

Press information

The Roman City Carnuntum

History

Tiberius, who later became Emperor, erected a winter camp in the Carnuntum area in the year 6 AD. This was the beginning of 400 years of Roman presence in Carnuntum. Under Emperor Claudius a military camp was erected around the year 54 AD where today's market town of Bad Deutsch-Altenburg is situated, which is where the city of Carnuntum originated. A civilian settlement, the so-called *canabae legionis*, grew up around the military camp and together they formed the military city. Towards the end of the 1st century AD a civilian settlement came into being in today's town of Petronell-Carnuntum, which later became the civilian city of Carnuntum. This was not under military command but had its own civilian administration.

Around the year 124 AD Carnuntum became a municipality under Emperor Hadrian and was known as *Municipium Aelium Carnuntum*. At this time the province of Pannonia was reorganized into Upper Pannonia (*pannonia superior*) and Lower Pannonia (*pannonia inferior*). Carnuntum became the capital of the province of Upper Pannonia and the seat of the governor. Emperor Marcus Aurelius conducted the campaign against the Marcomanni in Carnuntum during the years 171-173 AD and it has been verified that he wrote the second book of his famous "Meditations" here.

In the year 193 AD the then ruling governor Septimius Severus was proclaimed emperor by his troops in Carnuntum, and he then raised Carnuntum to the status of a *colonia* (*Colonia Septimia Aurelia Antoniniana Carnuntum*). Carnuntum reached its greatest expansion at the end of the 2nd, beginning of the 3rd century, covering an area of some 10 sq. kilometres with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Carnuntum thus became the second most important city north of the Alps.

There were three specific reasons that caused Carnuntum to flourish: it is strategically situated on the so-called Altenburger plateau. Along this stretch of river, the south bank of the Danube is some 30 metres higher than the north bank. For more than 400 years a Roman legion and an *ala*, a troop of cavalry, were permanently stationed in Carnuntum. There were therefore about 6,000 troops here (5,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry). In addition, Carnuntum was situated at the crossroads of two of the most important ancient long-distance trade routes, the Amber Road from the Baltic to Aquileia, and the Limes Road from west to east along the north border of the Roman Empire.

Carnuntum became once more the centre of world politics for the last time in the year 308 AD. Emperor Diocletian (who had actually retired) called a conference of emperors on 11 November 308 AD, in order to reorganize the system of tetrarchy and to bring stability to the Empire. Emperor Constantine emerged as the new strong man in the ensuing conflicts with the tetrarchs. Thus in Carnuntum the way was paved indirectly for the rapid spread of Christianity, which culminated in the Edict of Milan in the year 313 AD.

Carnuntum was mentioned for the last time in the Roman official calendar in the year 430 AD. After this date Carnuntum sank into oblivion, as the former Vindobona, today's Vienna, gained more geostrategic importance.

Rediscovery and scientific research

Finds from Carnuntum were brought to Vienna for the imperial collections as early as the Renaissance period. Modern scientific research began in the second half of the 19th century. Carnuntum was called “Pompeii at Vienna’s gates”, and the first excavations were undertaken in the area of the military camp. In 1885 the society “Verein Carnuntum” was founded, which – as the Gesellschaft der Freunde Carnuntums (Friends of Carnuntum) – has been operating up to the present day as one of the oldest societies for the promotion of archaeology. The Museum Carnuntinum in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg was opened by Emperor Francis Joseph in the year 1904. The Museum was privately financed with the aim of providing a “home for Carnuntum’s finds”. In the 20th century further excavations in Carnuntum’s former civilian city in Petronell-Carnuntum were undertaken with the purpose of creating an open air museum.

Despite 130 years of scientific research only an area of about 0,5 % of Carnuntum’s former city has been excavated. Some areas like the auxiliary fort and the legionary camp were covered up again after completion of the archaeological field research for conservation reasons; others, such as the Roman City Quarter, became a starting point for novel ways of museum presentation. The fact that large areas of the ancient city of Carnuntum were never built upon with modern buildings makes Carnuntum a unique treasure for science.

Basic research today and innovative presentation

The Roman Carnuntum is – 130 years after the founding of the Friends of Carnuntum – one of the leading cultural heritage sites and an innovative leader in pioneering methods of research and state-of-the-art presentation. The European Commission acknowledged these achievements in 2014 by awarding Carnuntum the first European Heritage Label.

From the year 2000 to 2012 the areas excavated in the 1950s were investigated anew to obtain exact information about building history and the chronology of settlement. In order to conserve the walls permanently, a concept that is so far unique throughout the world was implemented by the Museum in cooperation with the authorities for the preservation of ancient monuments: a Roman city quarter was erected in the exact original location. A total of 26 million euros was invested by the Province of Lower Austria. The aim is to open a window back in time to the early 4th century AD, to the time of the Emperors’ Conference.

The reconstructions were erected using methods of experimental archaeology and are fully functioning. Experimental means that Roman tools were recreated and used in the building work, the clay tiles for the underfloor heating systems were fired in Carnuntum’s own kiln, only old wood was used for roof constructions, which was chopped (just as the Romans did) and not cut. Building work itself was carried out using ancient craftsmen’s techniques.

The interiors were designed as far as possible following archaeological evidence, with murals, flooring and furnishing elements being reconstructed based on relief depictions. However, everything that can be seen is based on archaeological findings. When there was no evidence, then nothing is shown.

A Roman citizen’s house, a Roman city mansion as well as public baths have been built as full reconstructions. In addition, a partial reconstruction was carried out in order to protect the sole Roman floor mosaic that has been preserved in Carnuntum. The public baths are heated throughout

the year and enable an experience for all the senses. The reconstructions are not museum objects, but rather self-explanatory presentations of ancient life, giving visitors clear and palpable access to the Roman past.

In addition to the archaeological excavations, however, modern research methods, especially non-destructive, non-invasive techniques, are increasingly being used. Thus a sensational find was made in the year 2011. Unique throughout the world the second largest (after the *ludus magnus* in Rome) typical gladiator school was found in Carnuntum. The complex is not far from the Petronell amphitheatre and has remained undisturbed for about 2000 years. This world sensation caused the investigation of the whole ancient city area of Carnuntum, in cooperation with the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute. Non-destructive methods such as geo-radar, electromagnetism, airborne laser scanning and aerial archaeology were employed from 2012 to 2014. The aim is to create an exact land registry of the Roman city which on the one hand should form the basis of further research, and on the other hand provide a valuable tool for local planning concepts.

Apart from archaeological field research, historical appraisal of the extensive finds as well as management of the collections are to be continued. Carnuntum's archaeological collections house several million exhibits.

The Roman City Carnuntum as cultural and tourist attraction

The Archaeological Kulturpark Niederoesterreich Betriebsges.m.b.H. operates the Roman City Carnuntum which includes the locations of the Roman City Quarter, the Heidentor (Heathen's Gate), the Civilian City's Amphitheatre and Gladiator Training Arena in Petronell-Carnuntum as well as the Military City's Amphitheatre and Museum Carnuntinum in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg. The company was founded in the year 1996 and is a subsidiary of the Niederoesterreichische Kulturwirtschafts Ges.m.b.H.

About 45% of finances come from museum revenue and about 55% are subsidised by the Province of Lower Austria. Carnuntum is today one of the most visited cultural and tourism attractions in Lower Austria. Every year about 160,000 guests visit the Roman City Carnuntum. An increasing number of international visitors have been recorded, especially since the discovery of the gladiator school. The largest number of foreign visitors come from Germany, with 10% of guests, and Slovakia, with 12% of guests. In 2015 visitors from around 70 different countries came to Carnuntum.

In order to make Carnuntum more accessible to visitors with disabilities, extensive improvements for barrier-free access were carried out in 2015. Accessibility in particular for wheel-chair users and vision-impaired visitors has been improved with new tracks and tactile systems. Those with hearing impairment can make use of inductive systems more effectively than before, and a guide book in simple language is available for those with cognitive difficulties.

The measures to improve barrier-free access are part of an entirely innovative way of disseminating information. Virtual depictions on large-scale information boards give visitors a new kind of perspective on and into the reconstructions. Above all, this kind of presentation enables for the first time a view over the roofs of the Roman city quarter. In addition, virtual street scenes complement those parts of the city that have not been excavated and reconstructed.

Gladiator Theme 2014 - 2015

Based on the reconstructed Roman city quarter as a worldwide unique feature, visitors can enjoy a discerning and entertaining programme starting with the question of why there were gladiators and amphitheatres, the first sports industry in history will be examined discerningly.

In the Amphitheatre of Bad Deutsch-Altenburg an exhibition shows the complex gladiatorial system with the four fundamental archetypes: the *editor*, who organized and financed the games, the *lanista*, the ancient sports manager, the *gladiator* as actual protagonist and sports star, as well as the public, for whom the gladiator games were actually staged.

The Roman City Quarter examines gladiators' everyday life. Information on this theme can be seen on gladiator placards fixed to house walls (*edicta*), preserved graffiti, scratch drawings with depictions of gladiators, as well as everyday objects with gladiator motives.

A true-to-scale model of the amphitheatre and the gladiator training arena at the Civilian City's Amphitheatre gives an impression of this ensemble that is unique throughout the world.

20th anniversary of the Archaeological Kulturpark Nideroesterreich Betriebsges.m.b.H.

In 2016, the Roman City Carnuntum celebrates its 20th anniversary as a cultural institution. To mark this occasion, an improved Roman Festival will take place on three consecutive weekends from 28 May to 12 June. All locations of the Roman city will be offering an extensive living history programme, so that visitors can move back and forth from the world of the legions, to a meeting with German tribes and Dacians, from the world of gladiators to graceful Roman dancers. Roman crafts, a varied children's programme and Roman refreshments accompany the programme. The event will be crowned by a specially commissioned stage show "Carnuntum and the Emperors of Rome" taking the audience on a journey back in time through 400 years of Roman world politics in Carnuntum.

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