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Early Christian Graves in the Western Cemetery of the Military Town in Aquincum, Pannonia

After the Roman conquest of Pannonia with the development of public administration in the new province the Celtic *oppidum* on Gellért Hill as well as the village settled on the foot of the hill (in the section of Budapest called Tabán) continued on living as the *civitas eraviscorum*. North of the settlements of the aboriginal inhabitants, military forts and fortresses were established along the Danube (Bem square as well as Florián square and its environs). In the earliest levels beneath the military town which sprang up spontaneously around the fortresses there can be found cultural levels dating to the Copper Age. During the enormous building operations in the last two decades of the 19th century the remains of past ages, such as the Roman period, have been either uncovered and built in the walls of the new houses or they have been unregarded but completely destroyed. Therefore burials (usually beyond the city boundaries as required by law, cf. Twelve Tables III, Cicero *de leg.* 2, 24, 61) are of especial importance since the grave-goods associated with attire, artefacts of practical use, the grave-markers or - in very fortunate circumstances- the funeral monuments left in their original location, all attest to the age, gender, social rank and time of burial of the deceased. Even tombstones which have been moved from their original locations, sometimes several times before being reused or built into walls, contain valuable information through the names of those who erected them and those to whom they were raised. While it is accepted that the custom of raising inscribed funeral monuments is Mediterranean in origin, the relatively common occurrence of early (i.e. second half of the 1st century) tombstones with Illyrian-Pannonian mainly Celtic Eraviscan aboriginal names on them testify to the rapid, albeit slightly superficial, Romanization of the native population in this area. (Lapidarium Aquincum Inv. nos. 63.10.20, 63.10.110, CIL III 13379). An other part of the early (70-90 AD) tombstones raised over the graves of cavalrymen (close to the St. Margaret bridge) is associated with the *ala* camp which preceded the first legionary fortress. (Lapidarium Aquincum Inv. nos. 63.10.98, 63.10.150, 66. 11. 45).

Under Domitianus (AD 81-96) the *legio II Adiutrix* came to Aquincum and the rapidly developing military

town continued to use this southern cemetery north of the Margaret bridge (Fig. 2, nr. 1) but use of the western cemetery along the Bécsi road (Fig. 2, nr. 2) soon began. This large cemetery stretching more than 2 km south-north (however not continuously) in a 40-200 m wide band was in use up to the end of the 4th century AD. In addition to the cremation graves of the soldiers stationed here and those of their relatives, inhumation burials of the base population which preserve the tribal customs may also be found in the southernmost section of this cemetery (Bécsi út, plots 42-82, BERTIN 1996, 1997, 1999 HABLE-MÁRTON 2000, and westward on the slope of the hill, Kecse u. 25-29, TOPÁL 1996, 1997, Graveyard I, fig. 3.I). Six other graveyards can be distinguished to the north (Bécsi út 98-104=Graveyard II, fig. 3.II, NAGY T. 1943 KABA 1959 TOPÁL 1985, 1991, St Margaret Hospital and its environ=Graveyard III, fig. 3. III, TOPÁL 1984, Bécsi út 203=Graveyard IV, on both sides of the street, fig. 3. IV, TOPÁL 1986, intersection of Bécsi út and Perényi utca=Graveyard V, on both sides of the street fig. 3.V, PARRAGI 1964 TOPÁL-NÉMETH 1981 FACSÁDY 2000, Bécsi út 166-172=Graveyard VI, fig. 3.VI, TOPÁL 1993 FACSÁDY 2000 and Bécsi út 267-9, on the eastern side of the road, Graveyard VII, fig. 3.VII, TOPÁL 1993) which contain 2nd-3rd century cremation burials existing together with 3rd-4th century stone plate, brick or roof-tiles (*egulae*) graves and sarcophagi (among the latest a recently found one which contained the mummified corpse of a four years old girl, Cassia and was inscribed with verse written in hexameter: NÉMETH-TOPÁL 1991, Lapidarium Aquincum Inv.nr. 85. 9. 30). In more than one case we could observe that both cremation and inhumation occurred in one and the same grave-pit. We might rightly assume that in the case of the later burial (*Nachbestattung*) changes in funerary practice within one family took place fairly rapidly. Pliny observes (*Nat. Hist.* VII, 187) that many Roman families, especially the *gens Cornelia* retained inhumation, while others cremated, and Cicero writes (*De leg.* II, 22, 56) that Sulla was the first of the Corneli to be cremated. Nevertheless, far from Rome, groups in the north-eastern area of Pannonia, especially women on the evidence of dress accessories in graves and tomb-

stones tried to protect traditional tribal customs for centuries. All these obviously contradict the widespread assumption that relinquishing cremation and adoption of inhumation is but the result of spreading of Christianity.

Before considering our graveyard in question, something should be said about the general character of Christian burial customs, first of all the denial of cremation in a social surroundings which practise it. The Christians had every reason for preserving the body because they believe in physical resurrection in very literal terms. Let us think of the Gospel account in which it is told that Christ's corpse was anointed with myrrh oil, bound up in linen before laying into his tomb (*John*, 19, 39-42), or the frequent depiction of Lazarus as a body wrapped in bandages is also proof of a contemporary practice of mummification. Equally important was the orienting Christian burials with head to west and facing to east. This custom may have originated from the belief that at the second resurrection Christ would appear from the east. (*Matthew* 24,27). The denial of putting grave-goods near the corpse is not clearly and fully expressed although Christ himself was not provided with any. Nevertheless, from some burials in the Catacombs we can see that grave-goods was permitted in several, mainly female graves, but probably rather as marks of respect than for afterlife use TOYNBEE pp. 190-191.

After the Edict of Patience by Emperor Gallienus (260) the Early Christian communities established legally their separated cemeteries inside the boundaries of the settlements. Limited excavations in the surface cemeteries at Rome show them to consist of earth-graves separated by slabs of stone and roof-tile/brick tombs. Embalming was employed on occasions, more frequently the bodies were bound tightly in a sheet and plastered with lime or gypsum. Except one or two lamps (*lux aeterna*), glass vessels or items of jewellery, no grave-goods were deposited in the graves. TESTINI pp. 85-92.

At St. Matthias, outside Trier, where the grave of Maternus, the bishop of Trier has been identified, the excavation revealed a large number of inhumations contained in stone coffins aligned east-west and rarely accompanied by grave-goods. CÜPPERS pp. 165-174.

North from Trier, beside the road, at St. Maximin's, the burials are enclosed in simple stone and wood coffins with plaster packing (lime or gypsum), occasionally accompanied with grave-goods of 4th century date. EIDEN pp. 359-363. In Trier, at St. Medard, inhumations (and one cremation) were discovered often accompanied by grave-goods, mostly pottery vessels. One of the coffins contained a body covered in plaster, as well as glass and pottery vessels and a casket of jewellery. If this cemetery is correctly identified as a Christian one, it is an effective proof that pagan customs live long and Christian rite was not always

strictly applied. WIGHTMAN 247. Nearer the Rhine, at Bonn, Xanten and Cologne similar graves have been recorded beneath churches dedicated to prominent figures, martyrs, confessors or bishops in the early Christian church. GREEN pp. 49-50. In Augsburg at St. Ulrich and Afra most of the burials were facing to east with few or no grave-goods. FASOLD pp. 26-27. The rectangular halls with *exedra* and *mensa* in Noricum are collectively regarded as Christian churches NOLL pp. 73- , of the surface cemeteries surrounding them we know but few. On the basis of her epitaph, the young Ursa from Ovilava (Wels) CIL III 13529, NOLL 46-, may have certainly been Christian, while the existence of one or two lamps and altogether three fingerring with Christogram are regarded as much more less convincing argument UBL 150.

Pannonia has seven or eight more or less undoubted Early Christian communal urban basilicas: at least two in Aquincum (Budapest) NAGY L. 1942, 766 TÓTH 1990, 21, the lately much debated *basilica major* and *minor* in Gorsium (Tác- Fövénypuszta) FITZ 1976 pp. 28- FITZ 1993 TÓTH 1989, in Sirmium (Mitrovica) DUVAL pp. 85- and two in Valcum (Keszthely-Fenékpuszta) MRT I, p. 84. These sites may, indeed, be the evidence for the inevitable existence of some Christian communities even if their cemeteries have not entirely been uncovered. The nucleus of these cemeteries, around which the burials were grouped might be the grave-chamber of a martyr e. g. that of Anastasia, Demetrios, Ireneus or Synerotas/Syneros in Sirmium (Mitrovica) NAGY T. 1938 pp. 68-MÓCSY p. 752, the *basilica martyrum* in Mursa (Eszék-Osijek) or the painted *mausoleum*, grave-chapels and vaults beneath and round the Cathedral of Pécs-Sopianae, GOSZTONYI pp. 111- FÜLEP pp. 36, 51, 99, 108 where the cult of the above-mentioned Demetrios was probably cherished. On the basis of contemporary sources (list of bishops, martyr-files etc.) no such an outstanding person has been known from Aquincum so far. The presumed Aquincum origin of Beatus Antonius from *civitas Valeriae* (Ennodius, *De vita beat. Ant.* 7) is a pure surmise. Nevertheless, the features detailed above also recur here in several parts of cemeteries for which documentary or topographical evidence is lacking but which should be considered as burial places for Christian communities. The small apsidal building in the eastern cemetery of the Civil Town (*municipium Aquincum*, later *colonia*) is regarded as a *basilica coemeterialis* NAGY L. 1942 pp. 769-, fig. 39, and the groundplan of an other, double building of nine rooms was also explained in the same way. NAGY L. 1942 pp. 766-, figs. 37-8 MÓCSY p. 756 SZILÁGYI 1968, pp. 120-121. Recent excavations, however, i.e. in the last thirty years, in the Military Town (*canabae legionis*) yielded more convincing results which testify to the existence of Early Christian community. A characteristic three-foiled funerary chapel (*cella trichora*) at the

corner of Raktár and Körte streets, in the north-western zone of the *canabae* NAGY L. 1931 may have been the focus of a sub-Roman graveyard bordered by Hunor and Vihar streets NAGY M. p. 360, Fundliste 1. with further literature. An other chapel with five foils outside the southwestern corner of the late Roman fortress may have served the same purpose PARRAGI 1976. Both of them are situated relatively close to the above-mentioned Western cemetery along the Bécsi road, where seven separable graveyards may have been distinguished so far. One of them (fig. 3. IV) came to light at the laying of the district heating pipe, partly in the shaft sunk in front of the house Bécsi út Nr. 203, under the road and at the opposite side (fig. 4). At a depth of five metres and on about sixty square metres eight west-east aligned inhumation burials were uncovered by the earth moving machinery. Six of them were made of secondarily used stone slabs fastened up a large amount of white mortar, two coffins consisted of roof-tiles and bricks. Two graves of the former type (nr. 4 and 6) in the south-western corner of the shaft no. 1. were almost entirely left in the walls of the ditch because of statics. As a matter of facts we could explore three more or less undisturbed burials here, the capstones of the other coffins and, sometimes, the grater part of the graves, were smashed by bulldozing. In spite of this miserable circumstances in all the three cases (graves No. 3, 7 and 8) we could observe that the inner surface of the stone coffins were thickly plastered with mortar containing a large amount of lime, a feature very similar to plaster-packing in early Christian graves of Italia, Raetia and Germania. In these cases the reliefs of the re-used *steles*, e.g. figures of the deceased, funeral feast, *calo* with horse, etc. were even more carefully chipped than in case of a "pagan" grave. Moreover at the double burial in the grave no. 3, the second corpse was surrounded all around by very fine, pure semi-liquid or pulpified clay, presumably to separate the later burial from the former individuum who may have died not long before. One of the three glass vessels, an extra large bulbous flask (Fig. 5) was put carefully on the top of this layer of clay, the glass flagon and beaker (Fig. 6-7.) at the feet of the adult woman. Similarly our grave no. 7 contained a glass flagon and beaker as well, obviously a very frequent combination of grave-goods in sub-Roman-Early Christian burials symbolizing the *refrigerium*, what is more, by the opinion of several, mostly Hungarian experts, the *Eucharistia* BÓNIS 565-BARKÓCZI 126 - BÍRÓ 173 - PÓCZY fig. 10 SÁGI 244 - THOMAS 279, but first of all on the wall-painting of the grave-chamber no. II in Sopianae, FÜLEP pl. XX. Our grave no. 8 (in greater part in the wall of the shaft) consisted of undressed limestone slabs laid face downwards, the inner surface was thickly plastered with white mortar. There was only one grave-good found: on the annular finger of the left hand a ring of thin bronze cable with a centre-piece representing the

Christogram (fig. 8). On the basis of the above-mentioned and in these context, the owner of the ring, an elderly woman can be rightly called Christian. An even more convincing find came to light during the pressing through the heating tube under the road. The headlight of the machine cast upon a painted stone (fig. 9-10) which was immediately raised. It proved to be a portion of the western wall of a grave-chamber (grave no. 9), the other three? walls were probably smashed and taken away by the machine (night shift). The limestone slab bore a poorly preserved fresco, representing the *Chi-rho* with *alpha* and *omega* between two dove-like singing-birds and olive-branches. Above this zone the lattice pattern symbolizes the fence of the Garden of the Paradise, the same motif as could be seen on the doorpost of the "house-church" in the *canabae legionis* (Kiscelli street) PÓCZY fig. 68 and on the southern wall (also at the entrance) of the grave-chamber no. 2 at Sopianae FÜLEP pl. XXI/1-2. We have no information either of the skeleton(s) or of grave-good(s), the bottom of the chamber was - reputedly - made of bricks. From the earth, near the stone the middle portion of a bone hump-backed comb and a broze belt-buckle were collected.

In the shaft No. 2 sunken at the opposite side of the Bécsi road we explored five more graves, all of them consisted of roof-tiles and bricks with the common late Roman grave-goods, i.e. snake-head bronze cable bracelet, silvered bronze belt-buckle with independent pinched-in hinge, glass beaker, flask and double-*unguentarium*, etc. They were also west-east aligned and contained inhumation burials except one (no. 13) where only two tiny splinters of calcined human bones were found under the roof-tile laid upwards. On this *tegula* four pottery vessels were deposited covered with an other roof-tile laid downwards forming this way a sort of low *tegulae*-chamber. The pots contained red, dull ochre and white paint mixed with earth. If this object was a grave, it might have been the grave of a painter artisan who had helped to decorate the graves of his fellow-worshippers to God. According the preliminary spectrometric analysis of this paint-remnants carried out by David Smith (Museum of Natural History, Paris) the results are the following: two of the pots contained red paint obtained from hematite, goethite and lead, the third one contained white paint deriving from lead carbide with traces of gypsum, while in the fourth sample only calcite could be detected. These paints were probably not used in making the frescoes, since they could not be placed on fresh plaster owing to their lead content.

I have to mention one more object which came to light in the graveyard VI, north from this one, in a simple earth-grave (no. 122) which was overlain by an other late Roman inhumation burial (no. 113, with a layer of white gypsum or lime ?) TOPÁL 1993, pp. 49-51, Pl. 70-2, 160-1. It was the grave of a mature male aligned

east-west, faced to west! At the feet of the skeleton there was found a mould-pressed bowl in yellowish, impured glass. Incised decor above the footring representing palm-leaves and crosses (*crux graeca*) in squares. Similar motifs can be seen on the famous military belt-fittings of Aquincum BURGER 1984, commonly regarded as an early Christian, and on the pall of Boethius of Brescia von SYBEL 70. Above the footring and decor the inscription probably began: DALM [...and continued ...] C H [... Because of lacking seve-

ral letters there has been no solution of the inscription so far. (fig. 11-12).

In our Danube provinces there has been little success in identifying the physical remains of Christianity so far. Cemeteries, (or at least grave-groups) may, then, be the focuses for this reserved and many-sided survey and such sites may be the most convincing evidence for the existence of Christian communities in our region in the late 3rd and 4th century AD.

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Ókeresztény sírok az aquincumi katonaváros nyugati temetőjében

Aquincum katonai táborától és *canabaej*ától Ny-ra, a Bécsi út mentén D-É irányban mintegy 2 km hosszan húzódik Pannonia Inferior tartomány fővárosának térben és időben egyik legkiterjedtebb temetője. Eddig hét különálló sírparcellát tudtunk elkülöníteni, melyek között olykor 100-200 méternyi hiátusok vannak temetkezés és épület nyomok nélkül. Távfűtő vezeték mélyépítési munkálatainál az egyik ilyen különálló parcellának néhány, Kr.u. 4. század urolsó harmadára keltezhető sírját sikerült megmentenünk, melyek közül három, kölapokból összeállított, meszes harabarccsal vastagon kitapasztott-kiöntött sírládában az elhunytal egy vésett Krisztusmonogrammal díszített bronzgyűrűt, valamint

üvegkorsókat és üveg poharakat (*refrigerium* jelképei) temettek el. A villamos sín párja alól pedig egy festett falú sírkamra egyik kölapját emelte ki a kotrógép. A festményen látható bíborszínű, díszes medaillonban elhelyezett Chiro és alfa-ómega mellett kétoldalt egy-egy kék-szárnyú galambszerű énekesmadár, valamint olajág, felettük széles rács- és virágminta a bibliai Édenkert kerítésének szimbolumai. Mindezen jelenségek (mésszel való kiöntés, Krisztogrammos gyűrű és freskó, korsó-pohár melléklet) együttes előfordulásának alapján e néhány sírt ókereszténynek, a közeli *cella trichora* vagy *quinquichora* körül létesített temetőhöz tartozónak véljük.



Fig. 1. Budapest. The location of the graveyards Nos. I-VII in the Western Cemetery of the Military Town in Aquincum.
1. kép: Sírcsoportok az aquincumi katonaváros nyugati temetőjében.

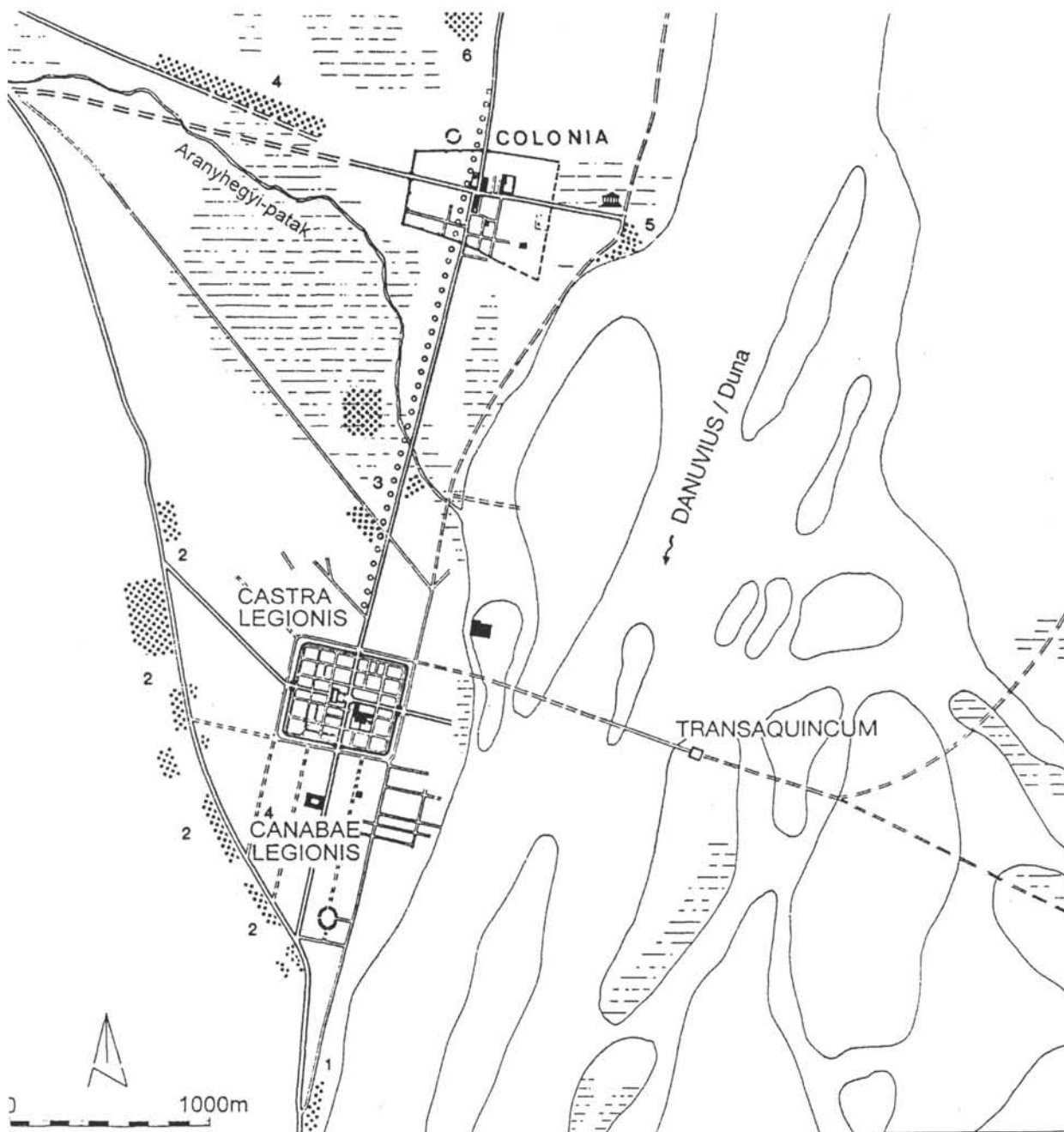


Fig. 2. Roman cemeteries around the Military and Civil town of Aquincum. 1= Zsigmond tér and surroundings, southern cemetery of the military town, 1-2 centuries AD. 2 = Kecse utca, Bécsi út, western cemetery of the military town, 1-4 cent. AD. 3 = Bogdáni út, Kaszás dűlő, Benedek E. utca, northern cemetery of the military town, 2-4 cent. AD. 4 = Aranyhegyi árok, western cemetery of the civil town, 1-2 cent. AD. 5 = Gázgyár and surroundings, eastern cemetery of the civil town, 3-4 cent. AD. 6 = Csillaghegy, northern cemetery of the civil town, late 1-early 2 cent. AD.

2. kép: Római temetők az aquincumi katonaváros és polgárváros körül.



Fig. 3. The *canabae legionis* and the graveyards of the Bécsi út cemetery 2/I-VII with the location of the *cella trichora* and *qvinqvichora*.

3.kép: A *canabae legionis* és a Bécsi úti temető sírsoportjai a *cella trichora* és *qvinqvichora* elhelyezkedésével.

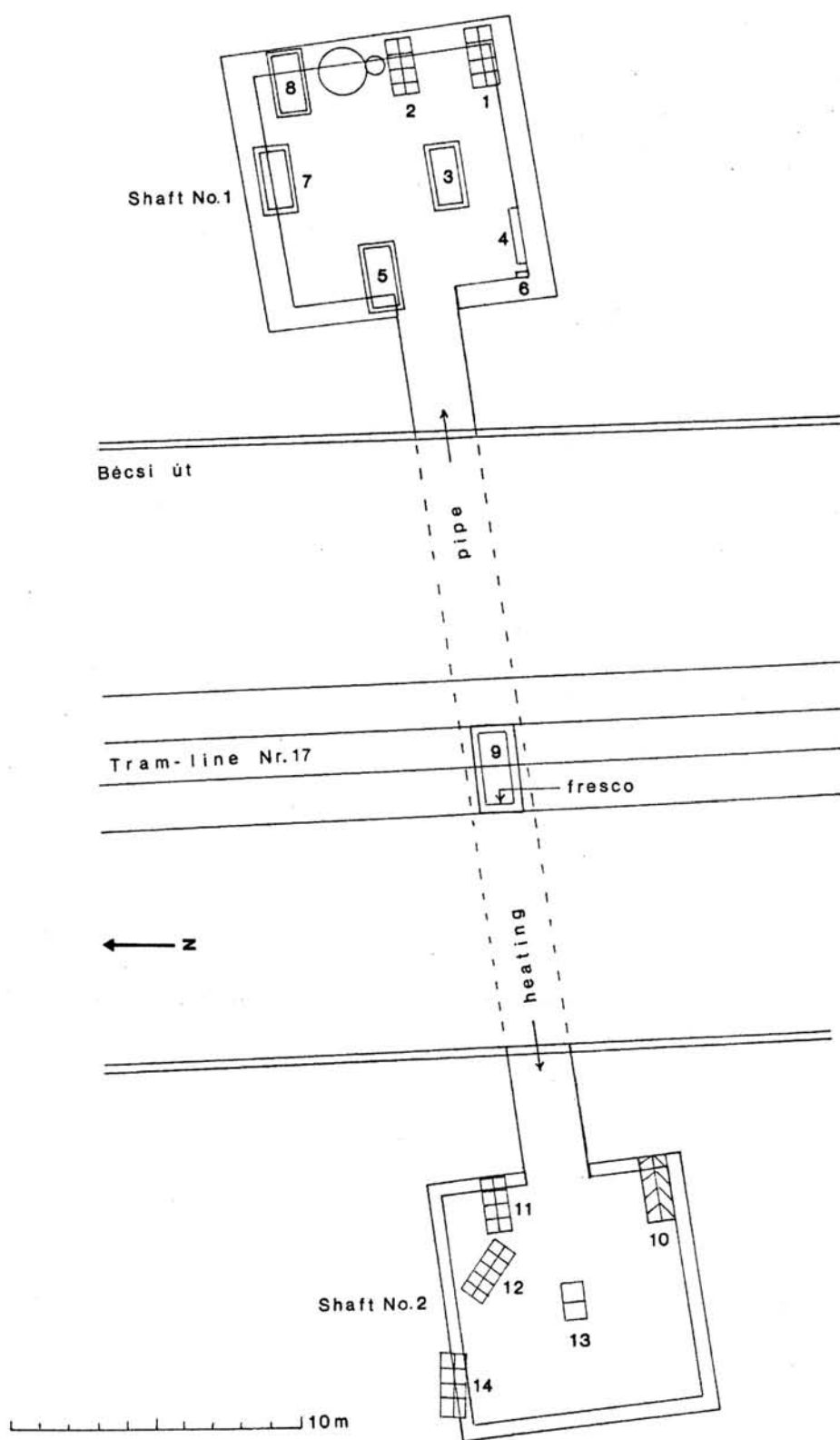


Fig. 4. Sub-Roman-early Christian graves in the shafts of the heating pipe.
 4.kép: Későrómai-keresztény sírok a távfűtővezeték két aknájában.

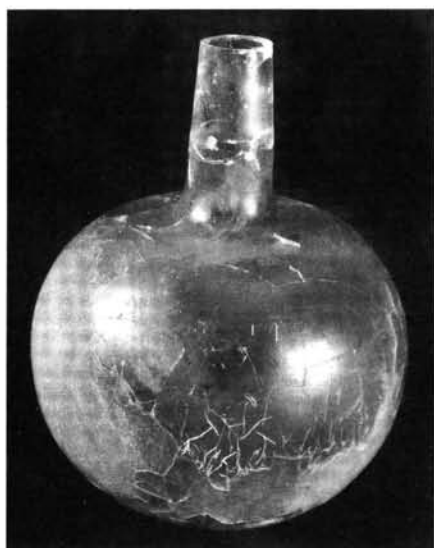


Fig. 5. Bulbous glass flask from a presumed Christian grave no.3, graveyard IV.

5.kép: Üvegedény a IV. sírcsoport 3., feltehetően ókeresztény sírjából.

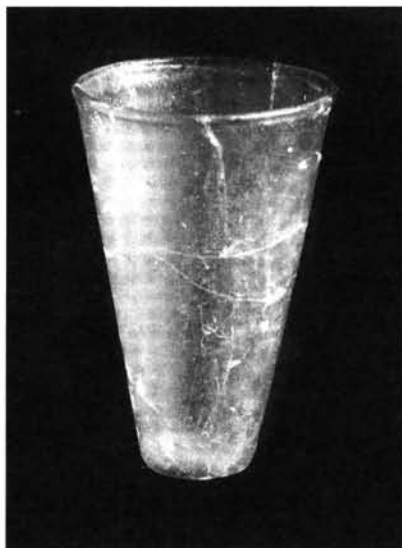


Fig.6-7. Glass flagon and beaker from a presumed Christian grave no.3, graveyard IV.

6-7. kép: Üvegkancsó és pohár a IV. sírcsoport 3., feltehetően ókeresztény sírjából.



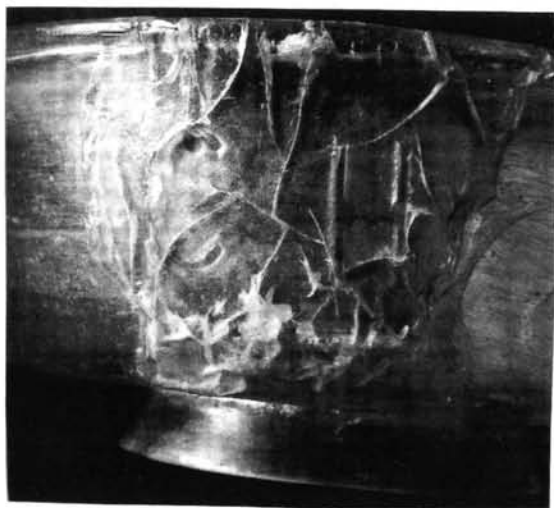
Fig. 8. Bronze annular ring with Christogram from the presumed Christian grave no. 8

8.kép: Bronzgyűrű christogrammal a 8., feltehetően ókeresztény sírből.

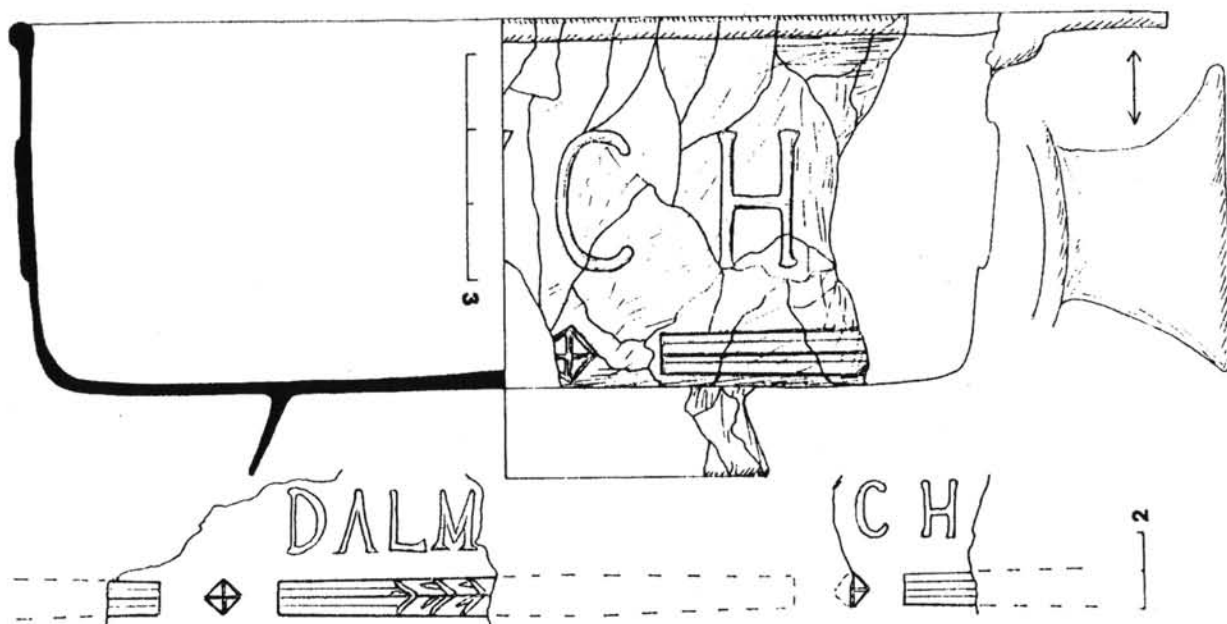


Fig. 9-10. Wall-painting and its reconstruction from the grave-chamber no. 9.

9-10. kép: A 9. számú sírkamra falfestménye és annak rekonstrukciója.



11



12

Fig. 11-12. Glass bowl (*patina?*) with inscription and *crux graeca* from the grave no. 122, graveyard VI.
 11-12. kép: Üvegtál (*patina?*) felíráttal és görög kereszttel a VI. sírcsoport 122. sírjából.