

## 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-Alteneburg 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 2<sup>nd</sup>, beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 180.000 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. With the exemption of the Lower Austria Federal Exhibition in 2011, the past season 2017 was the most successful in our 20-year history: Carnuntum welcomed a total number of 186.527 visitors.

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.

## Rome's Eagle – Exhibition 2017-2020

Rome's Eagle epitomized the Roman emperors' universal claim to power. As a symbol of the supreme god Jupiter, it also represented the legions and the Roman military as a whole. The exhibition echoes the eagle in its architectural design which divides the museum into two visual axes: the former legionary camp's standards shrine as repository of the legionary eagle is linked to the Roman deities by a vertical axis. On the upper floor, a visual horizontal axis between the north and south wings conjure up the path leading from Rome to the barbaricum on the other side of the Danube limes along which Carnuntum was situated.

In a specially created newsroom, scientists will present the ancient metropolis' individual military venues. Another emphasis will be placed on life within the Roman army. Where did the soldiers come from, what was their daily and private life like, how did they build up military careers and which equipment did they use? The most spectacular exhibits on display will be the world's best surviving Roman cornu, a brass instrument used in battle to translate military commands, and a series of fully preserved helmets. Original findings from Carnuntum offer highly personal insights into careers and destinies of Roman soldiers.

### Additional buildings and virtual adventures

The year 2018 is bringing a host of new highlights to discover and explore.

The Roman city quarter continues to grow, letting visitors experience the atmosphere of ancient Carnuntum all the more vividly. Along the Roman streets, the entire frontage is being reconstructed, complete with the shops and businesses in the buildings behind it. Strolling along, visitors can literally sense the hustle and bustle of the merchants and craftspeople. The new buildings have a utilitarian charm that stands in stark contrast to the noble elegance of the colonnade along the *villa urbana* and the Roman baths. The steady growth of this city can be witnessed by the visitors.

A special experience is the new Carnuntum app. It is free of charge and transports visitors back in time to Carnuntum the way it was for people who lived here 1700 years ago. The camera image on smart phones or tablets suddenly also shows areas of the quarter that have been buried for millennia, all precisely depicted in terms of position and perspective.

Using this app, the entertainment district of Carnuntum is brought back to life. Amphitheater, gladiator school, taverns and souvenir shops become visible and tangible on the spot.

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