction works. The high level of the archaeological preparation work and the excavations before construction is also justified by the fact that no archaeological site was identified later on during the watching briefs conducted by us while the earthworks were under way and which have now been almost entirely completed along the whole length of the planned road line.

By January 2011, we handed in all the required documentation of the preliminary excavations on the area of the road line

to the National Office of Cultural Heritage (KÖH), the Hungarian National Museum, and the Savaria Museum. In numbers, this corresponds to 1.38 running metres of paper documentation, or 19 DVDs and 6 CDs in digital format. Naturally, the complete material of all the sites has been conserved. This is equivalent to 280.4 ‘M30-type’ crates (20.19 m<sup>3</sup>), and in addition 108 vessels lifted out *in situ* and received by the base at Szombathely. An inventory has been made of the finds and their preliminary study has been accomplished. The geoarchaeological and environmental historical analysis of the samples from the road line were conducted and published by Pál Sümegi and his colleagues.<sup>1</sup>

The present volume is the presentation in monograph form of the excavated part of a Roman cemetery, which is the most significant entity to be found at Site 5 (in the 85+900 – 86+350 km section) along the road line, namely, at Nemesbőd–Általúton kívül-dülő (National Office of Cultural Heritage site registration No. 38574).

The site was excavated under my direction between 6 October – 11 December 2008, and 23 March – 23 April 2009, comprising an area of 23,198 m<sup>2</sup>. Between October and November 2008, nearly 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> was mechanically scraped and researched. We assigned identification numbers to 225 stratigraphic units during this excavation period. We were forced to halt our work due to the changeable, rainy, muddy, and later on the extreme winter weather conditions. In the 2009 period, a further 3,076 m<sup>2</sup> of topsoil was removed and 66 new features were excavated. Thus, altogether 291 stratigraphic units were identified by numbers, which belonged to 273 features. Meanwhile, aerial photographs were taken three times. On site, my colleagues were Gábor Vámos, senior archaeological technician, Hajnalka Hekli, Eszter Móricz and Ferenc Halász archaeological technicians in 2008; Ciprián Horváth archaeologist, Eszter Móricz, Anina Vágusz archaeological technicians, and Ákos Péntes field-assistant made up the team in 2009. The surface uncovered by the removal of the topsoil was surveyed for finds by Lajos Sándor with a metal detector. One of the most beautiful finds he recovered is a lead votive figurine of a goddess. The expert excavating workmen, led by Károly Czékus, were provided by HUSA-31 Kft. (Szeged), the subcontractors of Platina-Bau Kft.

The cemetery can be found north of the former ancient road connecting Roman *Savaria* (today’s Szombathely, Vas

<sup>1</sup>Sümegi *et al.* 2011; Sümegi *et al.* 2011a.

County, Hungary) and *Bassiana* (in the vicinity of today's Sárvár?; Vas County, Hungary), 1,300 m away, on the eastern terrace of the Surányi Stream, ca. 860 m from the watercourse, about 300 m east of the asphalt road leading into the village of Vép. forty-four features (37 graves, 4 structures of unknown function, and three enclosure ditches) were excavated (Fig. 3). The limits of the cemetery can be found in three directions (north, east and west). Among the graves – due to its significance – Grave 4 has already been published.<sup>2</sup> The cremations with enclosure ditches (Graves 5, 6 and 32), which are also early types and unique in the *'territorium'* of *Savaria*, are likewise worth mentioning. From the later burials, the inhumation grave with a crossbow brooch, glass beaker and knife (Grave 40) must be highlighted.

The cemetery is part of a Roman site complex, with a second element that – according to our current knowledge – is an area rather lightly 'inhabited', protected by a palisade on its south side, with an entrance opening towards the cemetery at its south-eastern corner (Figs. 1-2). Its vestiges – pits, ovens, postholes marking surface structures, and most of all: ditches that indicate the periphery of the settlement area – could be found both at the junction of the future Motorway 9 and Main Road 86 to be modernized, and along the line of the road's main lane at Sites 6 (Nemesbőd–Csepregi-

völgyre-dűlő I), 7 (Nemesbőd–Csepregi-völgyre-dűlő II), and 5 to be introduced below. The centre of the supposed *villa rustica* protected by a palisade, its living quarters and main buildings can be somewhere between the future junction of the Main Road 86 still in use, and the road leading to Vép, as its stone and tegula fragments and other portable finds abound on the surface.

The series of new publications of the Roman cemeteries from Vas County<sup>3</sup> expands further with the monograph of this necropolis.

The complete corpus of material found on the site has been permanently deposited at the Savaria Museum (Szombathely).

The present volume, which appears in the Archaeopress Archaeology Series, on the rescue excavations along the line of the new section of Main Road 86 between Szombathely–Vát, is – if you will – the result of the contract signed by National Infrastructure Developing Ltd – NIF Corp. and the Field Service for Cultural Heritage.

The manuscript was closed at the end of 2012.

Kőszeg, 5 September 2012

<sup>2</sup>Fülöp *et al.* 2010.

<sup>3</sup>Répceszentgyörgy: Kiss and Szilasi 2000-2001 [2002]; *Savaria* – Western cemetery: Bíró 2004; Zanat: Bíró 2005 [2006]; Sárvár: Kiss 2007.

# Acknowledgements

Gábor Ilon

In the present volume, my colleagues and I have ventured to publish the finds of a Roman cemetery on the ‘*territorium*’ of *colonia Savaria*.

In my opinion, it is important to make the data that is known about the excavated part of this cemetery quickly available for those interested in the topic, and to provide new information for the study of the cemeteries of *Savaria* and its territory. Therefore, I initially confined the study of this material to Dr Norbert Fülöp Endre, Roman archaeology specialist. Following his advice, I involved Andrea Barta and András Márton, Ph.D. in the project, who are also archaeologists specialized in Roman archaeology.

András Radics, archaeological technician, took upon himself the bulk of the preparation of the catalogue of finds, and the object drawings are also to be credited to him.

This was how the authors of the book assembled; I would hereby like to thank them for their – in my opinion – fast and high quality work.

I would like to express our thanks especially to Dr Dénes Gabler for his advice regarding the study of the Samian ware; and to István Vida and Dr Ferenc Redő, who identified the coins. For providing bibliographical parallels for certain objects I thank Balázs Rikker and Andrea Csapláros.

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The photographs of the objects for publication and the preparation of the plates for print were accomplished by Tibor Takács, archaeological technician and by József Bicskei photographer.

The maps were prepared by my colleague István Eke, archaeologist/GIS specialist, whom I would also like to thank here.

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