

Experience the Roman History of Regensburg

A walkabout through the ruins of “Castra Regina”





The Construction of the Legionary Fort on the Danube

The town's history begins in the year 179 CE with the completion of the Roman legionary fort in what today is the Regensburg city center. This monumental, rectangular-shaped fortress on the southern bank of the Danube was the permanent camp of the third Roman legion and offered almost 62 acres (25 hectares) of space to some 6,000 soldiers. Already one hundred years before the legionary fort was founded, a much smaller military camp for an auxiliary regiment had been built on a hill further south in what today is the district of Kumpfmühl.

A late antique register of government offices lists *Castra Regina*, the camp on the Regen, built across the mouth of that river. The legionary camp was apparently named after that tributary of the Danube, known with the ancient European name *Reganus*. The German name *Regensburg* combines the river and the fortress, just like the Latin denomination *Castra Regina*. Still, Roman milestones dating from 215 CE simply refer to it as "legio" and, hence, call it legion. Indeed, the fortress was then the only location with a legion in the province of *Raetia*.

The legion was composed of heavily armed elite troops that in all likelihood were permanently garrisoned there. Along with numerous auxiliary troops quartered in other fortresses throughout the northern edge of the empire, these Roman legionaries were entrusted with the defense of the province of *Raetia*.





The Legionary Fort and Its Expansion

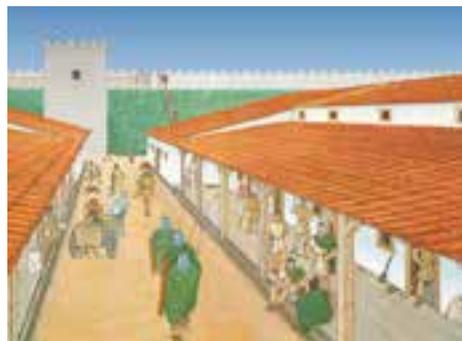
Twenty miles (30 km) southwest of Regensburg, at the Fort of Abusina, the Danube marked the natural border – the Danubian Limes – of the empire. Beyond this fort, a land border – the Rhaetian Limes – traced an imaginary wall from this point towards the River Main in the north-west. After the provincial territory located north of the Danube was relinquished to the Germanic peoples following the mid-third century, the watercourse formed a river frontier starting at the mouth of the River Iller. Since its inception, the permanent camp of the Italian Third Legion occupied a strategically decisive position, considering the Danube bend at Regensburg marks the northernmost point on the river. Furthermore, it allowed control over the territory against Germanic invasions that could naturally arrive from the opposing river valleys of the Naab and the Regen, which empty into the Danube.

The monumental slab with the fort gate inscription on display in the Museum of History bears witness to the foundation of this 1480 x 1770-feet (450 x 540 m) Roman fortress. With a length surpassing ten feet (3.2 m), only a third of the slab has been preserved, but the inscription is almost fully recognizable. It sets – albeit with a few isolated writing errors – the year 179 as the date the Italian Third Legion completed the fort with its wall, gates and towers, including the years of reign and appellations of Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his co-regent Commodus.



The slab with the fort gate inscription, currently on display in the Regensburg Museum of History, proclaims the completion of the legionary camp on 179 CE.

Interior of the Legionary Camp



The ruins of the ancient compound remain buried several feet under medieval and modern cultural layers: the streets, the headquarters, the dwellings of the commander and the commanding officer, the houses of the tribunes, the officers' and troops' living quarters, the field hospital, the storage building, the stables, the baths, and so on.

Most of the area was taken up by the accommodations, including the centurion's residence. A colonnaded street stemming from the Porta Praetoria in the north directly led to the palatial headquarters (principia) in the middle of the legionary fortress. Another of the main streets, the Via Principia, also colonnaded, included on its north side the line of houses of the six staff officers and the commander.

While traces of this monumental architecture prove that the site of the headquarters was exactly in the middle of the fort, very little is known about the location of other important large-scale constructions, such as the commander's residence, the field hospital, or the storage building. Around 300 CE, the section reserved for the military was limited to the northeast quarter, which freed up the remaining area for civilians who could seek safeguard from the devastating attacks of the German peoples within the powerful walls of the fortress.



Southeast corner of the fortress on Ernst Reuter Square



Roman wall in the car park under Dachau Square



Northeast corner of the legionary fortress



Porta Praetoria

Preserved Ruins of the Roman Fortress

Even after the Romans officially withdrew in the fifth century, their fort in Regensburg was still in use and shaped the fortifications of the early medieval city. In his biography of Saint Emmeram, penned around 770, Bishop Arbeo of Freising wrote: "The city (...) was impregnable, built with ashlars, dominated by high, powerful towers, and copious fountains."

While the residential area remained within the confines of the ancient fort during the Carolingian Age, the west walls were forgone toward 920 to allow the first urban expansions, and later removed. Large sections of the ancient south side and southeast corner retained their function as an integral part of the medieval walls for over 1,600 years. Towards the beginning of the fourteenth century, when the quarter further east was incorporated to the late medieval fortification, the largest portion of the east side of the legionary fortress lost its significance as part of the city's defenses. Not least because of their stability, portions of the Roman wall survived demolition and, in light of their significant remaining structure, constitute what can be called the most important Roman military base in southern Germany.

Due to the fact the urban soil has "elevated" a few feet as a result of culture and debris layers since the Roman era, the previously rising portions of the legionary fortress wall are nowadays, in part, deep underground.

In the following pages, we shall briefly describe the accessible sections of what the locals call the "Roman wall": the former southeast corner of the fortress, the Roman wall in the car park under Dachau Square (Dachauplatz), the northeast corner and the north gate, the Porta Praetoria at the Bischofshof's north wing on the "Unter den Schwibbögen" street.



Museum of History on Dachau Square





Tour **First Stop**

Roman “rest stop” / Southeast corner of the fortress wall



We are very close to the southeast corner of the former Roman fortress, today also a part of the “document Legionslagermauer.” After an archeological excavation conducted in 1955 and 1961 during the clearing for the construction of the surrounding buildings, a large historic conservation zone was designated, which today allows an impressive insight into the wall structure of the Roman fort.

At the time, Horst Bergschneider, a notable citizen of Regensburg, collected funds and built awareness for the preservation of the Roman wall at this location with commendable dedication and spectacular drives.

Discover here the impressive curvature of the southeast corner of the legionary fortress against the northward and westward continuation of the legionary wall. You can still make out large parts of the podium, with its characteristic slant. The rubble wall at the top of the curve probably dates from the middle ages and was added in lieu of a protruding corner tower. In the north, the ruins of a medieval fortified tower connect to the Roman masonry, documenting the overlapping progression from Roman to medieval fortification at this location. This also emphasizes the remains of the lower bailey with tower dating from 1389.

These two walls actually retained their defensive function all the way to the early nineteenth century, which was only relieved after Napoleonic troops bombarded and assaulted Regensburg in 1809. Large portions were removed and filled in, which in this case contributed to protect the lower section of the Roman wall.

To arrive to the next stop on our tour, take the pedestrian bridge northwards to the Am Königshof and Dr. Wunderle streets. Follow along there the remains of the city walls and also partially the Roman wall (on display at the Chamber of Trade and Commerce on 10 D. Martin Luther Street) until you reach the stairs to the “document Legionslagermauer” in the car park under Dachau Square.



Tour **Second Stop**

“document Legionslagermauer” in the basement of the Dachau Square car park



Development drawing of the Roman wall in the car park basement with color labeling for different wall sections; Roman ashlars in blue: dark for the protruding base layer over the foundation and medium for the ashlars in contact with the oldest mortar. This mortar's occasionally dubious radiocarbon dating is recorded, along with calibrated mean values (CE year as calAD; adapted from von Gosen et al., 2013, 430, fig. 1).



Diagonally opposite to the Museum of History on Dachau Square (2 D. Martin Luther Street) is an imposing digital presentation at the information center located in the car park basement. To enter, use the staircase accessible from Königsstraße.

Here, a section of the fortification, about 230 feet (70 m) long and up to five ashlar layers high, could be retained. This constitutes the longest preserved rectilinear segment of the Roman wall. Upon entering the basement using the steep staircase, you will notice the difference in height between the Roman habitation layer, as per the wall's podium, and the current street level.

This area on the east side of the legionary fortress was part of the city walls until the early fourteenth century, when this portion of the wall was transferred to be used in the convent of the Poor Clares and finally filled up. The ashlars undoubtedly date from the Roman period, although alterations and repairs in the antique can be recognized.

Find on the car park basement wall, opposite the Roman wall, a regular and a large monitor that present a twelve-minute video about the legionary fortress wall and, more particularly, about this section's uncovering and specifications. Another video explains the building history of the southeast corner of the Roman wall.





Tour **Third Stop**

The “Roman Era” exhibition in the Museum of History



One of Germany’s largest permanent exhibitions of the Roman era can be visited in the Regensburg Museum of History, directly on Dachau Square. Right at the start, find the slab with the fort gate inscription, probably placed originally over the east gate entrance. It was found at its original location in two fragments during excavations taking place on Dachau Square in 1873. The text marks 179 as the year of completion of the legionary fort and is thus Regensburg’s certificate of foundation. Its value for the town’s history is incalculable. A large model of the construction of the legionary fortress wall around the Porta Praetoria is also particularly interesting. It demonstrates the construction process from the arrival by boat to the riverside of the ashlar blocks, to the meticulous preparation of the stones, until their stacking using cranes.

Our tour continues northward from the museum towards the Danube passing by the Swan Square (*Schwanenplatz*). You can see here the east face of the fortress wall with a medieval superstructure along the Adolph Kolping Street. We shall follow the ruins of the wall up until the turn at the corner of the fortress on St. George Square (*St.-Georgenplatz*).



Tour **Fourth Stop**

The northeast corner



Up to 10 feet (3 m) high, the remains of the northeast corner of the legionary fortress wall are preserved on St. George Square. They were discovered in 1905 during the demolition of the pawnbroker department's accounting offices, a building next to the high medieval Haller Gate, already demolished in 1868. The process also allowed uncovering the east side of the Sts. George and Afra Chapel, including its Romanesque window.

Due to the fact the outer facing ashlar has not been preserved, the irregularly placed masonry does not allow you to recognize any of the usual components of the original construction period, a relatively flat front, the protruding podium, nor any of the beginnings of the corner tower. More likely, there are mainly stone blocks that belonged to the inner face of the broad ashlar masonry.

To arrive to the last stop of our Roman walk, let's continue walking westward, parallel to the Danube, along the Unter den Schwibbögen street until we reach the Porta Praetoria.



Tour **Fifth Stop**

Porta Praetoria

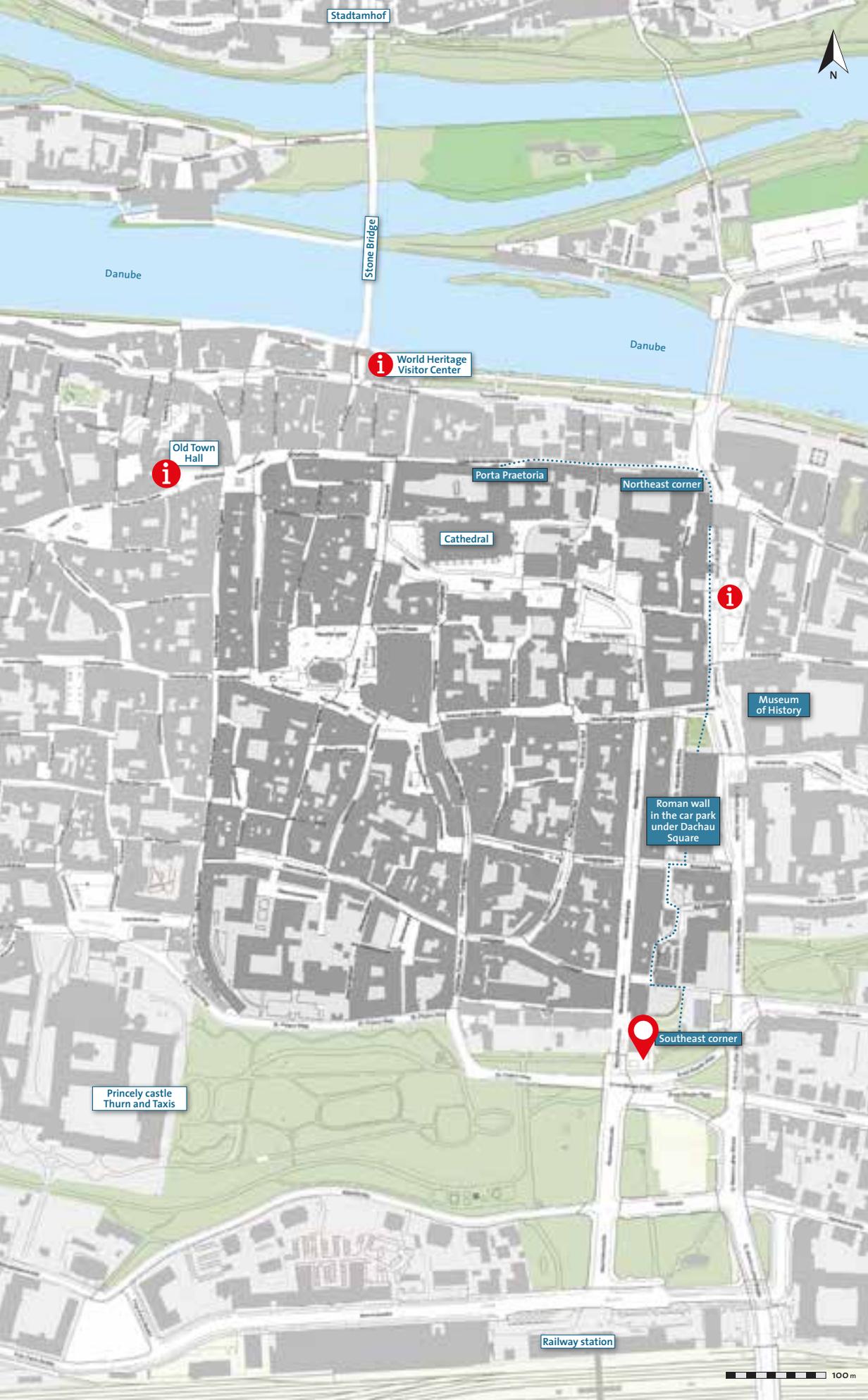


The Porta Praetoria is the highest, still partially upright structure of the Roman Era in Bavaria. Along with the Porta Nigra in Trier, this portal is considered the most significant Roman monument in Germany. Confronting the enemy Germanic tribes in the north, it was one of the four gates of the legionary fortress. The Roman Porta Praetoria was known until 932 as the “Water Gate,” *Porta Aquarum*, and was used to access the Danube. It lost its function as north gate at the latest with the construction of the Stone Bridge towards the mid-twelfth century. In 1649 the bishop’s brewery was built upon the gate. The Roman archway would not be uncovered until the brewery was demolished in 1885.

Four elements mainly comprise the Porta Praetoria’s stock visible today, all integrated into the north facade of the Bischofshof. Notice the east tower (preserved in the ground floor and the upper floor), the west archway of the former double entrance, along with the aggregate composed of large, reused, ashlar to replace the east archway, and the remains of the ashlar masonry immediately connected to the former west tower. The remains of Porta Praetoria rise up to 36 feet (11 m) over the current street level, while the ashlar’s entire podium remains 3.3 feet (1 m) underground. Assuming three stories and a fitted roof, the total height of the towers must have exceeded 65 feet (20 m)!

The east tower restoration that took place between 2016 and 2017 allows access to the “document Porta Praetoria” from the rear of the upper room through a glass door.

Facing the Porta Praetoria, you can get a good idea of the former extension of the legionary fortress on the north side: To the west, you can see past the Bischofshof, whose facade runs exactly along the fortress wall and the Goliath Street, all the way to the Coal Market (Kohlenmarkt). The northwest curve was at the beginning of this square in Roman times, and, with it, the beginning of the legionary fortress wall.



Stadthof

Stone Bridge

Danube

Danube

World Heritage Visitor Center

Old Town Hall

Porta Praetoria

Northeast corner

Cathedral

Museum of History

Roman wall in the car park under Dachau Square

Southeast corner

Princely castle Thurn and Taxis

Railway station

100 m



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Regensburg Tourismus

www.tourismus.regensburg.de

Find here information for visitors and tourists. The Tourist Information team will be happy to provide personalized advice and assistance.



Regensburg, World Heritage Site

www.regensburg.de/welterbe/en

Discover what makes Regensburg a UNESCO World Heritage Site, on this website and at the visitor's center in the Historic Salt Store against the Stone Bridge.



Regensburg Museums

www.regensburg.de/kultur/museen/en

Find information about "documents" and museums in Regensburg, including current opening hours here.



Transportation in Regensburg

www.rvv.de/app?lang=en

The Regensburg transportation companies offer the simplest orientation and navigation for municipal short-distance traffic in an app.



Römerspuren – Tourismusverband Ostbayern Interreg Projekt

www.ostbayern-tourismus.de/Roemerspuren

Take a tour through Roman Regensburg and fourteen additional Roman sites along the Danube in eastern Bavaria and Upper Austria with the Römerspuren App (in German).

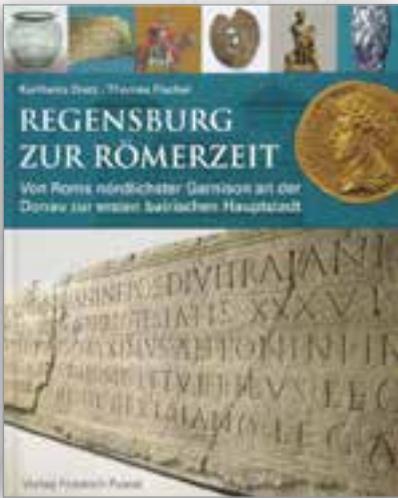


More about Roman Regensburg



Andreas Boos, Lutz-Michael Dallmeier
Kulturführer „Castra Regina –
Das römische Legionslager von Regensburg“
(Regensburg 2018) ISBN 978-3-943222-43-2

Available at the Tourist Information Centers and
in bookstores (in German).



Karlheinz Dietz, Thomas Fischer:
Regensburg zur Römerzeit
(Regensburg 2018) ISBN 978-3-7917-2976-3 (in German)



Gerhard Waldherr:
Römisches Regensburg. Ein historischer Stadtführer
(Regensburg 2015) ISBN 978-3-7917-2738-7 (in German)

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