

# A Late Copper Age biritual cemetery on the outskirts of Balatonszentgyörgy

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## Summary

The present volume offers an assessment of a recently excavated large cemetery, which in terms of the number of burials is only eclipsed by Budakalász and Pilismarót-Basaharc, and is thus the third largest Late Copper Age burial ground in the Carpathian Basin and, at the same time, the second largest biritual cemetery of the Baden complex after Budakalász.

István Molnár and Krisztina Somogyi uncovered a total of 76 Late Copper Age burials at the Balatonszentgyörgy-Faluvégi dűlő 2 site in 2017. Mária Bondár learnt about this cemetery in 2020 while gathering material for her project, “Complex analysis of the Late Copper Age burials of the Carpathian Basin”, funded by a grant from the National Research Development and Innovation Office (NKFI K-128413) awarded in 2018. Preparations for the assessment of the cemetery and its publication as part of the project began in early 2021, amidst the still raging COVID pandemic.

Published here is the catalogue of the cemetery’s burials, alongside an assessment of its finds and the associated archaeometric and other analyses, prepared as part of the NKFI-funded project (K-128413). The costs of the publication were covered by Grant MEC\_K 140620 awarded by the Mecenatúra 2021 Fund.

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The archaeological assessment is presented by Mária Bondár and Krisztina Somogyi. The chapters covering the archaeological evaluation of the cemetery and its finds are complemented by analyses written by specialists of the archaeology-related disciplines. The physical anthropological assessment of the human remains was undertaken by Piroska Rácz. The scanty archaeozoological material recovered from the burials was examined by Erika Gál, the archaeomalacological finds by Pál Sümegi. The few chipped stones were analysed and drawn by Tibor Marton. The results of the geological examination of the samples taken from the stone packing of the burials are presented by Dóra Georgina Miklós. The potentials and preliminary findings of the bioarchaeological analyses, currently still in progress, are summarised by Dániel Gerber.

The site and its investigation are described by Krisztina Somogyi. The biritual cemetery of the Baden culture at Balatonszentgyörgy covers 1250 m<sup>2</sup>: the northern and southern boundary of the burial ground could be securely determined (*Fig. 6*), while some burials probably still lie west and north-east of the investigated area. The various features in the subsoil mixed with brown sand in the cemetery’s middle part were excavated using both the traditional spade-spit and the trowelling technique over a roughly 10 m by 30 m large area (*Fig. 4*). The storage pits found in the cemetery’s eastern part date from the Bronze Age and some of them disturbed the Copper Age burials (*Fig. 8*).

A total of 73 features (stratigraphical units) can be associated with the Baden complex (*Table 1*): among these, 32 were inhumation graves containing a single burial, three were graves with double inhumation burials (Graves 763, 774, 807 and 1223) and one was a grave containing three burials (Grave 794). The 37 inhumation burials contained the complete or partial skeletons of 42 individuals.

A total of 31 individuals were interred according to the cremation rite in 29 graves. Of these, ten were scattered cremation burials and one was a double burial (Grave 783). There was a double burial among the 14 inurned burials, too (Grave 1188). In four cases, it proved impossible to determine which variant of the cremation rite was employed for interring the deceased (one of these, Grave 1212, was a double burial). Although there were no cremains, Grave 804 can nevertheless be regarded as a cremation burial in view of the find circumstances (*Fig. 11 and 18*).

Seven disturbed burials lacked human remains (Graves 773, 776, 778, 784, 805, 1161 and 1185) and, therefore, the burial rite could not be determined. The cremains from Graves 776 and 1185 turned out to be the calcined remains of animals. Grave 776, marked by a stone packing, yielded only small vessel fragments, as did Grave 1185, which similarly contained broken vessels. The cremains from Graves 779 and 787 originated both from humans and animals.

In her assessment of the cemetery, Krisztina Somogyi covers various dimensions of the burial ground such as the location of the interments deposited according to different rites, the possible correlations between biological sex, age and burial rite, and the possible patterns in the deposition of grave goods. She also discusses the conclusions that can be drawn from the chronology of the burials.

The burials in the cemetery's central area formed a large inner group with more loosely spaced graves along the edges, dominated by cremation burials. Solely inhumation burials were uncovered along the cemetery's perimeter. The pit burial (Grave 794) lay at the cemetery's edge. In addition to the main inner group, three smaller clusters could also be distinguished: one north-west of the main group (Graves 803, 804, 809, all cremation burials, *Fig. 21*); another at the cemetery's western edge made up of three inhumation burials whose chronological position also differed (Graves 793, 800 and 794, possibly representing Baden IV, *Fig. 10*), and a cluster of biritual burials in the north-east (Graves 1164–1167, 1171 and 1215, predominantly inurned burials, *Fig. 2*), which was assigned to the Baden III period by Mária Bondár.

The cremation burials lay in the modern subsoil. 13 inhumation burials had genuine grave pits or their location was indicated by a soil mark in the subsoil. The grave pits were oval or had an irregular shape and were filled with mixed brown sand. There was no apparent correlation between age, biological sex, orientation and a burial's spatial (horizontal or vertical) location within the cemetery.

The mortuary population of 73 individuals was made up of 39 children (53%), 30 adults (41%) and four individuals whose age and biological sex could not be determined (6%). The adults comprised five males and 18 females, alongside seven individuals whose biological sex could not be determined. The adults included one *senius*, four *maturus* and 23 *adultus* and over-20 individuals.

Children under 15 were interred according to both the inhumation and the cremation rite practiced in the cemetery. However, there were no children under the age of 2 among the scattered cremation burials, while none of the cremation burials yielded the remains of adults over 40 years of age (which, however, can perhaps also be explained by the loss of data owing to the destroyed graves). The individuals buried according to the cremation rite were of roughly the same age: 20–39-year-old females and a smaller child. Only children and *maturus* females or *maturus* females and *Inf. II* children or females of different ages were buried according to the inhumation rite. Multiple burials were not specific to a particular chronological horizon in the cemetery.

The practice of covering graves with a stone packing was first documented at this site from the cemeteries of the Baden complex in County Somogy (*Figs 17, 24, 27, 32–33*). The Balatonszentgyörgy cemetery is the first Baden burial ground where some of the smaller stones placed over the graves were collected and examined by a geologist (Dóra Georgina Miklós).

There was no apparent pattern in the spatial distribution of the 15 stone-packed graves; only so much was apparent that they lay in the cemetery's middle, north-eastern and eastern part. A genuine heap of

stones covered Grave 780, the burial of an elderly man. The general funerary practice appears to have been the use of one large stone (sometimes together with several smaller ones) for covering the strongly crouched inhumation burials (Graves 1213, 1216 and 1221). Grave 1196, an infant burial, had the entire grave pit covered with stones. A stone packing could be documented in the case of two cremation burials lying near the modern surface (Graves 1186 and 1181, the latter an inurned burial), while the other stone-packed graves were inhumation burials. With the exception of three graves, most of the graves with a stone packing contained child burials.

Three stone-packed burials were south to north oriented, the dominant orientation of the deceased in the cemetery, while a differing orientation was documented in four cases, suggesting that the diverging alignment cannot be correlated with the stone packing and neither were there any differences in the grave goods compared to the other burials. Mária Bondár's analysis indicated that the stone-packed graves could be assigned to the Baden IIB–III period.

The cremains were deposited in a small heap in ten cremation burials. Grave 783, a double burial, had two separate heaps, each covered with a bowl. Seven cremation burials contained grave goods. One typical funerary custom appears to have been the placement of one or more vessels with the mouth downward over or around the cremains. Cups and jugs were the typical vessels accompanying the deceased, irrespective of age. Bowls served to cover the cremains. The vessel sets recovered from the burials sometimes included a storage jar, two to three bowls, or a jug. Most burials contained one to three vessels and the range of vessels was more or less standardised. With its set of six vessels, Grave 803 (Baden III/IV) was one of the burials with the highest number of vessels in the cemetery. Grave 779, whose grave goods included a broken copper sheet, a spindle whorl, and a red stone, was also assigned to the late Baden III, while Grave 1162, which yielded a shell plaque, was dated to the Baden III period by Mária Bondár.

With the exception of the cemetery's earliest and some of the latest burials, the scattered cremation rite was practiced during the burial ground's entire use-life (although predominantly in the Baden IIB–III period). On the testimony of the securely datable burials, the deposition mode of the cremains and the vessels did not change over time.

Of the 14 inurned cremation burials, Grave 1188 was a double burial. Owing to the disturbance to these burials, the vessel sets deposited in these burials can rarely be reconstructed with certainty. It would appear that inurned burials were furnished with a larger vessel for the cremains (an amphora, storage jar or pot), the exceptions being the child burials, in which the cremains were placed in bowl (Grave 1164) or a jug with an *ansa cornuta* handle (Grave 1155). A breast pot served as the urn in Grave 1219, the burial of an adult female. The larger vessel was generally covered with a bowl, either with its base over the mouth or set upside down. A jug or mug was sometimes also placed inside the urn. Grave 1155, a child burial assigned to the Baden IIB period, contained the fragments of at least five vessels, an unusually high number both among the inurned burials and the cemetery itself. Inurned and scattered cremation burials contained sets of similar ceramic types and a similar number of vessels, usually one to three vessels. Another shared trait is the use of bowls for covering the urn or the heap of cremains to keep them together as well as for protecting them.

Inurned burials are attested from the cemetery's earliest period (Grave 1219, Baden IIa or IIB) and the rite remained current during the ensuing Baden IIB and III horizon, too, in roughly equal proportion. In contrast, no inurned burials were found dating from the burial ground's last period (terminal Baden IIIb/early Baden IV, possibly Baden IV). The basic vessel set made up of an urn and bowl for covering it remained in use during all periods; a higher number of vessels and the use of a vessel that differed from the usual large vessel as an urn was also documented in all periods of the cemetery's use-life.

Of the 37 inhumation graves, four were assigned to the Baden IIb phase, eight to the Baden IIb–III phase and eight to the Baden III phase according to Mária Bondár's chronological periodisation. A south to north orientation was the general practice (18 burials, representing 49% and roughly one-half of the interred individuals). This orientation could be noted across the cemetery's entire territory. The alignment of the burials in nine graves diverged from the typical orientation; most of these burials, some with a stone packing, lay in the cemetery's outer zone. There was no correlation between atypical orientation and biological sex or age. However, no children under 7 were oriented other than north to south. Neither were there any differences in the grave goods compared to the burials with the traditional orientation. The duality of standard and deviant orientation could be noted throughout the span of the cemetery's use, indicating that there was no chronological difference between the two. In the case of single burials, the deceased were deposited in a crouched position and laid on their left side in inhumation burials, the single exception being Grave 1221 containing an individual crouched on the right side. Individuals crouched on the right side were usually found in multiple burials.

Of the 36 inhumation burials, grave goods survived in 25. The range of grave goods made up of inorganic artefacts can be reconstructed from the pieces recovered from the undisturbed or barely damaged burials: 12 graves (32%) containing 13 interments (31%): Graves 757, 800, 774, 1211, 1172 and 1214 (lacking a stone packing) and Graves 780, 1171, 1196, 1202, 1213 and 1221 (stone-packed burials).

12 graves were disturbed and incomplete, and included also a triple burial, adding up to the interment of 14 individuals.

Five graves can be regarded as burials lacking grave goods (Graves 768, 793, 1207, 1193, 1216), as can the interment in a settlement pit (Grave 794) because the origin of the stones in the pit's fill is uncertain. The other disturbed features could not be interpreted.

A closer look at the position of the grave goods within the grave revealed that vessels were generally placed beside the head, near the arms or upper body, or in the region of the feet. Grave 1214 (possibly from the Baden III period) represents a unique case: the small body of an infant was covered with a bowl with its mouth downward, resembling cremation burials, suggesting that this practice was probably its equivalent. One unusual practice was documented in relation to Grave 780: the small vessel, a jug, was placed beside the grave's stone packing, on its outer side.

A single vessel, a jug was placed in six well-documented burials. Storage jars, pots and bowls were sometimes the single vessel accompanying the deceased. Judging from the seven undisturbed and one disturbed child burial, children in the Inf. I age group were accorded a mug. This practice could be traced throughout almost the entire span of the cemetery's use-life (Baden IIb–III). The three vessels deposited in Graves 1196 and 1184, both infant burials (Baden III), represent a high number. The disturbed burials showed some variation in the deposited vessel sets.

The shared element of all three rites is the inclusion of a jug or a mug in the vessel set, which was in all likelihood deposited beside the deceased with the same purpose. The deposition of a single vessel can be noted in both inhumation and scattered cremation burials. The inclusion of one to three vessels, a spindle whorl, and a small chipped stone of chert among the grave goods is another element common to the different funerary rites practiced at Balatonszentgyörgy.

The deposition of spindle whorls was apparently part of all three rites during the Baden III period. This artefact can be linked to females on the basis of two female inhumation burials (Graves 774 and 1223). The determination of biological sex is uncertain in the case of cremation burials (Graves 781, 1188 and 779). A small chipped stone was placed beside the upper body or in the waist region in two inhumation burials, one the burial of an adolescent (Grave 1172, Baden IIb), the other the burial of an

adult (Grave 762), whose age corresponds to that of the individuals interred according to the scattered cremation rite (Graves 785, 783) and the inurned rite (Graves 781 and 1188) during the Baden III period.

Made predominantly from limestone and, more rarely, of snails and in one case of clay, the beads deposited in the burials in varying numbers were doubtless part of the costume. They were usually found in the head region in child burials, suggesting that they had been hair adornments or had ornamented a headdress or cap, or had been strung into a necklace. Some were strung into a bracelet, while some appear to have been sewn onto a dress or a coverlet. A bead necklace was found in Grave 774, a double female burial.

Mention must be made of a broken copper sheet found in a female burial (Grave 779) and a delicate copper wire placed in the burial of an 8–10-year-old child (Grave 1171).

The typological assessment of the finds and the typo-chronological ordering of the burials is presented by Mária Bondár.

The combined plan of an excavation usually reflects a situation that had never actually existed since archaeologists usually uncover the superimposed relics of successive chronological horizons, from which they then have to single out the finds and the various features of a settlement or a cemetery from each period and determine their typical traits and the possible relationships between them. These points are illustrated by Mária Bondár in her assessment of the Late Copper Age cemetery and its probable chronological horizons, which she distinguished using the same approach as in the case of the Pilismarót cemetery.

The dating of the burials was undertaken using the traditional typo-chronological method, which revealed that the cemetery's early graves, 32 in all, were clustered in its middle part, in the broader area of Grave 1219, regarded as the earliest burial (Baden IIa or IIb). Six graves were assigned to the Baden IIb horizon (nos 777, 780, 1155, 1161, 1169 and 1185), five to the Baden IIb–III period (nos 778, 787, 1181, 1210 and 1216), and fourteen to the Baden III period (nos 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 788, 804, 809, 1162, 1164, 1165, 1166, 1167, 1171, 1184, 1211, 1214 and 1215). No more than three graves represented the next period, the terminal Baden III, in this area (nos 779, 803 and 1212) and there were no graves from the cemetery's late period in the central area (*Fig. 35*).

The significance of the Late Copper Age cemetery is summarised by Mária Bondár. It has been suggested that the standard pottery forms and the combination of ornamental motifs on the vessels of the culture, which is now generally designated as the Baden complex owing to its vast distribution, were the visual expressions of some shared tradition. It is also assumed that the combinations of decorative elements did not depend on the momentary whim of potters, but were “constants” transmitted from one generation to the next. It is also quite obvious that owing to the natural differences between potters in terms of their abilities, skills and experience, their familiarity with and understanding of traditions, as well as their personal preferences, there are major differences between the seemingly similar vessels, which poses certain obstacles to any typological analysis.

The vessels recovered from the burials of the Balatonszentgyörgy cemetery do not represent the entire ceramic repertoire of the Baden culture, only a few types were selected for deposition (*Tables 2–3*). The overview of the pottery does not offer an exhaustive typological analysis covering each and every minor detail since the goal was not to present each vessel in minute detail and to list all known analogies. Instead, the focus was on identifying local traits in the cemetery and on determining shared traits that would outline broader categories. Another important consideration was the identification of small divergences and distinctive elements that would provide secure anchors for the assessment of the entire cemetery, as in the case of the Budakalász and Pilismarót burial grounds, where this proved possible. For example, if vessels made by the same potter can be identified in several burials, it implies that they had been made during the potter's lifetime, within the span of a few decades, indicating the

chronological proximity of those burials and providing important pointers for the cemetery's internal chronology. The traits typical to a particular chronological horizon are crucial for reconstructing the "peopling" of the cemetery, the sequence of the burials, which can only be outlined after individual burials are assigned to chronological horizons based on the distinctive traits of various types and on the examination of their spatial distribution within the cemetery and their possible associations with the other graves goods (*Tables 4–5*). Of the typological systems current in Late Copper Age studies, the chronological phases of the most widely used scheme, elaborated by V. Němejcová-Pavúková were adopted in this volume.

According to this scheme, Baden IIa and Baden IIb (Horizon 1) and Baden IIb (Horizon 2) represent the early classical Baden period after Boleráz. Baden IIb–III (Horizon 3), Baden III (Horizon 4) and late Baden III (Horizon 5) span the classical Baden period, while terminal Baden III and early Baden IV (Horizon 6) and Baden IV (Horizon 7) can be correlated with the late classical period in the life of the Baden complex.

The finds from the Balatonszentgyörgy cemetery indicate that the overwhelming majority of the cemetery's burials can be dated to the classical Baden period, to the time after the Boleráz period, while the late Baden period is represented by a few burials only. Similarly to the Budakalász and Pilismarót burial grounds, the cemetery's use-life can be estimated as spanning roughly 150–200 years.

Increasingly more radiocarbon dates are available for the Late Copper Age from the distribution of the Baden complex. The early phase of the Baden culture (Boleráz) is generally dated to 3650–3350 cal BC, while the culture's classical phase to 3350–3100/2900 cal BC.

Radiocarbon dates provide secure chronological anchors for determining a cemetery's use-life. However, Mária Bondár did not use the currently available raw data in her typo-chronological assessment. The radiocarbon dates for the cemetery will be calibrated and modelled by Krisztián Oross, who will publish the results in the volume covering the Late Copper Age burials of the Carpathian Basin, scheduled to appear in 2023.

The most important aspects of the cemetery's overall social context as revealed by the analysis of the burials are reviewed by Mária Bondár.

One remarkable finding of the detailed assessment was that only single exemplars of certain vessel types were deposited in a burial:

- Grave 767 (female): bowl (*Pl. 5. 3*);
- Grave 778 (lacking human remains): storage jar fragments (*Pl. 11. 3*);
- Grave 780 (elderly male): jug (*Pl. 14. 5*);
- Grave 785 (7–14-year-old child): two bowl fragments (*Pl. 23. 3, 7*);
- Grave 800 (elderly female): jug (*Pl. 29. 3*);
- Grave 803 (adult): jug with notched handle (*Pl. 32. 2–3*) and bipartite bowl (*Pl. 31. 1–4, Pl. 32. 1*);
- Grave 804 (lacking human remains): two bowls (*Pl. 33. 3, Pl. 35. 6, 8*);
- Grave 809 (2–4-year-old child): narrow-necked jug (*Pl. 38. 3*);
- Grave 1155 (2–4-year-old child): jug with ansa cornuta handle (*Pl. 41. 1*);
- Grave 1161 (lacking human remains): jug (*Pl. 43. 1–3*);
- Grave 1184 (0–0.5-year-old infant): handled pot (*Pl. 56. 4*);
- Grave 1187 (7–14-year-old child): storage jar fragments (*Pl. 62. 3–5*);
- Grave 1188 (double burial of a 2–4-year-old child and an adult female): jug with eight symmetrically spaced vertical ribs (*Pl. 63. 3, Pl. 65. 1, Pl. 66. 7*);
- Grave 1219 (adult female?): bowl (*Pl. 83. 3*) and breast pot (*Pl. 84. 1*);
- Grave 1223 (elderly female): pot fragment decorated with an impressed cordon (*Pl. 87. 1–3*).

Compared to the 436 graves of the Budakalász cemetery and the 110 graves of the Pilismarót cemetery, there were far fewer burials in the Balatonszentgyörgy burial ground and thus only certain elements indicate the presence of an adult elite (Graves 779, 780, 800, 803, 1219 and 1223). Aside from vessels, a few other articles also reflect the prominent status of a particular burial.

The special status of the roughly 20-year-old female buried in Grave 779, a scattered cremation burial (terminal Baden III), was indicated by a copper sheet (*Pl. 13. 6*), a reddish stone (*Pl. 12. 4*), a spindle whorl (*Pl. 12. 5*) and two different jugs (*Pl. 12. 3, Pl. 13. 1*).

In addition to three stones, Grave 780, the burial of an elderly male (Baden IIb) yielded the single exemplar of a particular jug type (*Pl. 14. 1–5*).

One distinctive trait of the Balatonszentgyörgy cemetery is that children appear to have been held in remarkably high esteem, as shown by their grave goods and costume accessories (e.g., Graves 1162, 1171 and 1221) and the deposition of the single exemplar of particular artefact or vessel type in their burials. All three burials can be dated to the Baden III period.

Grave 1162 contained the remains of a 2–4-year-old child (Baden III). Lying among the remains were the fragments of a plaque polished from an *Unio crassus* mussel (*Pl. 39. 7–13*) and the tiny fragments of a few limestone beads. No vessel was deposited in this burial.

The 8–10-year-old child interred in Grave 1171 (Baden III) was covered by a larger stone. Deposited in the burial were beads made from *Columbella rustica*, a marine snail gathered in distant lands (*Pl. 52. 17–24*) and a crumpled copper wire (*Pl. 52. 3*) alongside limestone and clay beads. The burial did not contain any vessels.

The body of the 2–4-year-old child in Grave 1221 (Baden III) was similarly covered with a larger stone. The burial contained a few beads and alongside six perforated *Lithoglyphus naticoides* river snails, also used as beads (*Pl. 85. 8*). There was no vessel in the burial.

The shell plaque, the exotic marine snails from a faraway region, the unusual metal articles and the red-coloured stone as well as the higher-than-average number of vessels indicate a status differing from the average from the Baden III period onward, irrespective of the funerary rite according to which the deceased was interred. Although there are few clues as how exactly they differed from the others, the artefacts themselves would suggest that these items served to express the special or prominent status of certain individuals within the community, as has already been demonstrated for the period's other burial grounds at Budakalász-Luppa csárda, Balatonlelle-Felső Gamász and Pilismarót-Basaharc.

It could be noted that the location of the graves was pre-determined in this cemetery, too, and that certain members of the community enjoyed a special status, reflecting the presence of an elite. The proportion of males is surprisingly low, suggesting that their daily tasks or thirst for adventure and discovery called them elsewhere. They maintained contact with distant regions, whence they brought back raw materials and other commodities, and also acquired new skills and knowledge. Some probably perished far from their home and could not be buried by their loved ones. The graves lacking human remains can perhaps be interpreted as symbolic graves for the community's members who had died in faraway lands.

The high infant and child mortality is noteworthy: over one-half of the excavated burials contained children of various ages. The genetic analyses will perhaps shed light on the causes of their death.

The plan of the cemetery (*Fig. 35*) clearly shows that the graves were not closely spaced and that even during the same period, new graves were opened at some distance from a previous one even if there was enough space for an interment closer to a previous one. This would suggest that the graves were visible on the ground, either because not too much time had elapsed between two funerals, or because they were marked in some way.

The pre-determined nature of grave locations would imply that this was one of the organising principles of the cemetery and that individuals who differed from the others in some respect were also interred in this small burial ground, their status reflected not only by their grave goods, but also by the location of their grave.

The catalogue of the graves and their finds – on which the analyses of the cemetery are based – was assembled by Krisztina Somogyi and Mária Bondár. The catalogue contains a detailed description of the graves and the location of the grave goods in the burials, a description of each find reflecting its condition after its cleaning and conservation, and the typological category to which a particular vessel can be assigned to. Also included are the identifications of the various other finds provided by the specialists whose findings can be found in separate studies at the end of the volume. The coordinates of each grave enable its location on the plan of the cemetery. The grave plans and the grave goods are illustrated in 87 plates.

Additional information for drawing as full a picture as possible can be gained from the archaeometric analyses. Various issues that could hitherto not be studied using traditional archaeological methods can now be addressed by disciplines such as genetics, molecular biology, geochemistry and physics that have been incorporated into the standard archaeological arsenal. The collaboration and dialogue between various disciplines provides a wealth of new information on the Copper Age, too. Drawing from the deceased themselves and the various aspects of their burials and grave goods, the “archaeology of death” can reconstruct many dimensions of their one-time lives and life circumstances. These will be published in a separate volume in 2023.