

L I T E R A T U R E

H. Kérdő, K. – Schweitzer, F. (eds): AQUINCUM Ancient landscape – ancient town. Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 2014, 188.p

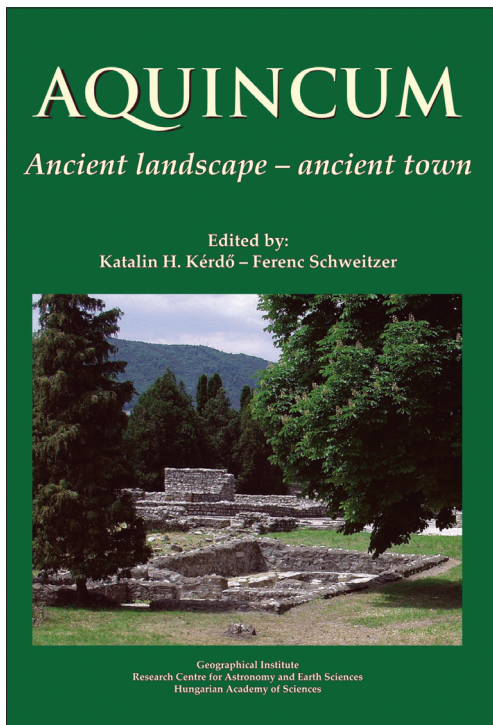
Historical events, magnificent masterpieces of art, architecture and engineering as well as people linked with the Roman Empire have long fascinated us. Hollywood movies like *Ben Hur*, *the Gladiator* or *Spartacus*, just to mention a few, have helped keeping our fascination alive. No wonder that the Empire, its rich cultural and material heritage appearing all over Europe, and literature on the subject is still popular even after 2000 years.

One of the classical examples of our Roman heritage is found in the heart of the Hungarian capital: the remains of the former Roman town known as Aquincum. The open air museum of the Historical Museum of Budapest is one way to promote this unique heritage. Publications aimed to raise scientific and public awareness of the latest findings on the subject via putting events into a landscape perspective like the present volume are exceptional and as such warmly welcomed.

The present volume, courtesy of a tight collaboration between researchers of the Geographical Institute of the Research Center for Astronomy and Earth Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Historical Museum of Budapest, is a pioneering masterpiece in combining results of archeology, history with those of natural scientific, primarily landscape geomorphological analysis. This way the reader gets firsthand information on which factors and to what extent might have influenced the formation and development of the Roman settlement of Aquincum.

The volume is aimed to elucidate the living conditions and cultural characteristics of the people inhabiting Aquincum, while discussing their interactions with the natural endowments of the landscape touching upon aspects of skillful exploitation and planned transformation. The potential pull-factors influencing initial site choice and further expansion of the settlement are meticulously evaluated taking into account their impact on space and utility management after the establishment of the town. Several exciting questions are lengthily discussed ranging from how raw materials for construction and ornamentation were gained, why the location was chosen and how nature, including floods shaped the everyday lives of the local citizens.

The conundrum of the system of trenches found in several places along the Danube is another intriguing issue tackled. According to the interpretations



presented some of them correspond to artificial canals for sewage disposal and transportation into the nearby Danube. Others might have been channels linking artificial fish ponds around the city. One can instantly understand why the interface of the eastern foothill area of the Buda Hills and the floodplain of the Danube was chosen for settlement besides obvious defensive purposes and despite the potential threat of iterative flooding. The exuberance of cold and warm springs, rocks and clay used for construction and housewares production, well-defended harbors along the river branches and backswamps are just a few among the potential pull factors touched upon in this volume.

Of the nine chapters of this 188 page volume, the first three gives an overview of the inferred natural endowments of the site. Besides the presentation of the morphology, soils, inferred climatic endowments and natural vegetation an attempt to reconstruct initial and later artificially altered hydrography of the area is also made. Based on the complex evaluation of available information seven environmental subtypes are identified to make up the mosaic of the landscape under study ranging from the main channel of the Danube and its side branches through lower and higher floodplains, backswamp areas, terraces, piedmont surfaces as well as karst slopes and horsts.

The next chapters discuss the history and archeology encountered. The initially formed Civil Town occupied the higher terraces and the higher floodplain

surrounded by waterlogged areas offering protection. However, with the development of the city and an increase in the population new areas had to be occupied requiring alteration of the hydrography by regulating streams to gain new space. The artificial transformation of the Aranyhegyi Stream into a branch of the Danube and the birth of the Kis (Little) Island hosting the later constructed governor's palace is also highlighted.

Finally, an overview is given on the utilization of natural resources as well as traces reflecting further human-induced environmental transformations. I especially enjoyed reading the chapter dealing with how nature took back the site after abandonment and how these records are preserved in the geology and archeology of the excavated areas.

The text reads smoothly and enjoyable for even layman as well. High quality illustrations, excavation photographs, interpretive maps and drawings accompanying the text aid better visualization and easy understanding of the underlying hard science, even for readers outside of the fields of archeology or geography. I found the short list of technical terms at the back of the volume especially useful as a quick reference guide for the terminology. Also the data on excavated feature levels with reference to their photo location in the volume as an appendix is a treat for those looking for utilizing this data in further research. This book may equally count on the interest of professionals and general public alike.

SÁNDOR GULYÁS