

ISEUM – A COHABITATION: THE MICRO-TOPOGRAPHICAL AND FUNCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE ISIS SANCTUARY IN SAVARIA IN THE 1ST AND 2ND CENTURIES AD

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Abstract

The Iseum Savariense is not only one of the most important sacred sites in Pannonia, but also one of the most challenging archaeological sites in the province, for the interpretation of the archaeological features offers many – until now unanswered – questions. One of these is its micro- and macro-topographical and functional interpretation, which we would like to introduce in the following.

Keywords: *Savaria – Iseum – industrial function – sacral function – functional change – topographical evolution.*

Introduction to the research history

The sanctuary came to light accidentally during reconstruction works in 1955.¹ Its discovery was a sensation, although not completely surprising. Namely, based on the known findings, Vilmos Wessetzky, Professor of Egyptology at the university of Budapest, had argued for the existence of an Iseum in Savaria a year before already.

¹ For the research history see Sosztarits and Balázs 2016.

The excavations – carried out by Tihamér Szentlélek between 1955–1961 – revealed the main outline of the sanctuary² of c. 3000 m² and also its sacral findings.³ The most important and best-known in international scholarship are the elements of the frieze of the podium temple: the marble reliefs depicting Roman and Alexandrian gods and figures,⁴ such as Victoria, Mars, Hercules, Genius Augusti, Isis-Sothis, Serapis, and Anubis (fig. 1). The joint depiction of the Roman and non-Roman deities refers to the strong implication of the imperial cult with the worship of the Alexandrian gods in the Severan times.⁵ For Isis and Osiris were associated strongly with the prosperity and victory of the Empire, they took their position among the main imperial gods. The depiction of the emperors with the attributes of Serapis became more and frequent, just like Isis as the guardian of the grain supply got larger importance in the turbulent 3rd century.⁶

After the excavation, an on-site reconstruction of the façade of the podium temple and the presentation of the buildings around the sanctuary courtyard were carried out based on the work of Tibor Vákár and Gyula Hajnóczy.⁷ The elapsed time, the environmental pollution and, nevertheless, the scientific doubts regarding the reliability of the monumental reconstruction⁸ made it necessary to start a new archaeological project at the beginning of the 2000s.

Under the leadership of Ottó Sosztarits, new excavations started in the summer of 2001, which continued with smaller interruptions until 2010. The archaeological work resulted in the discovery of many archaeological features and architectural details of the sanctuary and, in addition, many thousands of finds.⁹ Archaeological research at the site continued with excavations south and west of the Iseum from 2013 onwards, which completed the previous results.¹⁰ The complete investigation of the find material and the features is still in progress.

Based on the preliminary evaluation of the recent research and its results, it is clear that two “research aspects” have produced significant new results. It has become clear that the earlier assumption for the foundation, dated to AD 188, and the destruction of the sanctuary by an earthquake in AD 456 cannot be supported anymore. The chronology of the Iseum can now be outlined with a high probability as follows:¹¹

Following the earliest intensive – but profane – built-up period (period 1), the existence of the Savarian Iseum can be confirmed from the Flavian period onwards beyond

2 For the exact size of the sanctuary: Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 38–39; Sosztarits et al. in print. The contradiction of the formerly published ground plans and measures was first raised by I. Tóth: Tóth 1999.

3 About the finds see Szentlélek 1965; 1978–1979; and the catalogue of *Iseum Cat.* 2013.

4 Steindenkmäler 1971, nos. 71–74; *SIRIS* 661; *RICIS* 613/503; summarised in Mráv 2005.

5 Sosztarits 2008; Sosztarits 2016, 38.

6 Bricault and Versluys 2014, 13–14; Podvin 2014.

7 Mezős and Botos 2006.

8 Tóth I. 1999; Scherrer 2003, 74–75 fig. 13.

9 See the catalogue items of *Iseum Cat.* 2013.

10 See Balázs et al. 2017 about the Late Roman *horreum* and recently Sosztarits et al., in print.

11 The first attempt for a chronological framework: Sosztarits 2010, 146–150; for the detailed periodisation see Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 38–40.



Fig. 1. Part of the temple façade relief of the Iseum Savariense depicting the goddess Isis riding on the Sothis dog, with Mars to the right (photo: Savaria Museum)

doubt, on the basis of the earliest finds of sacral character and architectural remains (period 2). This sanctuary had a smaller ground plan, and its upper walls were of adobe and wood construction. In the first third of the 2nd century, large-scale reconstruction work began on the site of the Iseum (period 3). The previous buildings were demolished and replaced by a huge stone complex of 72 × 43 m, with the podium temple at its centre, significantly increasing the size of the sacred precinct. The next major renovation was carried out during the Severan period (period 4), but this time only the interior space distribution and the decoration of the complex were redesigned. The complex stood until the middle third of the 4th century, when a systematic dismantling began.

Another new discovery is the large amount of find material associated with a wide range of industrial activities in the early assemblages. Their interpretation has long posed questions, since two major concentrations of find material had already been observed during the excavation: in the northern and southern ends of the Hadrianic entrance hall. We had long been of the opinion that the workshops and the sanctuary were closely related, coexisting in parallel within a given spatial unit.¹²

However, a systematic analysis of the archaeological material of the area and of the different periods has revealed that the story is more complex, and the currently available data provide a slightly more sophisticated overview of the relationship between the different functions (i.e. sacral and industrial-profane) and of the shift in emphasis of a certain function.

12 Sosztarits 2016, 36.



Fig. 2. The tesserae from the the Iseum
(photo: Savaria Museum)

(fig. 2).¹⁵ These are labelled with names, weights, colours, textile fabrics/names that refer to the local cleaning and/or dyeing of the textiles. In addition to these, the finds show that the activities here covered a wide spectrum, from the preparation of raw materials to the making and repairing of textiles. It is yet to be identified if any archaeological features clearly indicate *fullonica* in the excavated area, yet the finds at least suggest its existence.

The other group of artefacts was related to bronze casting and the repair of bronze objects. The large quantities of metal scrap, melting pots, moulds, unfinished pieces and production waste, as well as the furnaces and their work pits identified so far, suggest the existence of several workshops in the area.

Workshops from the pre-Iseum period (Period 1)

The Iseum-district and the southern suburb of the town show a permanent, intensive building activity from the time of the foundation of the colony around AD 50. This, compared to the known building history of the area of Savaria surrounded by town walls, confirms that this is the earliest known area of the Roman colonia that was continuously built up.¹⁶ From a topographical point of view, the dominant landmark of the area was clearly the Amber Road. As we shall see, the Iseum and the surrounding plots, streets and even the southern town wall were oriented along this line, while the entire urban network within the town wall was built following a different orientation.¹⁷

Relatively few features can be assigned to period 1, as the earliest layers have been reached only over a very small area, and in many places they have been destroyed

13 Pásztókai-Szeőke and Radman-Livaja 2013.

14 Sey 2013.

15 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 23.1–18.

16 Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 38; Sosztarits et al., in print.

17 For the double alignment of the urban street network see: Tóth E. 1971, 165–166 fig. 3; later: Sosztarits 1995, 240; Mladoniczki and Sosztarits 2009, 344–345; Sosztarits 2022, 17.

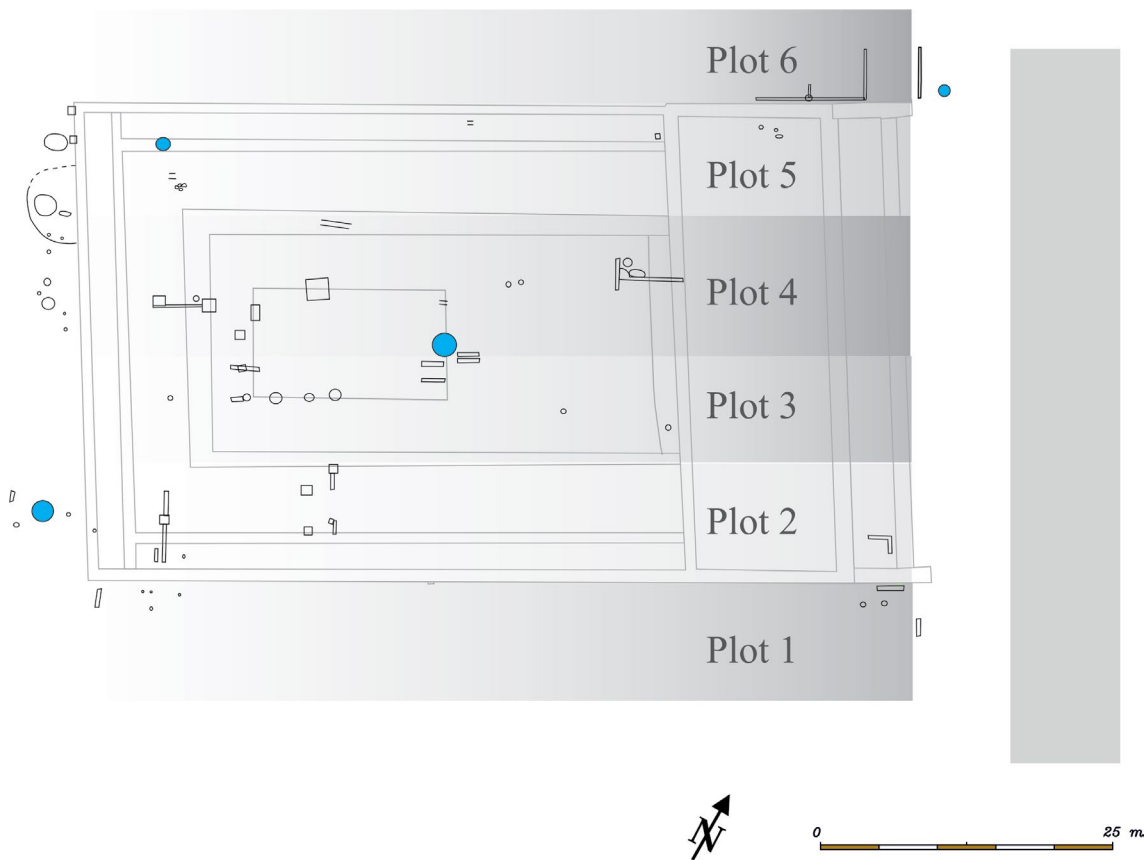


Fig. 3. The features of the Period 1 (based on the excavation documentation, drawing by Sz. Bíró)

by structures of later periods. It is certain that there are indications of parcelling in the area, where buildings, mainly of timber-framed constructions, were erected facing the Amber Road. The eastern end of the plots reached the Amber Road itself, while the western end might have extended to the bed of the former Savarias, now Perint creek.¹⁸ The size of the former plots can be indirectly determined from the buildings of the later period: they were 10–11 metres wide (c. 35–40 Roman feet). We numbered them from south to north starting from one (fig. 3). The southern closing wall of the timber-framed building at the eastern end of plot 6 to the north, and the northern closing timber-framed wall of a similar building on plot 1, also suggest that the area between them (which is the same width as the width of the Hadrianic, larger Iseum) can be divided into plots of roughly the same width. This seems to be supported by the line of E-W oriented beam foundation trenches documented under the later podium temple in the area of plots 3–4, and also by the width of the enclosed area of the Flavian Iseum, which was exactly twice as wide as a reconstructed plot for period 1.¹⁹

18 For the changing bed of the Perint creek see: Mladoniczki and Sosztarits 2009, fig. 1; Anderkó 2016, 73–76.

19 Sosztarits et al., in print.

As these features are very fragmentary, it is difficult to determine their function. However, based on the finds from the destruction layer of this period, we can assume that there were different workshops in the area. Several assemblages have therefore been identified:

Plot 4–5

In the western part of the site, traces of a bronze workshop have been found in the form of a large charcoal layer (trench 39/a, SU 1512, 1517, 1627) and the remains of several timber-frame buildings. From the destruction layer a melting pot (inv. no. R.2009.2.9148, 11569?), iron slags, a bronze vessel lid (inv. no. R.2011.4.1501) and a bronze pan (*Iseum Cat.* 8.8) came to light. The finds were discovered from a vast levelling layer from a larger area, but it is not clear on which plot the workshop may have originally stood. It is most likely to have been located in the area of the 4th plot.

Plot 3–4

A possible bronze workshop may be assumed on the eastern area of the later sanctuary courtyard. In the destruction layer of the first period, a couple of finds could be identified, among them a semi-finished bronze bracelet decorated with a circle of dots (*Iseum Cat.* 22.14) and small bronze trimmings.

Plot 3

In the beam trench (SU 1461) cut into the subsoil on the eastern side of the later podium temple: a loom-weight (inv. no. R.2009.2.10199) and a spindle shaft (*Iseum Cat.* 23.20) were found. They could only be interpreted within this period, since in the following period the area would certainly have become part of the sacred precinct of the Iseum. At the eastern end of the same plot, and at the eastern end of the later courtyard, two “lead tags (tesserae)” from the earliest layer were also found (trench 16=43, SU 1666 – *Iseum Cat.* 23.11, 15). Moreover, other ware labels emerged as stray finds nearby (trench 42/a: *Iseum Cat.* 23.17, between the later altar and stairs: inv. no. R.2020.1.52). This suggests a textile workshop in the area of the later podium temple, which ceased to exist at the latest with the construction of the Flavian sanctuary.

Plot 1

A timber-framed building from this period is also known on the south side of the later sanctuary. Its northern closing wall ran practically in the same line as the wall of the later stone-foundation building, which continues to function as the closing wall of the building on this plot in the following centuries of the Roman period. Mainly textile-producing finds could be identified from its early layers: e. g. loom weights were found *in situ* (SU 479 – *Iseum Cat.* 23.34–35, SU 438 – inv. no. R.2009.2.622).

For the rest of the site, no clear statement can be made. It is important to mention that no traces of the round huts mentioned by Szentléleký were found during the



Fig. 4. The features of Period 2 (based on the excavation documentation, drawing by Sz. Bíró)

2001–2010 excavations.²⁰ According to his description, these adobe buildings with wattle and daub walls were built until the end of the 1st century AD and could be dated by Samian Ware from the Po valley.

The smaller Iseum (Period 2) (fig. 4)

Plot 3–4

In the Flavian period, the first sanctuary with a stone-built enclosure wall was built by combining the 3rd and 4th plots. It occupied an area of 42 × 21.4 m and extended about 20 m from the Amber Road. The exact location of the central temple has not yet been determined, but it can be assumed that it was in the immediate vicinity of the later podium temple. The complex was built partly on a stone foundation but

²⁰ Szentlélek 1965, 382.



Fig. 5. Frescoes with motifs of the Alexandrian cult from the Flavian sanctuary (photo: Savaria Museum)

tion layers, so they could be from a bronze workshop of the earlier period. So far, leaf fragments of a bronze diadem have been identified (*Iseum Cat.* 8.63 – all from secondary filling, but there is one piece: inv. no. R.2009.2.7190 surely from period 1), all of them

with a timber and mud upper structure. The walls of some of the inner sanctuaries, which cannot be identified today, were decorated with high quality frescoes (fig. 5).²¹ These murals depicted the goddess or her priestess or priest, as well as the main symbol of the cult, the *sistrum*, and other motifs associated with the cult, such as a snake. They should not be seen as decorative items, but as essential elements of the cult, belonging to the goddess through dedication. For this reason, they were not allowed to leave the sanctuary during the later construction work in the first half of the 2nd century and were therefore deposited as debris in an area which must have been already a sacred place at that time.²² Their discovery in the west of the larger sanctuary precinct shows that this area was already part of the sanctuary from the Flavian period and that the sanctuary area may have extended as far as the Perint creek. Beside the frescoes, a statue base dedicated to Isis Augusta by the *duumvir* of Savaria²³ and the high quantity of “ritual” ceramic finds (e.g. lamps, incense burners, offering plates) from the destruction layer of this period refer to the religious activity of the building.

So far, we have not been able to identify a workshop in this area, or at least we have not been able to assign any features to it, except for a small pit with a burnt-out wall in the western rear section. However, workshop finds have also come to light from these features and layers, but these are mainly from destruction

21 Harsányi and Kurovszky 2017.

22 Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 45–46; Sosztarits et al., in print.

23 *CIL* III 4156 = *RIU* I 14 = *SIRIS* 661–662 = *Iseum Cat.* 1.4.

cut from a bronze plate that had probably been used for other artefacts before. In addition, a semi-finished, strongly profiled brooch with one knob (type Almgren 84 – inv. no. R.2009.2.6982) was found here, which however suggests the continuation of the workshop in the 2nd century.

In the two plots adjacent to the Iseum, the workshops were undoubtedly still in operation, on the eastern side of the plots, facing the Amber Road. So far, the following workshops have been identified:



Fig. 6. The moulds and the products of the brooch-forging workshop (photo: Savaria Museum)

Plot 5

Traces of bronze casting were found in the northern area of the Iseum. The remains of a metal workshop were found in the filling of a furnace pit (KE 592), in which strongly profiled brooches with a single knob (Almgren 69 = Riha 2.9.4.), semi-finished brooches (*Iseum Cat.* 22.12) and fibula moulds (*Iseum Cat.* 22.5, *Iseum Cat.* 22.3, inv. no. R.2009.2.5807–5808) were identified (fig. 6). In addition to the brooches, a mould for a latch (*Iseum Cat.* 22.7) and a lead test mould for a lunula (*Iseum Cat.* 22.9) were also found, which may refer to other products of the workshop. The metalworking itself is indicated by the blast pipe (*Iseum Cat.* 22.6), the melting pot (*Iseum Cat.* 22.1) and the large amount of slag from the furnace and its working pit.

Plot 2

The smaller textile workshop formerly located in the southern area (on plot 1) was probably moved one plot to the north (to the southern end of the later entrance hall of the Iseum). Here (trench 36) spindle hooks (*Iseum Cat.* 23.33 A–B, 23.29, 23.30 and inv. no. R.2009.2.7167, for the spindle hooks see Pásztoókai-Szeőke 2015, 88–92), a spindle button (*Iseum Cat.* 23.21), loom weights (R.2009.2.7898, R.2009.2.7900–7903), several bronze pins and a lead tag (*Iseum Cat.* 23.12) were found.

Similarly, in the western part of the site, south of the podium temple, a couple of lead tags (*Iseum Cat.* 23.13–14), spindle hooks (*Iseum Cat.* 23.28), bone and bronze pins were found (trenches 30 and 40, mainly from the 2nd period, from the destruction and levelling layers – inv. no. R.2009.2.4265, R.2009.2.4383, R.2009.2.4485, R.2009.2.7283), and loom weights (inv. no. R.2009.2.10753, R.2009.2.10760) were also discovered from this area. The area of the textile workshop presumably continued to the west, and here a corner of an adobe-walled building was also found above the remains of an earlier timber-framed building (fig. 7). This structure may have belonged to an industrial rather than a residential complex. Only the SE corner of the building survived: an adobe wall corner was built on a hard yellow clay foundation, which had



Fig. 7. The corner of the adobe-walled building in the SW area, on plot 2 (photo: Savaria Museum)

a gravelled foundation. The floor of the building was also revealed in the form of a hard white mortar. With a maximum dimension of 220 × 200 cm, the exact size of the room is unknown. Regarding the dating, it is worth mentioning a grey pot buried in the destruction layer of the earlier period 1 outside the adobe wall, and the three coins from them which may also be considered as building sacrifices (all coins from the reign of Titus with the terminus post quem AD 81, *Iseum Cat.* 15.2–5). These suggest that the adobe building can be dated after AD 81. The debris of the entire building was found only inside the room. The finds from its surroundings (wool comb: *Iseum Cat.* 23.19, loom weights: *Iseum Cat.* 23.36–37, bronze pins: inv. no. R.2009.2.2799, R.2009.2.3372, R.2009.2.5718, bone pin: inv. no. R.2009.2.4901, spindle button: inv. no. R.2009.2.3611, spindle hook: inv. no. R.2009.2.2296, R.2009.2.2716) indicate textile processing.

At the eastern end of the site (trench 36), a large quantity of bronze trimmings, a large quantity of slags, 72 negative fragments (inv. no. R.2009.2.7697, R.2009.2.7739) were found, which were used to cast small bronze objects. A melting pot (*Iseum Cat.* 22.2, inv. no. R.2009.2.7733) and a carriage ornament representing a female mask with a casting failure (R.20009.2.7043 = *Iseum Cat.* 14.39) also point to bronze casting. It was also possible to document the remains of a destroyed small furnace, which probably belonged to this industrial complex.

Plot 6

In 2008, a large quantity of cattle horn core and bullock fragments were found on the north side of the entrance hall and the eastern portico of the Iseum, already outside the sanctuary. The dating of the artefacts clearly places the assemblage in the 2nd period, and its interpretation should be sought in a more profane context, i.e. in the presence of a possible glue-making workshop.²⁴

Plot 1

On the southern side, a stone-foundation building was constructed over the former textile workshop.²⁵ The function of this partially excavated building is not yet known. The earliest stone buildings in Savaria, which were constructed probably in the Flavian period can be related to sacral or public functions,²⁶ and the residential buildings were generally built as a result of the great urban development which began in the Hadrianic period. Based on this, we can assume that this building must also have had some kind of public function.

It seems that in the Flavian period two buildings with stone foundations were erected on the site: the Iseum and the other one whose function is still uncertain, although it may have been administrative. In the plots between and next to them we can locate various workshops, mainly for bronze and textile processing. These may have been forced outside the town walls because of the risk of fire. We have no evidence of their possible direct relationship with the sanctuary.

Construction of the large Iseum (Period 3) (c. AD 120–200)

In the first half of the 2nd century, the spatial organisation of the area changed fundamentally (fig. 8). In the territory of the colony, a major urban development project was launched, which included the establishment of the urban road system, the construction of the public sewerage system and the paving of the streets with basalt. These works also concerned the southern area of the town. With the construction of the road that bounded the district from the south,²⁷ the former plot system may have been transformed, although its orientation was not changed. The construction of the larger sanctuary of the Iseum was accomplished by incorporating the two adjacent plots (plots 2 and 5), thus eliminating the workshops located there.

The centre of the larger Iseum consisted of the former sanctuary with a system of corridors around it. Smaller adjoining rooms were built along the main enclosure wall on three sides of this corridor, and a two-aisled entrance hall was built on the side facing the Amber Road.

Although it was built as a single architectural unit, the sanctuary must have extended beyond its enclosing walls from the 2nd century onwards.²⁸ The building on the

24 See also Sosztarits et al., in print.

25 Sosztarits et al., in print.

26 Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 35–36.

27 Balázs et al. 2017, 81.

28 Sosztarits et. al., in print.

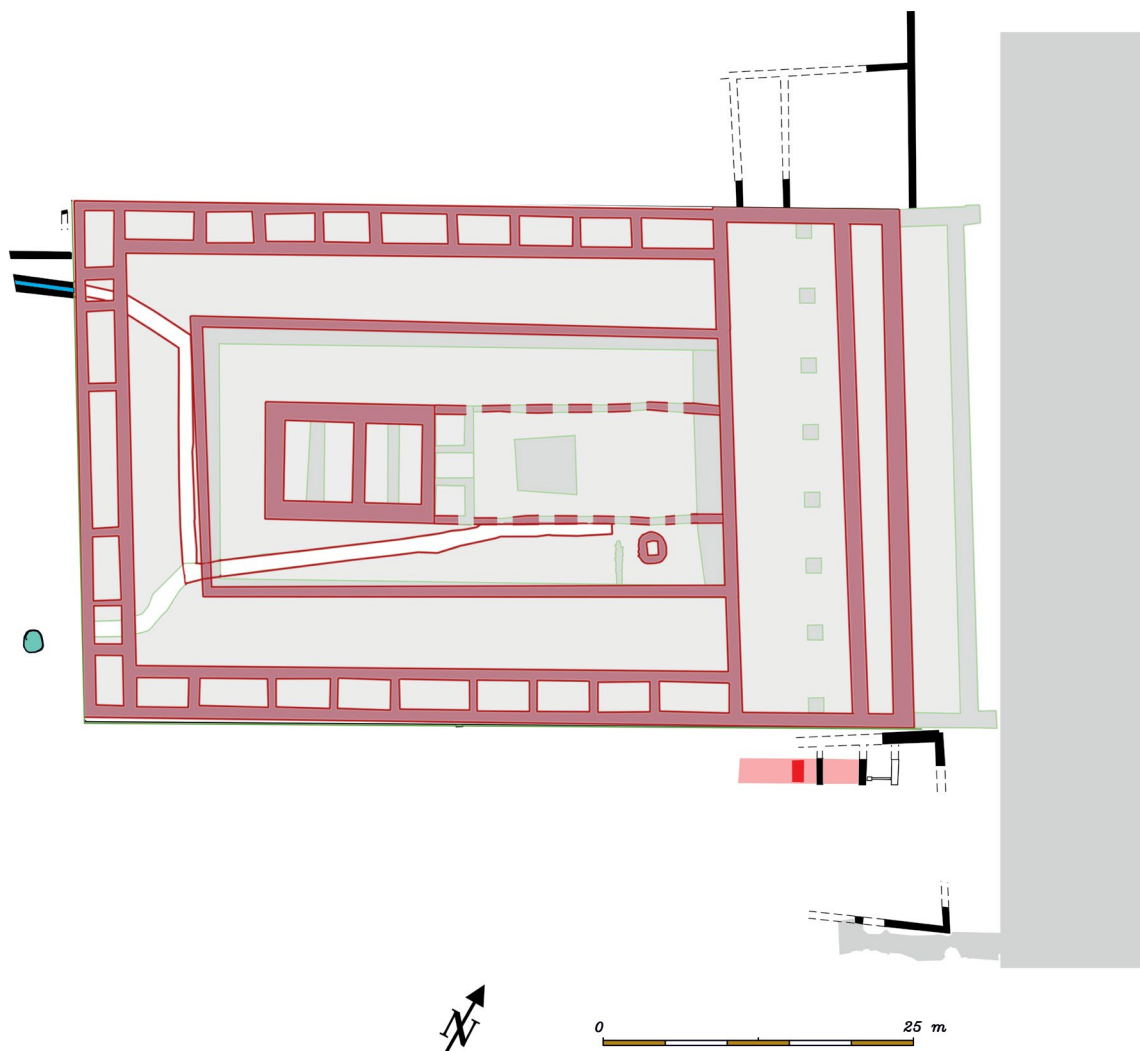


Fig. 8. The features of Period 3 (based on the excavation documentation, drawing by T. Kiss - Sz. Bíró)

northern side, immediately beyond the closing wall, must have formed an integral unit with the sanctuary as early as the 2nd century, since the foundation walls of the northern building ran directly to the enclosing wall of the Iseum, without an independent southern enclosing wall. This would also imply that this plot (plot 6) also belonged to the Iseum in some way.

The area of the sanctuary to the west was certainly larger. Due to the ritual burial of the wall elements of the earlier temple in this area, the sacred area had already extended further west in the earlier period.²⁹ In the 2nd century AD, a basalt paved road running parallel to the Perint may have been the road that bypassed the town from the west, which also may have limited the western end of the Iseum area. In the first half of the 2nd century, the drainage of the Iseum was constructed in the northern half of the larger sanctuary (formerly plot 5), leading the water westwards

²⁹ Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 45–46.

through the newly added area. Therefore, the drainage through this area reinforces the possibility of a common owner of the whole area.

This suggests that the sacred area was larger than before, and that the former residential and workshop functions in the area began to be gradually reduced.

Whether the former workshops ceased to exist permanently or simply moved elsewhere is not yet clear, but only a few indications for workshops are available. One of these evidences for industrial activity are the finds from this period coming from the outside of the southern wall of the Iseum (trench 14). Here, although no workshop features could be definitively linked to this period, the finds suggest the establishment of workshops in the front section along the Amber Road,³⁰ while a residential function can be identified in the rear section.

We should here mention the possible continuation of the bronze workshop at the western part of the Iseum plot, based on the semi-finished brooch of the 2nd century (type Almgren 84; see above plot 3–4). Another stirrup piece of a semi-finished fibula Almgren 84 was also found in the area of the NE section of the Flavian Iseum courtyard (*Iseum Cat.* 22.11).

In addition, it should be mentioned that there are also traces for grain processing in the area. Two Pompeii-type millstones and a semi-finished measuring vessel (*modius*),³¹ which were buried at the earliest in the 2nd century AD, are indications for this activity. The exact location of the grain processing is not yet known, as the three stone monuments were found on three different sides of the Iseum. However, grain processing was closely related to the cult of Isis, since Isis as the goddess of fertility was also responsible for the grain production and as Isis Pharia protected the grain shipments from Egypt to Rome.

The Severan Golden Age (Period 4)

The next major reconstruction of the Iseum took place in the Severan period, but the basic layout of the sanctuary was not changed. The façade of the podium temple received the well-known marble decoration, and an imposing granite colonnade was erected by opening the western wall of the entrance hall towards the courtyard. The corridors surrounding the courtyard were transformed into porticoes. Subsequently, in the second half of the 3rd century, the entrance hall was raised and this elevation was maintained until the abandonment of the sanctuary in the middle of the 4th century and the systematic demolition of the Iseum.³²

In the area of the southern building, which dates back to the earlier period, alterations and additions also took place, but its architectural integrity has been preserved. There is also evidence of some industrial activity here: a brick oven, dated by a coin of Gordian III, can be interpreted as a melting furnace.

30 Sosztarits et. al., in print.

31 Balázs et al. 2017, 83–87 fig. 3; *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 6.10.

32 Sosztarits et al., in print.

In the area north of the Iseum, the building annexed to the sanctuary in the earlier period has also been preserved, although it is possible to assume that it was rebuilt and the rooms rearranged, but architecturally it still formed an integral unit with the northern wall of the Iseum.

In the western area, where there had previously been no obvious built-up area, major changes took place. In the second half of the 3rd century AD, two buildings were erected at the NW corner of the Iseum, with a smaller passage between them. This passage was aligned with one of the smaller rooms inside the Iseum, so a smaller gateway, communication floor between the sanctuary and the rear section may be assumed here. The northern building had the more elaborate design: its painted vaulted ceiling³³ and the heating channel indicated a special function for this room.

Functional changes in and around the Iseum

In the 1st century, as we have seen, we can assume the existence of several workshops in the area of the later Iseum district (textile workshop, metalworking), in the suburb of Savaria. Although their exact location is uncertain in most cases, the foundation of the first sanctuary in the Flavian period indicated the beginning of a functional change in the area.

In the 2nd century, a larger Iseum was created by integrating the neighbouring plots. It is assumed that some (or all) of the buildings on the adjacent plots were functionally linked to the Isis sanctuary in the 2nd century, since their walls were joined to the walls of the Iseum. These buildings probably had such functions, which cannot be not located clearly within the walls of the Isis sanctuary so far, but their existence has to be assumed based on the evidence from other well-researched sanctuaries (e.g. banquet hall, accommodation for pilgrims etc.).³⁴ In summary, it is clear that a vast sanctuary complex of imperial importance was built around the middle of the 2nd century, which is essentially without parallel in Pannonian sacral architecture, both in terms of size and architectural quality.

With the development of the sanctuary, the industrial activity was essentially reduced to the background, but not completely eliminated. In fact, immediately to the south of the sanctuary, on the outside of the enclosure wall (trench 14), a building with several rooms and different periods may have been used as a workshop even in the 3rd century AD. The reorganisation of the urban infrastructure in the 2nd century also influenced the topography and function of the area: the former plot system arranged along the Amber Road was replaced by an insula system, with the construction of the road running from E to W south of the Iseum, which joined the long-distance bypass along the Perint on the west side. This insula measured approximately 110 × 110 m, with the sanctuary of Isis at its centre (fig. 9).

At present, little information is available regarding the rest of the Iseum insula. Only the results of an archaeological trench provide information on the building activity in

33 See Harsányi and Kurovsky 2016.

34 Sosztarits et al., in print.



Fig. 9. The southern suburb of Savaria (surveyed by F. Derdák, graphic by Gy. Isztin)

the north-eastern part of the insula.³⁵ Here, the same early built-up character was documented as in the Iseum area, but without any indication for the function of the rooms. The excavations revealed the stratigraphy of various rooms, which were located not directly along the Amber Road, but a little west of it. Interestingly, the site more or less coincides with the assemblage of sheep skulls discovered by Vilmos Lipp in the 19th century³⁶ and later interpreted as the remains of a 4th-century cryobolium by István Tóth.³⁷ If the original description was accurate, the site can refer to the front room of this building, probably the building located in the NE-corner of the Iseum insula.

Less is known about the area on the other side of the Amber Road due to the relatively limited excavations, and this is even more true for the Early Period. At present we only have evidence of industrial activity in the area opposite the north-eastern corner of the Iseum.³⁸ However, it seems certain that significant changes took place here in the 2nd century, in parallel with the changes documented in the Iseum district.³⁹ Directly opposite the Iseum, Tihámér Szentléleky carried out excavations in the 1970s,⁴⁰ and one trench reached this area during the 2001–2010 years. This research revealed the complete stratigraphy of a section. Already from the 1st century traces of a bronze melting workshop came to light, its chronology corresponding to the period 2 in the Iseum. From the later layers, some semi-finished bronze artefacts and small bronze trimmings also indicate some kind of metalworking activity.⁴¹

According to our current knowledge, several buildings with a sacral function may have stood in this area from the 2nd century onwards. Directly outside the southern town gate, a large enclosed courtyard sanctuary with an inner colonnade was built to Jupiter Depulsor.⁴² The building inscription, framed by the figure of Victoria standing in a niche on either side, shows a striking resemblance to the main inscription of the Iseum. The formal characteristics date both to the Severan period.⁴³

In the same period, a temple dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus was built a little further south.⁴⁴ Here, the inscriptions on the discovered stone monuments clearly refer to the cult.⁴⁵

35 Balogh et al. 2002, 157–159.

36 Lipp 1870, 43–44.

37 Tóth I. 1975 and for its interpretation see also Thomas 1979, 231–233.

38 Szentléleky 1974.

39 Szentléleky 1973.

40 Szentléleky 1970, 1972, 1973, 1974.

41 The complete investigation of the features and finds is still in progress.

42 Medgyes 1974; Medgyes–Tóth 1975. For its identification as a sacral building see: Sosztarits 2022, 17; Sosztarits et al., in print.

43 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 1.2 = *LapSav* 2011, 102–105 no. 41. The inscriptions were first published by I. Tóth (Tóth I. 1983–1984), without identifying that the Victoria relief also belonged to the inscription. The “weiblicher Torso” mentioned by Tóth was identified and also linked to the inscription during the investigation of the stone monuments of the Iseum, and it was confirmed by geological analysis; see: Mráv 2005, 38–40 fig. 13.

44 For its provenience see: Szentléleky 1970, for its dating: Szentléleky 1968, 382–383, and Tóth I. 1971, 80–84.

45 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 1.16–17, 1.19.; Tóth I. 1977.



Fig. 10. The three-figure marble relief depicting Mercury, Silvanus and a Genius Augusti or Genius coloniae (photo: Savaria Museum)



Fig. 11. Fragment of a Mithraic head (photo: Savaria Museum)

Although the area has only been partially excavated, the discovered finds suggest that there are other sacral structures between these two. During the research carried out between 1969 and 1973, Szentlélek identified three additional buildings between the above two on the eastern side of the Amber Road, and he also described them as sacral buildings.⁴⁶ Only little information came to light about the periods of the 1st–2nd centuries during this research, only the existence of the early, multi-period, timber-framed buildings was documented. During an urban development at the end of the 2nd century, the known stone buildings were erected over their destruction layers.⁴⁷

First of all, a three-figure marble relief with oriental characteristics must be mentioned; this depicted Mercury, Silvanus and a Genius Augusti or Genius coloniae with a kalathos on his head.⁴⁸ This stone monument was discovered in the northernmost of these buildings (fig. 10).

A fragment of a head with a frigate cap of Mithraic type (fig. 11)⁴⁹ and a naked female figure holding a snake in her hands (fig. 12),⁵⁰ as well as terracotta and lead votive offerings,⁵¹ were found in its vicinity.

The largest and central building of the vast “sacred district”, which included the sanctuaries of several deities, was of course the Iseum. The architectural and functional evolution of the sanctuary changed the specific “coexistence” of the previous-

46 Szentlélek 1978–1979, 186–187.

47 Szentlélek 1973.

48 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 5.1; Gesztelyi 1989–1990, 144–152.

49 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 3.13; Scherrer 2022.

50 *Steindenkmäler* 1971, 121 no. 186.

51 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 9.3. Furthermore, a little east from the excavation on today’s Music School several lead votives came to light – unpublished excavation.



Fig. 12. Relief depicting a naked female figure holding a snake (photo: Savaria Museum)

ly predominantly commercial and/or industrial environment and the early smaller sanctuary in such a way that the sacred function gradually became dominant and later almost exclusive. This naturally affected the character of the relationship between town-walled inner colony territory and the Amber Road area. Its role as a long-distance trade route became secondary as the traffic shifted to the transit road behind the sanctuary, between the stream and the western town wall.⁵² Of course, the road retained its traditional character as a main road, but the cult buildings along it transformed it more and more into a sacred road. It is no coincidence that Szentlélekly called it the “Alley of Oriental Sanctuaries” as early as 1969,⁵³ and a little later István Tóth, following P. Merlat, called it the “Rue of Temples”,⁵⁴ apparently not unreasonably.

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52 Mladoniczki and Sosztarits 2009, fig. 1.

53 Unfortunately, T. Szentlélekly did not publish this term; it appears only in the excavation documents.

54 Tóth I. 1977, 66.

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