

The Local Government of Budapest, District III, Óbuda-Békásmegyer, as consortium leader, together with the Budapest History Museum (BHM), the Hungarian Tourism Agency (HTA), and the Castle Headquarters Integrated Regional Development Centre Nonprofit Private Limited Company submitted a joint VEKOP-application in Summer 2018, which received—under the identification number VEKOP-4.1.2-17-2018-00001 and title “The complex utilisation for tourism of the heritage of the Roman limes section in Óbuda-Aquincum”—**a non-refundable grant of gross 469 053 735 HUF**. During the implementation of the project, instead of the Castle Headquarters Integrated Regional Development Centre Nonprofit Private Limited Company, the Lechner Knowledge Center Non-profit Limited Company joined the project as consortium partner.

The aim of the project is to develop the utilisation of the ancient Roman heritage of District III, with a special focus on the Aquincum Museum, for tourism. The two main development components of the Budapest History Museum were **the construction along Szentendrei Road of Phase 1 of the Esplanade** of the internationally-renowned museum with the largest Roman collection in the country, **as well as the further development of the existing exhibition space and creation of an interactive exhibition space at the Aquincum Museum**. Both developments took place on Municipality of Budapest property, with the BHM as project owner. The planning started already in 2017, using funds from the Municipality of Budapest. The approval of the plans and the preparation of the implementation plans took place in early 2020, and construction began in 2022. In addition to the Aquincum Museum site, the project also involved the Military amphitheatre and the Kórház Street fortress gate. At those two sites, the past is presented to us in the form of reconstruction panels, and we can also see the past virtually on our phone screens using a proprietary app.

Although the history of Budapest, Hungary’s most important tourist destination, began with Aquincum, the remains of the Roman settlement have not played a defining role in the capital’s tourism. The aim of the project is to improve the knowledge about the Hungarian Capital’s Roman period and archaeological remains among domestic and international visitors as well as to promote the museum and its activities.

It is hoped that the development implemented in the framework of the project will have a positive impact on the current tourism service providers in the area in the future. The development implemented in multiple locations in District III targets several visitor segments (e.g. families, students, seniors); therefore, a significant increase in visitor numbers may be expected not only in the locations affected by the development. Consequently, service providers not only at the supported sites, but also those in the district will have the opportunity to boost and further develop their turnover. The project has contributed to the preservation of the built and cultural heritage and also has a didactic role: it aims to raise awareness regarding the protection and promotion of the Roman archaeological heritage of Budapest among a wide range of visitor groups (such as the local population).

The Roman monuments of District III are a part of the everyday life of the residents; after all, the ruins are located in the immediate vicinity of residential buildings and institutions, embedded in the urban fabric of Óbuda. In the course of their daily routines, residents come across the ancient sites multiple times (e.g.

Flórián Square – the southern and eastern gate of the legionary fortress, army barrack blocks, the so-called House of a centurion, the greater baths of the fortress; the Hercules villa on Meggyfa Street; the cella trichora on Raktár Street; the Roman aqueduct along Szentendrei Road; the amphitheatres on Nagyszombat Street (military) and Zsófia Street (Civil Town), etc.). Importantly, the grant has made it possible to create opportunities for information gathering (boards, audio-visual systems, etc.) that provide the citizens of the district in an experiential way with all the information which make the ruins more familiar, accepted and appreciated. In the framework of the project, tourism and infrastructure developments aimed at the worthy presentation of the Roman remains were implemented at 3 main sites, which offer a suitable location for the provision of a range of services.

Sites:

1. The Aquincum Museum site: Esplanade on Szentendrei Road. In the framework of the project:

- the southern part of the pavement section along Szentendrei Road was widened,
- a row of low bollards was built next to the kerb to prevent cars from parking on the pavement,
- so-called herms were set up, with the portraits of emperors important for Aquincum as well as with important historical events
- after the demolition of the existing asphalt pavements, 3 types of new pavement were built
- a new gateway was built,
- from the new gateway to the ticket office a new, special walkway was built, on which the words of a famous Aquincum epitaph can be read in 3 languages (Hungarian, Latin, English)
- along the new walkway Roman stone remains have been put on display
- a section of the museum fence was renewed
- a gathering place was created in front of the museum building, with trees planted and benches built

For decades, the Aquincum Museum has struggled to present the entrance zone of the park in an accentuated and clear way. Prior to the implementation of the project, the pedestrian entrance and ticket office building of the museum area was accessed via the visitor car park. The visitor car park was accessed on foot via the vehicle entrance from Szentendrei Road. It was difficult to find one's way to the ticket office due to the position of the entrance, and signs were provided to assist visitors. Prior to the development, the Museum's car park was open from Szentendrei Road, and both entry and exit were through this gate. Crossing the pavement and turning off Szentendrei Road without a turning lane was dangerous for both motorists and pedestrians; it was also less accentuated and therefore difficult to notice.

The almost-10-hectare park, which has now been upgraded, however had a problem – for decades – with its heterogeneous outer boundary, its fence, which was not worthy of the park, did not help visitors to enter the museum, did not convey information and, last but not least, was also extremely dangerous – with the proximity of Szentendrei Road pedestrian traffic was difficult there.

The area of the Aquincum Civil Town is extremely rich in finds; it is the largest Roman city north of the Alps that can be excavated to this day in a contiguous area, and nearly half of it is open to visitors. The buildings, however, survived only partially and in ruins. Tourists at the sights want to see and imagine reconstructed versions of the various buildings on the spot, using faithful – preferably realistic and digital – reconstruction drawings and videos.

Of the attractions, the Aquincum Museum was the only one capable of drawing in a significant number of visitors on its own. Neither the amphitheatre nor the Eastern fortress gate were significant tourist attractions in their own right previously. By connecting them to a network, our aim was to increase the time spent by tourists in the district; and through the networked presentation of the Roman monuments, the attractions can be interpreted in a more complex way and they become more accessible, giving visitors a more comprehensive picture of the Roman ruins of Aquincum and the parts of the former settlement. The Roman ruins in District III of Budapest are the most significant in the country, in terms of their size, number and condition, yet their importance is not sufficiently recognised by either domestic or international visitors. The development of a coherent network for their presentation enhances their importance in tourism.

The new wall constructed in front of the Aquincum Museum, as an advertisement feature, will hopefully stop some of the tourist traffic to the Danube Bend, providing visitors with visual and textual information about the Roman town. As part of Phase1, the Esplanade's entrance and access sections could be constructed. The aim, already in Phase 1, is to "turn" the museum a little to face the visitors, trying to present and display as much and as interesting information about Aquincum as possible to the pedestrians passing by.

A better comprehension of the wholeness of the Aquincum Civil Town is also helped by the large map of Aquincum displayed on both sides of the massive bronze gate now constructed, and, next to this gate, the indication in the pavement of the location of the former Roman town gate, which had once stood here, as well as its textual and graphic display in the same spot on a glass wall.

2. The Aquincum Museum site: exhibition on the army in Aquincum and the Pannonian limes. The development was implemented in an existing building of the Aquincum Museum, with a partial interior remodelling. In the framework of the project, the BHM Aquincum Museum gained a new permanent exhibition entitled "In the shadow of the Roman eagle - Military life along the Aquincum limes".

- a homogeneous interactive exhibition space was created, complemented by a traditional exhibition space
- the building's sanitary block was renewed,
- an interactive exhibition was built in the exhibition space, which presents the daily life of the Roman army on the limes,
- a museum-education room was also created
- the basic conditions for holding events in the hall were provided
- visuals were set up in the halls.

Aquincum was a border town of the Roman Empire and the capital of the province of Lower Pannonia for about 300 years; hence its prominent military role in the defence of the Pannonian provinces. Several military bases (including a legionary fortress housing a heavy infantry unit of nearly 6000 men) in what is now Budapest bear witness to the presence of the most powerful army of the time.

In addition to the weapons, the parts of military attire, and the peacetime activities of the military, the exhibition also presents finds that were previously unknown to the general public. One example is the building inscription known as the 'Drusus stone', which had been used as key evidence for the Augustan occupation of the province of Pannonia, but is now known to commemorate the construction of the Óbuda cavalry fort in AD 73. Also on display for the first time is a Roman armour assembled from several fragments. Those looking for a more peaceful, artistic experience will be delighted by the almost 2000-year-old colourful wall-painting of the Mithras shrine excavated at the Aquincum legionary fortress, which has been exhibited in an interior evoking the atmosphere of the shrine, along with the altars found there during the excavation.

Visitors can step into the main street of a bustling legionary fortress, take a look inside interiors furnished in the Roman style, and, through the VR content, enter a military barrack block, a bathhouse, or a Roman shrine, while the sound panel fills the exhibition space with ancient melodies. It is also worth keeping an eye on the little eagle. Those who follow his flight can learn about the daily life and careers of the soldiers stationed in Aquincum. Young and old alike can enjoy the games corner, where they can learn about the wardrobe of the fearsome warriors of antiquity, try out Roman board games and take part in the army's peacetime construction projects, build a model of a Roman watchtower from wooden blocks, study the famous Roman road-construction techniques or arrange the fortifications of the limes system on a map of Pannonia.

3. Military amphitheatre: The amphitheatre—the arena of which is even larger than that of the Colosseum in Rome, and the imposing walls of which did not survive—has not yet been given its true function. Following conservation work, the site was used by residents for recreation and dog-walking, and by the surrounding schools for outdoor events, but it did not really fulfil its function in tourism, and no information about the attraction was to be found on site before the project was implemented, apart from a single information board.

Within the framework of the project, 2 special so-called reconstruction (plexiglass) panels were installed next to the military amphitheatre, through which visitors can see the original contours of the building, learn about its shape, its ancient image, and how it looked in its heyday. A separate plexiglass panel depicts the later periods of the amphitheatre. On public property on the corner of Nagyszombat Street and Szőlő Street, at the entrance to the ruin area, stands a transparent reconstruction panel which provides information about the attraction, and when viewed from a particular point, the Roman period structure of the military amphitheatre becomes visible.

Next to the main road, at the corner of Pacsirtamező Street and Nagyszombat Street, we set up an attention-grabbing board, which provides information on what built and cultural heritage can be found at the site. Passing by it, the figures on the panel create a three-dimensional effect and also move in relation to each other. Looking at the ruins, the lines of the military amphitheatre in the background take shape. There are two panels placed in front of each other; the one in the back shows the lines of the building, while the one in the front displays gladiators, passers-by and chariots. On site, we can use our phones to scan the QR code on the panels to get a virtual representation of the amphitheatre as it once was. Here a further interactive phone application, also created as part of this project, allows us to stand at certain points of the amphitheatre and see how the building once looked, complemented with textual information.

4. The Kórház Street fortress gate (Eastern fortress gate) experiential display – The Kórház Street fortress gate did not meet the tourism needs of the 21st century. No information was provided there on the ruins, which are open to the public; in that form, the attraction was not tourist-friendly. Indication of the fortress gate's volume was lacking, and the attraction, hidden among the housing estate buildings around it, deserved more attention. It was difficult for visitors to envisage the original shape and location of the ancient structure within the fortress.

In the framework of the project, a special plexiglass panel was installed next to the Eastern fortress gate, through which visitors can see the original contours of the building, and get to know the shape of the structure and how it would have looked like in antiquity. The panel shows the typical fortified gates of the legionary bases, their imposing form and the strength of their walls. The reconstruction panel has been complemented by a selfie-point.

As in the amphitheatre, here too a mobile application has been activated, with the help of which we can bring the Roman fortress's entrance to life, in its original form, with textual information, while standing in front of the gate.

Together, these project elements described above are suited to present and promote experientially the Hungarian Capital's Roman archaeological heritage and, more closely, the visible and invisible remains of the Aquincum settlement complex.