

Thesis of the Doctoral Dissertation

Anita Kirchhof

WALL-PAINTING IN PANNONIAN VILLAS

Budapest

2011

Eötvös Loránd University  
Faculty of Humanities  
Historical Studies Doctoral Programme  
Archaeological Doctoral Programme

Thesis of the Doctoral Dissertation

Anita Kirchhof

WALL-PAINTING IN PANNONIAN VILLAS

Dissertation Supervisor: Dr. Borhy László DSc.

Budapest

2011

## I. Theme and aim of the dissertation

The subject of my doctoral dissertation is the wall-painting of *Pannonian* villa-estates and within this theme I lay emphasis on the inner decorations of estate centres in the area north of the Balaton and in the surroundings of *Aquincum*.

As for the wall-paintings of villa estates researchers so far have been familiar only with those old finds which came to light from the Baláca villa during the excavations made by Gyula Rhé between 1906 and 1926. These finds, belonging to the early period of the villa, that is to the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D., were published by himself and later they were reconstructed by Edit B. Thomas. At the same time remains of decoration are known from 16 villas from the 122<sup>1</sup> ones can be found in the area north of the Lake Balaton, in *Aquincum* they are known from 4 buildings from 44 centres of estates and this kind of decoration is known also from other parts of *Pannonia* from 30 villas.

The intention of my dissertation is partly the study and the determination of types of the old wall-painting material excavated by Gyula Rhé and in this connection also the revision, correction and analysis of the reconstructions made by Edit B. Thomas. Furthermore the basis of my studies was constituted by the study of those wall-paintings which came to light from several buildings (I., II., X., XVII.)<sup>2</sup> of the Baláca villa during the excavations restarted in 1976 comprising the assortment of the remains according to types, the making of reconstructions as well as their arrangement in groups according to periods.

Another aim of my thesis was the examination of the inner decoration of other villas with wall-paintings in the area north of the Lake Balaton. This material came to light from the villas at Bakonyszentlászló, Balatonfüred, Gyulafirátót, Kádárta, Örvényes, Öskü and Szentkirályszabadja. It is either unpublished or published only in part. I studied also the ornamental elements of those villas which are mentioned only in records, the *in situ* decorations of which had been committed back to the earth or had got lost or destroyed after they had been found (Balatonalmádi, Balatongyörök 1.-2., Gyenesdiás, Kékkút, Sümeg, Tihany, Várpalota, Veszprém).

The analysis of the inner decoration of villas in the surroundings of *Aquincum* was also the subject of my research work, comprising the wall-painting and stucco decoration of the Csúcshegy, Csúcshegy-harsánylejtő, Szőlőkert street and Testvérhegy villas. In addition tangentially I studied those painted finds which are known from the other *Pannonian* villas

---

<sup>1</sup> Gabler D., Einige Fragen über die Geschichte der römischen Siedlungen auf dem Territorium nördlich vom Balaton. Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei 19/20 (1993-1994) 150.

<sup>2</sup> The examination and full-scale study of the wall-paintings of buildings I. and XVII. will be possible only after they will be published.

according to the publication of Edit B. Thomas.<sup>3</sup>

In my thesis there is a special emphasis on the inner decoration of villas in two regions. Centres of estates in the area north of the Lake Balaton had been already developed at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. along the main routes and they were self-supporting units. At the same time the majority of those villas which were situated near *Aquincum*, that is along the *limes*, had been developed only after the Marcomannic Wars. In these villas usually farming activity was practised. The owners purchased the necessary industrial products at the markets of the towns.<sup>4</sup> In the Late Roman period Barbarian assaults becoming permanent along the frontiers had their influence also on the villas in the surroundings of the towns. Soldiers' families had moved into those villas which had occupied a strategically key position. They played an important role in frontier defence as well. At that time the buildings became less spacious and the villas became self-supporting while other villas had been ceased to exist.<sup>5</sup> There are some differences in the Late Roman Period development of the villas in the area north of the Lake Balaton of those estates which were situated along the main routes flourished, their inner decoration attests considerable prosperity. At the same time in those centres of estates which were situated at a considerable distance from the main routes or were established on the downs of the Bakony Mts., only slight alterations<sup>6</sup> can be observed referring to stagnation.

Regarding the wall-painting of these regions of different development I tried to answer the following questions:

Whether the consulting, use of special pattern book(s) could be detected according to territorial circulation? Are there differences between the painting of self-supporting villas and of those ones which were near towns and if there are, what is the nature of these differences? Who were the persons who made the inner decorations and where they originated from? Are we able to detect quality differences within a given region or between regions? Are there any differences between regions as regards the character and decorative motifs of the ceilings?

---

<sup>3</sup> E. B. Thomas, *Römische Villen in Pannonien*. (Budapest, 1964)

<sup>4</sup> Sz. Póczy K., *Die Villa von Békásmegyer und die Gutshöfe in der Umgebung von Aquincum nach den Markomannkrieg*. Budapest Régiségei 22 (1971) 96.

<sup>5</sup> Zsidi P., *Aquincum topográfiája*. Specimina Nova 18 (2004) 205.

<sup>6</sup> S. Palágyi, *Schwerpunkte der neuen Ausgrabungen im Gutshof von Baláca*. Balácai Közlemények 3 (1994) 13-14.

#### Questions regarding certain villas:

Whether the wall-painting of the villas reflect the economic function of the estates, a local activity and if it does on which scale? Can we prove the existence of decoration type(s) which is/are characteristic only of villas? Is there a difference between the decorations of buildings of different function over different periods? Whether within a certain building the function of different rooms had an influence on the quality of the wall-paintings or on the character of decorative motifs? Whether the wall-paintings reflect either a local or an Italian environment and if they do, to what extent? Are there differences between buildings regarding the design of ceilings (flat or vaulted ceilings)? Can we trace the mark of one or more artists on the paintings? Whether a connection or perhaps a certain identity of motifs existed between the decorations of ceilings, floors and walls or between the motifs of the different zones of walls?

#### Questions regarding the technique of producing the wall-paintings:

What kind of appliances and dimensions were used to make plaster-work, wall-paintings, to proportion the surfaces, to deposit the motifs? Was there a sketching and if it existed, in which manner? Can we demonstrate the application of a stencil? What kind of sets of brushes the painter used? Whether differences in the composition of plaster-works meant also differences in quality or not? In what manner the renovation of the paintings was made? When earlier paintings had been inserted can we find differences between the instruments used? How many persons used to work during the preparation, impainting of paintings? What kind of paints were used over different periods? How and in which form the paints had been got into the spot? Who were the painters and the owners of the villas? Whether the ethnic, the religious affiliation or the pursuit of the owner had an influence on the wall-paintings? If there were graffiti, which period they had appeared in, what was their subject and who made them? How and where the stucco ornaments belonging to the wall-paintings had been made? Regarding the function of the rooms can we find differences in the decoration of ceilings? To what extent the application of perspective influenced the design of the ceilings? The existence of what kind of supporting devices can be concluded from the impressions at the reverse sides?

## II. The method of the dissertation

During my researches I studied the decorations of different buildings within a centre of estate and compared them with each other. After this I examined per periods the wall-paintings of villas within the same region, finally I compared with each other the decorations of the two regions. Tangentially I studied decorations known from the other *Pannonian* villas as well and looked for parallels between them and the thoroughly examined wall-paintings of the mentioned two regions and I compared them also with the decorations of Italy and of other provinces of the Roman Empire.

Except the old material the Baláca villa is the only one where the study of the wall-paintings was possible according to buildings and rooms. The fragments from other villas we are not able in every case to connect to either rooms, buildings or periods, therefore I treat them according to villas, by ranging them typologically. At the same time if there was a possibility to do it, like in the case of the Szőlőkert street villa, I discuss them according to periods as well. Within the villas I treated the ceiling decorations and stucco fragments with special emphasis.

In the first phase of my studies made on wall-paintings I selected those fragments which belonged to the same site or to the same collection. I cleaned off their surfaces, arranged them in groups according to colours and the manner of painting, later I tried to fit together the fragments of these groups and as far as I could I tried to assemble them to get larger surfaces. Fitting them together was hampered by the earlier restoration technique, which meant the embedding of every single fragment in plaster (Baláca, Balatonfüred, and in some cases also Gyulafirátót, Örvényes). Because of this plaster coating there was no possibility to fit together the fragments and I could not study either the character of the plaster-work of the fragments or the traces of a certain supporting device if it had survived at all. Therefore with hard, painstaking work giving utmost attention and care to the operation I tried to remove the modern plaster bed at least in cases from those more important fragments which seemed to be fitting together. This operation was followed by the adjustment and drawing of the fragments, and finally the making of a reconstruction.

A difficulty of the study of wall-paintings is that, contrarily to other types of finds, from the small or monochrome individual fragments one cannot conclude always to the whole composition of the painting or to its position within a room (base, side wall, ceiling) before the partial or final assembling. A further phase of my work was researches in libraries and documentation departments, finally these researches were followed by the classification and

interpretation of data.

Determining the type of a given painting I took into consideration the composition, the background colour, the manner of the painting, the application of colours, and also the composition, colour, layers, thickness and reverse side of the plaster-work. If excavation records were not available I tried to put the different types in the chronological sequence adequate to the Imperial trends on the basis of their composition, ground colour, application of colours and analogies.

### III. The structure of the dissertation

My dissertation consists of two main parts, namely of the presentation and interpretation of the wall-painting of the villas and of the itemized catalogue.

The introduction comprises the outlines of the work including the motivation of choosing the subject and the intentions. It is followed by the survey of the history of researches of *Pannonian* wall-painting. In the third, fourth and fifth chapters there is the detailed description of those *Pannonian* villas from which either wall-paintings or fragments suggesting the existence of other inner decoration are known.

In the third chapter, after a short introduction there is a detailed treatment of villas in the area north of the Lake Balaton, arranged into groups according to their names in the Archeological Topography of Hungary. In the introductions of its subchapters there is a short description of the history of researches, the history of the construction of the villa and the chronological implications. It is followed by the description of observations made during the excavation or excavations related to the wall-paintings. Finally I give an analysis of the paintings, their characterization according to types and their chronology, based on my own researches. At the end of the description of different types there is a minor summary containing a short enumeration of observations and new results. This summary contains also the chronology and analogies. The characterization of different villas is followed by the interpretation of the results within a summary and at the end of the part with text there are the illustrations, drawings and coloured reconstructions presenting the villas and their wall-paintings.

The majority of the wall-painting material of villas in the area north of the Lake Balaton is originated from the Baláca villa (1485 items), though those paintings which came to light during the excavations made in the centres of estates at Balatonfüred (61 items) and at Örvényes (147 items) also represent a considerable quantity. I deal with the wall-paintings of the most intensively studied Baláca villa in several subchapters, partly because the old wall-painting material, excavated by Gyula Rhé, which is classified into 71 different types, due to excavation imperfections cannot be connected either to buildings or rooms (except the wall-paintings from the early period which most probably decorated the building XIII.). Partly, because within the villa painted fragments are known from several buildings. Therefore I study the Baláca wall-paintings according to buildings, that is the published and *in situ* wall-paintings from the building I., as well as the decorations of buildings II. and X. in an itemized manner. At the end of the chapter dealing with the Baláca villa I treat with a special care the

ceiling decorations (type 21) and stucco fragments (type 20) found in the area of the whole estate.

The fourth chapter, dealing with the villas in the surroundings of *Aquincum* describes the decorations of the villas from this region following the above system.

The fifth chapter, the composition of which is identical with those of the above ones, presents other villas with wall-paintings from *Pannonia*, though the analysis of their decorations was made on the basis of the published material.

In the sixth chapter I try to find out who were the owners of the lavishly decorated villas.

The seventh chapter examines the technique of making Roman wall-paintings as it is reflected by ancient sources and archeological finds available. It deals with the manufacturers of the paintings, their legal status, the tools and devices applied during painting and stucco making, the question and types of pattern books, the pigments used for painting, including their kinds, market value, the making of plaster-works, the division of surfaces.

The results of the studies on the wall-paintings of the villas treated with details in the different chapters at the end of the part with text are followed by a summary, acknowledgements, list of abbreviations and references.

The second part of the dissertation is a catalogue containing 1765 items in which wall-paintings known and studied from the estates in the area north of the Lake Balaton and in the surroundings of *Aquincum* are enumerated per villas. In the catalogue the inventorized fragments are mentioned according to their inventory number, while the ones without it are present on the basis of their profile numbers or according to their types. The catalogue contains also the archeological context, the short description of the subject, number of pieces, the determination of the painting period, the thickness of lines, data on traces of sketching or of incised patterns, type of the decoration, the layers of plaster-work, the characteristics of the reverse sides and the dimensions of the fragments. In certain cases, like in the case of the *in situ* wall-paintings of the building I. at Baláca I introduced some individual viewpoints as well.

#### IV. Main results of the thesis

Villa estates can be found all over *Pannonia*, in every region of the province, along the *limes*, in Inner *Pannonia* or in the Drava-Sava confluence area. They had been established along the main routes or near them. Slightly less than one third of the villas studied yielded wall-paintings, mosaics or other ornamental elements which refer to a rather rich inner decoration. It is an universal observation that in the centres of estates consisting of several buildings not only the main building but also the bath, the house of the *vilicus* and perhaps some other structures, maybe the corridors, too, which linked buildings were also decorated with ornamental elements meeting the requirements of the age.<sup>7</sup> In the Baláca villa the bath had wall-paintings of similar quality as the ones in the main building while the house of the *vilicus* was decorated with paintings of lower quality. Almost every farm-building was supplied with plaster-work, quite often even the putting of new coats of plaster-work can be observed.

In my dissertation I compared first of all the wall-painting and inner decoration of villa estates in those two regions the development of which differ entirely from each other. These two regions are the area north of the Lake Balaton in Inner *Pannonia* and the other one is the municipal territory of *Aquincum* along the *limes*. The villas in the area north of the Lake Balaton had got connected with the life of the province by the *Poetovio-Aquincum* route and had got the necessary goods, too, in this way, by trade. In the area north of the Lake Balaton already in a very early period, during the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (Baláca),<sup>8</sup> but at the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D. at the latest, villas had been established and to make paintings for them the first master painters, too, had arrived along this route. On the basis of a similar collection of motifs applied by them they had originated most probably from the surroundings of *Emona*. On the basis of the similar design (the application of colours and motifs) of the so-called early period wall-paintings and stucco decoration which can be observed both in Baláca and Balatonfüred we may suppose the presence and circulation of the same pattern books in the area in this period. At the same time some differences in the identical ornamental elements of the two sites allow us to think that several groups of painters or several master painters had arrived the area to prepare the wall-paintings of newly erected

---

<sup>7</sup> Therefore in case of small-scale excavations it is hard to decide whether the remains of the *villa urbana*, those of the bath or the ones of the house of the *vilicus* had been found. The decoration of the bath did not differ considerably from that of other buildings, the presence of bathing scenes or the application of some special colour cannot be observed in every case. Their paintings bear rather those stylistical marks which are characteristic of the given period.

<sup>8</sup> Gabler D., Einige Fragen über die Geschichte der römischen Siedlungen auf dem Territorium nördlich vom Balaton. Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei 19/20 (1993-1994) 151.

buildings, to serve the increased requirements with their work. At Baláca in this period the building XIII. can be considered as the main building of the villa and also the building II., too, determined as a bath, had existed then. It was supplied with (red-black) wall-paintings of a quality similar to that of the ones of building XIII. Other buildings or decoration belonging to this period are not known from the Baláca estate, perhaps they had been made of wood. The appearance of the wall-paintings and of identical motifs suggests that a synchronous painting had been carried out in the villas situated at a considerable distance from the Lake Balaton, on the downs of the mountains and in the estates near the shore of the Lake. Considering this we may suppose that a parcelling out of land made according to a uniform system was applied here in the area North of the Lake Balaton, too, which probably went together also with a colonization. Similar system can be observed in the territories of *Savaria*, *Scarbantia*, *Poetovio*<sup>9</sup> and *Aquincum*.<sup>10</sup> Near the line of the supposed important trade route within a zone along the northern, northeastern shore of the Lake Balaton we suppose the presence of densely situated parcels of veteran soldiers while away from this route the presence of few straggling parcels of veterans<sup>11</sup> can be supposed.

A general characteristic of the early period wall-paintings at Baláca is the water-side scene on a dark coloured base, in the middle zone the alternate succession of larger monochrome panels with narrower fields having a rich ornamental decoration against a dark background and terminated from above by a stucco frieze. There are no available for us solid data as regards the decorations of the upper zone. The early period wall-paintings at Baláca suggest that they belonged to five-seven different buildings. The one with the black background had been made most probably during a later rebuilding. According to the analysis of the composition of the plaster-works of the wall-paintings the two yellow-lilac wall paintings represent a definitely high quality. The other ones have different, less compact plaster-work which can be explained most probably by the function of the room. The fissures can be seen on the surface of the red-black wall-painting – it has the poorest quality and regarding its painting it belonged to a room of minor importance – refer to a former subsidence of the building. Perhaps also the alteration of the building can be connected with this phenomenon. The different effectuation of the ornamental elements can be observed on the painted stuccos makes us to suppose that several, at least two or three, motif painters

---

<sup>9</sup> Gabler D., Vidéki települések Pannoniában. In: Magyar régészet az ezredfordulón. (Budapest, 2003) 235.

<sup>10</sup> Most probably the *centuriatio* at *Aquincum* took place between the establishment of permanent Military Camps and at the end of rule of Emperor *Traianus*. Zsidi P., Territoriums des Municipiums – Villen und Dörfer. In: Forschungen in Aquincum 1969-2002. Aquincum Nostrum II. 2. (2003) 177.

<sup>11</sup> Gabler D., Einige Fragen über die Geschichte der römischen Siedlungen auf dem Territorium nördlich vom Balaton. Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei 19/20 (1993-1994) 150.

(*pictor parietarius*) had worked on the decoration of the villa, simultaneously. Differences in the quality of plaster-works suggest the work of several helpers for a long-time. The presence of imported paints observed on the paintings, like that of vermilion and of Egyptian blue refers to a well-to-do owner. The red paint was easily available at the neighbourhood, while the black paint, the base of which was soot, was produced most probably on the spot. The stuccos, too, belonging to the early period wall-paintings refer to a local preparation, synchronously with the making of the wall-painting. On the basis of the inscription of the Baláca *tumulus* the villa decorated with the early period wall-paintings was the property of a native *Pannonian* family,<sup>12</sup> its devastation and a change in its ownership can be traced in connection with the Marcomannic Wars. The considerable similarity between the wall-paintings of the Baláca and Balatonfüred villas suggests their synchronous preparation and also the use of the same pattern book, though they are the products of undoubtedly different artists. The existence of early period wall-paintings can be observed also in the villas at Bakonyszentlászló, Gyulafirátót, Örvényes and supposedly also in the one at Tihany.<sup>13</sup>

After the Marcomannic Wars Baláca had become the centre of a large estate. Its main building (No. I.) had been constructed with an orientation different from the earlier one. Four rooms of the building had been supplied with mosaics<sup>14</sup> and together with this the building II.,<sup>15</sup> too, had been extended by new rooms and apses. Because of insufficiencies of earlier excavations we have only a few information on the early period wall-paintings of the building I. However, the characteristic red-green, less frequently yellow-blue wall-paintings of the *Severan* period can be traced there and they are present also among the wall-paintings in the northern foreground of building X. and also in the material of building II.

The richest period of the Baláca villa was the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. when the northern and eastern facades of the main building had got a stucco cover, divided by engaged columns and the inner rooms had been divided into smaller ones by using light structure walls and the *peristylum* had been encircled by a wall (*porticus fenestrata*).<sup>16</sup>

On this wall a painting rousing the feeling of an inner garden was represented. In this period the building II.,<sup>17</sup> too, had been extended considerably and as for the decorations of the building II. this was the only period when the application of a stucco frieze can be observed.

---

<sup>12</sup> G. Alföldy, Die Inschriften des Hügelgrabes von Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 8 (2004) 89.

<sup>13</sup> On the basis of stuccos mentioned by Edit Thomas because the fragments had been lost since then. E. B. Thomas, Römische Villen in Pannonien. (Budapest, 1964) 123.

<sup>14</sup> S. Palágyi, Schwerpunkte der neuen Ausgrabungen im Gutshof von Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 3 (1994) 15.

<sup>15</sup> H. Kelemen M., Vorbericht über die Freilegung des Gebäudes Nr. II. in Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 2 (1992) 337.

<sup>16</sup> S. Palágyi, Schwerpunkte der neuen Ausgrabungen im Gutshof von Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 3 (1994) 13.

<sup>17</sup> H. Kelemen M., Vorbericht über die Freilegung des Gebäudes Nr. II. in Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 2 (1992) 337.

The building XVII., considered to be a bath, is at present unpublished, though it is highly possible that in the above-mentioned period it has a rich decoration similar to the ones found in the other buildings. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. period of the Baláca villa only some minor alterations can be traced in buildings I. and II. Among those wall- paintings which still existed at the time of the devastation of the villa we may mention the stylized representations of fences and gardens decorating the bases of the corridors as well as the wall-paper motifs with four-petalled rosettes on the ceilings of the corridors. The *in situ* preserved wall- paintings refer to the Late Roman Period decoration of the rooms. Among them the white plaster-works, freshened up several times and a geometric pattern composed of narrow red stripes and painted against a white background which had been survived on the base of room 26 are noteworthy. The Late Roman period fragments of building II. suggest that they belonged to some linear composition against a white background, this composition appears in several cases together with festoons. The subsidiary buildings supplied with white plaster-work which was freshened up usually twice or three times also live on the Late Roman Period.

Representations of gardens, similar to the one in the Baláca villa can be found also in other villas of the area north of the Lake Balaton, e.g. at Gyulafirátót, Örvényes and probably in the Öskü villa, too. In the latest painting period which continued until the devastation of the villas red and black linear compositions painted against a white background were predominant. This kind of decorations occurs also at Gyulafirátót and at Kádárta. At Baláca, Balatonfüred and Pomáz a Late Roman painting period was observed with paintings produced with similar technique and with the application of a clayey grounding. In several cases they were painted over earlier decorations. The application of an outer white plaster-work with a grounding containing brick-dust is also characteristic of the Late Roman Period and can be found all over *Pannonia* (Baláca, Sümeg, Pomáz, Bruckneudorf, *Aquincum*).

At present marble incrustation applied on the base, otherwise generally widespread cannot be traced in building I. at Baláca which can be explained by the fact that the *in situ* wall-paintings of the rooms with mosaics and apsis are heavily worn. At the same time marmoration is present in building II. at Baláca, though only its simpler, stained variant represents it. In other villas in the area north of the Lake Balaton this type of decorations, with a rich assortment of colours was widely applied.

Quality differences among the wall-paintings of buildings of the Baláca villa, having different functions can be seen principally on their ceiling decorations. Repeated compositions on ceilings imitating coffered ceilings by painting, like the one composed of hexagons and the ceiling with so-called conchoidal decoration belonged most probably to

one of the rooms or to a corridor of the main building. The four-petalled wall-paper rosette pattern of the Late Roman period composed of circles represents a higher quality work, a variant of the pattern, belonging to an earlier period, decorated most probably one of the ceilings of the building XVII. On the ceilings of the less „important” building II. only a simple wall-paper pattern composed of small repeated ornamental elements appears, this type of decoration does not occur in other buildings. This „simpler” wall-paper pattern can be found in the Örvényes villa as well.

According to our present knowledge stucco decorations are almost entirely absent from the centres of estates in the area north of the Lake Balaton, except the early period.<sup>18</sup> In most cases they were substituted for painting. A large number of painted stucco decorations are known from the Baláca villa and a few pieces can be found in the Balatonfüred and Gyulafirátót material as well. The stucco imitation of the Gyulafirátót villa, painted with yellow against a white background, reminds of the pattern of the ceiling with hexagons at Baláca, therefore we may suppose that they had been prepared contemporaneously. Painting is predominant also on the real stucco friezes of the early period, only the stucco ledge of the representation room was elaborated more carefully, perhaps it was prepared in another workshop. The other stucco works suggest rather local preparation, just like the facade design of the later period. Our observations made so far suggest that probably in the early period stucco manufacturers, too, had arrived the area, together with the painters, who, after finishing their work there, continued on their way. In the case of the early period paintings at Baláca it is impossible to suppose the order of a less expensive, painted, stucco pattern, a much more plausible explanation for the preference of the painted variant is the absence of stucco making workshops. In the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. significant alterations seemed to take place in the buildings I. and II. of the villa. Probably a workshop with a large staff of painters and stucco manufacturers was invited to make this work, just like in the case of the earlier wall-paintings. Considering the volume of the work we suppose the existence of separate workshops of painters and of stucco manufacturers.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. inner decorations of villas along the shore of the Lake Balaton, especially the ones made during the rule of *Constantinus* and *Valentinianus* display a conspicuous richness while in the villas, further from the Lake Balaton, e.g. at Baláca, only some minor, insignificant rebuildings, alterations were made in this period. The flourishing of villas in the zone along the lake shore in the Late Roman Period can be explained by the

---

<sup>18</sup> Except Baláca, where the existence of a considerable stucco working activity can be verified during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.

nearness of the trade route. The appearance of carved marbles of high standard and their large scale application as well as the presence of other carved stone works (red sandstone) refer to the existence of a stone carvers' workshop in the neighbourhood. In the Örvényes villa the rooms of the bath building was supplied with mosaic floors, marble slabs, their walls had been coated with marble covering. That is why only very few, scattered wall-paintings are known from the building IV., and it is possible that they decorated only the ceilings. In the same period several other carved stones and marble furnishings can be connected to the decoration of the main building of the Örvényes villa.

As for the villas near the Lake Fertő it is strange that stucco fragments and marble parts<sup>19</sup> occur only in a minimum quantity in the otherwise richly furnished Bruckneudorf villa after 350 A.D. where there is a mosaic floor of 400 m<sup>2</sup> and the building itself was extended to have a representation room. In the Late Roman period the villas in the southern part of *Pannonia*, too, prospered, their coloured mosaics and marble coverings testify their richness. (Nagyharsány).

The majority of the villas around *Aquincum* was established in the territory of the Civil Town, along the main routes, after the Marcomannic Wars,<sup>20</sup> though the wall-paintings of the Testvérhegy villa belong to an earlier period, that is to the beginning of the *Antoninan* period.<sup>21</sup> Among the remains of the wall-painting grounded on a structure consisting of wooden lathes fragments of bases and of ceilings imitating coffered decoration were found. This early period wall-painting can be characterized by the application of several colours. Similar linear compositions are known from the building II. at Balácsa, which belongs to a later period and from the Civil Town of *Aquincum*.<sup>22</sup>

The representative stucco decoration of the Csúcshegy villa, with a harvest scene can be connected with the prosperity in the *Severan* period after the Marcomannic Wars. Its analogies can be found in the materials of both the Military Town and of the Civil Town. On the basis of similar finds from the Military Town we may come to the conclusion that within the Military Town at least two stucco manufacturing workshops flourished and at least one workshop existed in the Civil Town. As for the stuccos of the Csúcshegy villa it can be proved that they had been manufactured synchronously with the decorations in the Military and Civil

---

<sup>19</sup> B. Saria mentions marble covering only regarding the aula, but check excavations already could not identify them and the pieces, too, are lost. Excavation records, note at 20.07.1950. Here, too, I should like to express my thanks H. Zabeňický for kind information.

<sup>20</sup> Zsidi P., *Neuere Villa am Territorium des Municipiums von Aquincum*. (Bp. III. ker. Kaszás dűlő-Csikós utca) Budapest Régiségei 27 (1991) 151-152.

<sup>21</sup> Here I should like Zoltán Havas, leader of the excavation, for his kind verbal information.

<sup>22</sup> Wall painting from Sújtás street. M. Németh, Wall-painting from the eastern part of the Civil Town. In: *Plafonds et voûtes à l'époque antique*. (éd. L. Borhy) (Budapest, 2004) 282-283.

Towns and most probably they can be connected with the activity of a workshop invited from the Civil Town.

The wall-paintings of the third villa, in the Szőlőkert street, belong into three different painting periods during the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. The fragments of the earliest period refer to the existence of a ceiling decoration with wall-paper pattern and of linear decoration on side wall. On the fragments belonging to the painting phase in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. the illusion of a garden with *peristylum* was produced. This wall-painting can be compared with the *peristylum* painting of the Baláca villa regarding both the choice of the subject and dating. After this the pattern represented on the renewed wall-painting suggests already a change in the function of the room with the *peristylum*, furthermore the overpainting of the stucco frieze originated from an earlier period and its different decoration style suggests that the *peristylum* of the building had been considerably altered, maybe it was narrowed and its walls had been heightened.

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. villa estates near *Aquincum* generally had obtained handicraft goods and industrial products from the markets of towns therefore beyond doubt workshops to make the inner decorations of the villas were invited also from the towns.<sup>23</sup> The majority of villas near *Aquincum* was used still at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and quite frequently even at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>24</sup> This period can be characterized by a narrowing of the villas and by fortification works made in them. In this period the inhabitants of the villas were soldiers' families who had a share in defending the frontiers. They led a self-supporting way of life. The decoration of Late Roman Period villas in the surroundings of *Aquincum* are represented by the *in situ* survived simple white plaster-works, and according to our present knowledge buildings with more luxuriant furnishing and design are absent. We cannot entirely exclude that those parts which were above the white bases had some minimum painting or that the excavated buildings had some economic function but the general application of white plaster-works may suggest also the decrease of the number of painters' workshops in the towns.

---

<sup>23</sup> Sz. Póczy K., Die Villa von Békásmegyer und die Gutshöfe in der Umgebung von Aquincum nach den Markomannkrieg. Budapest Régiségei 22 (1971) 96.

<sup>24</sup> Zsidi P., Aquincum topográfiája. Specimina Nova 18 (2004) 205.

Parallels and differences in the painting of villa estates  
in the area north of the Lake Balaton and near the *limes*

Wall-painting in these two regions was influenced by different effects. The first paintings of the villas near the Lake Balaton were made by painters working in a workshop of a larger staff, employing also stucco manufacturers or perhaps they were wandering artists. They arrived here from farther towns. In *Aquincum* a close connection can be observed between the inner decorations of villas, established after the Marcomannic Wars and the wall-painting and stucco manufacturing of the towns. This suggests that the artists had been invited from the towns to prepare the inner decoration of the villas. The recovery of the *Severan* period had an effect on both regions. This period was the flourishing time of the villas near *Aquincum* but the Baláca villa, too, became a large estate in this period by the newly built main building I., where at that time the mosaic floors displaying considerable richness were prepared. After this in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. the alteration of the Baláca villa testifies prosperity. Here, too, workshops from farther towns or wandering artists had been invited to prepare the decorations. As for the villas near *Aquincum* the existence of rich inner decorations can be attested still after the Barbarian assault in 260,<sup>25</sup> e.g. the decoration with the *peristylum* in the Szőlőkert street villa, too, was made in this period. The decorations in both regions are composed of sequences of similar elements. The bases had been decorated with paintings applying different colours and imitating marble, among them egg-shaped, patched and stained variants are equally present. The main field of the side wall was divided by a composition of linear character which was terminated from above by stucco or by a painted variant of stucco. As for the ceilings the general application of the wall-paper pattern can be observed, which, depending on the function of the room was made either in a more splendid or in a simpler design.

From the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. part of the villas near *Aquincum* had been abandoned while in other buildings the application of minimum style white plaster-works can be observed. At the same time for the estates along the shore of the Lake Balaton, in Southern *Pannonia* or near the Lake Fertő this period was more prosperous.

---

<sup>25</sup> In the villa in Kaszás-dűlő-Csikós street a layer of destruction which may belong to this period cannot be found, but most probably the inhabitants of the villa had escaped from this region for a short time. Zsidi P., *Neuere Villa am Territorium des Municipiums von Aquincum*. (Bp. III. ker. Kaszás dűlő-Csikós utca) *Budapest Régiségei* 27 (1991) 151. Supposedly the Kaszás dűlő-Csikós street villa represents together with the remains of buildings excavated at the Szőlőkert street the same unit. Zsidi P., *Details of a Roman Period villa farm between the Military and Civil Towns in Aquincum*. *Aquincumi Füzetek* 5 (1998) 108.

The use of pattern books in the area north of the Lake Balaton can be observed almost all over the time of its existence of the villa. As for *Aquincum* it is the *Severan* period when a definite circulation of an identical pattern book can be supposed.

The representation of a green-black or yellow-green cube, on a white background, drawing in perspective, is a special type of patterns, which occurs only in *Pannonia*. Fragments with this pattern are known at present from Baláca, Balatonfüred and *Aquincum*. In the territory of the Roman Empire the same geometric composition occurs with an identical colour application yet in a completely different form and design. The special *Pannonian* variant of the pattern suggests the existence of those pattern books in the provinces which contain some individual decoration elements differing from the imperial fashion only in a slight degree. At the same time the *Pannonian* variant can be considered rather as the true copy of a mosaic pattern and maybe for certain reasons the mosaic variant of the motif was preferred to the painted type applied on side walls.

Every decoration in the villas at Baláca, in the area north of the Lake Balaton and in the surroundings of *Aquincum* was made on the basis of pattern books. Representations can be connected with activities in the villas or with the environment of them cannot be found on them. The rich owners of the villas near *Aquincum*, high-ranking officers, ordered luxurious decoration following style trends fashionable in towns even for their villas. Representations of local landscapes or environment cannot be found even on the wall-paintings of the Baláca villa, though this is the villa where the parts of wall-paintings could be reconstructed the best of all. Rather representations of crammed perspective architecture, characteristic of towns, and *amphitheatre* scenes, were chosen from the pattern books to decorate the representative rooms of the villas even in the early period. The representation of the owner or of his wife used to appear on Roman wall-paintings only at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., but on a large scale it occurs in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. Before this time the representations of mythological characters, historical persons and personifications was widespread.<sup>26</sup> As for the Baláca paintings in two cases presented itself the possibility that the owner or a scene can be connected to some local activity were represented, however, their chronology excludes this idea, and it seems that these paintings can be interpreted rather as a personification and as part of a mythological scene. The use of pattern books can be attested at Baláca even in a later period, too, on the wall-painting of the *peristylum* of building I. On the wall-painting producing the illusion of an inner garden olive-trees and pomegranate bushes are represented

---

<sup>26</sup> H. Mielsch, *Römische Wandmalerei*. (Darmstadt, 2001) 209-210.

which are not indigenous species in *Pannonia*, just like the ones on the emblem of the mosaic of room 31., belonging to an earlier period.<sup>27</sup>

Within the rooms the motifs of wall-paintings are repeated on the different decoration surfaces. The best example of a repeated ornamental element on the zone of side walls is the wall-painting of the red dining-room at Baláca where the water-scene of the base can be recognized in the stucco band and the astragal pattern of the medallions of the main zone appears also on the borders of the medallions of the stucco frieze. The extension of the zones and surfaces on the wall-painting was determined by the multiplication of the dimensions of the medallion or of the narrow field (nearly 1,5 Roman feet). In most cases the patterns on the ceilings are mirrored by the ones on the mosaic floors. E.g. at Baláca the mosaic in the room 10. of building I. represents a composition similar to the ones on the ceilings of the corridors or in the Bruckneudorf villa there is a similar correlation between the patterns on the ceiling and on the mosaic floor of the aula. Contemporary motifs can be recognized quite frequently in the decorations of several rooms. By a careful selection of patterns a harmonical unity had been created both within the different rooms and within the building as a whole.

#### Publications of the author dealing with the subject of the dissertation

- Kirchhof A., Válogatás a balácai, római kori villagazdaság falfestményeiből. Kiállításvezető.-Roman wall-paintings from the villa estate at Baláca. (Veszprém, 2001)
- Kirchhof A., A balácai szüret-jelenetes falfestmény rekonstrukciós problémái-Probleme bei der Rekonstruktion der Wandmalerei „Weinleseszene” in Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 7 (2002) 173-198.
- Kirchhof A., Lábazatot díszítő falfestmény-rekonstrukció Balácáról-Rekonstruktion der Sockelmalereien aus Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 8 (2004) 216-236.
- Kirchhof, A, Coffered Ceiling-Decoration at Baláca, Pannonia. In: Plafonds et voûtes à l'époque antique. Actes du VIII<sup>e</sup> Colloque international de l'AIPMA. 15-19 mai 2001. Budapest-Veszprém (Budapest, 2004) (éd., L. Borhy) 261-270.
- Kirchhof, A., Ceiling-Decoration with Vintaging Scene at Baláca/Pannonia. In: Plafonds et voûtes à l'époque antique. Actes du VIII<sup>e</sup> Colloque international de l'AIPMA. 15-19 mai 2001. Budapest-Veszprém (Budapest, 2004) (éd., L. Borhy) 359-361.

---

<sup>27</sup> The bird represented on the mosaic is most probably a pheasant species introduced Europe that is not an indigenous one and the little birds represented on the wall-painting are bee-eaters, frequently occurring in Southern Europe. Galambos I., Die Pflanzen- und Tierdarstellungen auf dem Mosaik und der gemalten Hofwand des römischen Gutshofes von Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 10 (2008) 176.

- Kirchhof, A., Black-ground Wall-painting at Baláca/Pannonia. In: Plafonds et voûtes à l'époque antique. Actes du VIII<sup>e</sup> Colloque international de l'AIPMA. 15-19 mai 2001. Budapest-Veszprém (Budapest, 2004) (éd., L. Borhy) 363-365.
- Kirchhof A., Újabb adatok a balácai ún. vörös-fekete szoba rekonstrukciójához. Balácai Közlemények 9 (2005) 53-74.
- Kirchhof, A., How was the so-called red-black wall-painting at Baláca/Pannonia made? In: Circulación de temas y sistemas decorativos en la pintura mural antigua. Actas del IX Congreso Internacional de la AIPMA Zaragoza-Calatayud 21-25 septiembre 2004 (Zaragoza, 2007) (ed. C. Guiral Pelegrín) 497-499.
- Kirchhof, A., „*Ab ovo ad Mala*” The decorative system and reconstruction of the Red Dining Room at Baláca. Balácai Közlemények 10 (2008) 42-111.
- Kirchhof A., Mozaikok, Falfestmények és stukkók-Mosaics, Wall paintings and stucco. In: Aquincumi házak belső és külső dekorációi. Aquincumi Látványraktár- A BTM Aquincumi Múzeuma állandó kiállításának katalógusa- Wall paintings and stucco. In: Interior and Exterior Decoration of Buildings. Visual Store at Aquincum. Catalogue of the permanent exhibition of the Aquincum Museum. (Budapest, 2009) 69-70.
- Kirchhof, A., Coffered Vault-decoration from Baláca Represented in Perspective. In: *Ex Officina...Studia in honorem Dénes Gabler* (Győr, 2009) (Hrsg., Sz. Bíró) 239-254.
- Kirchhof, A.- Rehorovics, A., A face from the past....painted portrait on wood from a mummy grave in Aquincum. In: *Atti del X Congresso Internazionale (Association Internationale pour la Peinture Murale Antique)* (ed., I. Bragantini) *Annali di Archeologia e Storia Antica* N. 18/2 (Napoli, 2010) 723-729. Tav. LXVIII/1.
- Kirchhof, A., A wall-paper pattern painted on stone from Aquincum. In: *Atti del X Congresso Internazionale (Association Internationale pour la Peinture Murale Antique)* (ed., I. Bragantini) *Annali di Archeologia e Storia Antica* N. 18/2 (Napoli 2010) 731-734. Tav. LXVIII/2.