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Representation of Celestial Spheres and Eternal Time on Vaults and Domes in Roman and Early Byzantine Art: Interpretation of a Roman Wall-Painting from Brigetio
(Komárom/Szőny, Hungary)

Abstract:

Roman *Brigetio*, actual Komárom/Szőny in Hungary was one of the four legionary complexes in the Roman province *Pannonia*, controlling the Danubian frontier of the Roman Empire from the 1st c. CE. till the end of Antiquity, i.e. 5th-6th c. CE. Concerning the life of the Roman settlement, which consists of three parts (legionary fortress, military town, civilian town), most aspects (social life, administration, religion, arts, etc.) were influenced by the strong military presence, which offered good economical and financial possibilities. The Roman army was a good and certain market not only for the local ceramic production, but also for products, which must have been transported by the long distance trade from the Aegean or Mediterranean world (wine, oil, olives, fish sauce, luxury pottery). All aspects of “real” Roman life were present even in such a relatively small town as *Brigetio* was: the civilian town was planned and constructed in a regular system of *insulae*, had a net parallel and rectangular streets with stone pavement and canalisation. Also probably had a *forum* and sanctuaries were erected and dedicated to Roman gods and goddesses, and finally, there was an intensive social life in the amphitheater(s?).

The private houses were decorated with fascinating wall-paintings in a period (mid 3rd c. CE), in which qualitative decorative art even in the main centers as Italy or even Rome did not exist any more.

During excavations, carried out by the author, two main surfaces of Roman wall paintings were discovered in the 90-ies of the 20th century. One of them represents a scene of a feast of soldiers of probably Syrian origin. The other one, which belonged to a barrel vault, and is the main subject of the lecture, shows a cosmological scene with the personification of the Four Seasons in form of female busts in the corners, and with the personification a constellation of the fixed-stars Andromeda and the Horse (Pegasus) in a central medalion, representing – corresponding to the astrological literature of Greek and Roman antiquity – the highest sphere of the universe. How this symbolism of space and time was taken over by Christianity, will be shown in the lecture.

Curriculum vitae:

László Borhy is professor of Roman provincial archaeology at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. Since 1992 director of the excavations in *Brigetio*. His main fields are Roman military history, Latin epigraphic, Roman art (wall-paintings, glyptic) and history of Roman Pannonia. He published not only the interpretation of a cosmological vault, found by his team in 1994-1996 (*Par domus est caelo, Pytheas, Budapest 2007*) in Brigetio, but he also identified a second, civilian amphitheater on base of the analysis of a Latin inscription (*Brigetiói amphitheatrumok? Pytheas, Budapest 2009*). He is editor in chief of the archaeological catalogue “*Acta Archaeologica Brigetionensia*” of the Klapka György Museum in Komárom (founded in 1996), where he published the guide to the stone monuments and Latin inscriptions of the lapidary (2006), and composed further catalogues of different artefacts in the collection of the same museum (bone carvings, 2001; gems, 2003; wall-paintings, 2010).