

PRESS RELEASE

September 23, 2026

The Lost City

Rome's Network on Both Sides of the Enns

Discovery of the Century at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Danube Limes: Research team discovers lost Roman City near St. Pantaleon-Erla

Scientific sensation at the UNESCO World Heritage Site Danube Limes: An interdisciplinary team of researchers – including the Forum Donaulimes, the University of Innsbruck, GeoSphere Austria, Research Archaeology and the OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH – has discovered the remains of a previously unknown Roman city near St. Pantaleon-Erla in Lower Austria. Geophysical surveys reveal a systematically laid-out urban area spanning 25 to 30 hectares, with a regular street grid and an amphitheatre seating around 8,000 people – as large as that of the well-known military town of *Carnuntum*. For a settlement that developed in the vicinity of a garrison of around 500 soldiers, such a large and meticulously planned town is unprecedented throughout the entire Roman Empire.

A City as an Archaeological Time Capsule

Since 2015, an interdisciplinary research team has been focusing on the roughly 10-kilometer-long section of the Roman Danube Limes between Enns (Upper Austria) and St. Pantaleon-Erla (Lower Austria). At this central hub on the northern border of the Roman province of Noricum, researchers can explore Roman history across nearly 500 years in all its facets.

The dating of the settlement is particularly noteworthy. According to the current state of research, settlement began around 80 AD and was abandoned again around 180 AD. The archaeological finds break off abruptly at this point, suggesting an orderly, planned withdrawal rather than destruction. This opens up a unique 'time capsule' for archaeological research, promising extraordinary insights into Roman history.

Danube Limes: Connecting across borders

This discovery was made possible by more than a decade of intensive collaboration within an interdisciplinary research network that operates across institutional and provincial boundaries. The network involves academic institutions and specialist organisations from across Austria, such as ArchaeoPublica, GeoSphere Austria, the Forum Donaulimes, the Lower Austrian Provincial Collections, the OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH, Research Archaeology and the University of Innsbruck, which pool their expertise in archaeology, prospecting, heritage conservation and science communication. Since 2021, the Danube Limes – stretching from Bavaria to Slovakia – has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site and forms part of the ‘Frontiers of the Roman Empire’ World Heritage Cluster, which today comprises four separate World Heritage Sites from Great Britain to Romania.

The legionary fortresses at Enns and Albing near St Pantaleon-Erla are already part of this World Heritage Site. The structures that have now been discovered also have the potential to be included in a future extension of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The research team’s long-standing collaboration with specialists from 7reasons Medien GmbH in Vienna also enables the creation of initial digital visualisations and reconstructions of the research findings.

The rediscovery of the Roman city marks only the beginning of a long-term research process. Numerous questions regarding the site’s development, function and significance can only be answered through further investigation. At the same time, the area is subject to ongoing change due to agricultural use. Without targeted investigations and sustained support for research and heritage conservation, important parts of this unique time capsule could be irretrievably lost in the coming decades.

Press releases, images and videos can be found at

<https://danube-limes.org/en/downloads/presse>.

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Press conference “The lost city”

23 September 2026, 10.00 am | St Pantaleon-Erla

Presentation:

Marlies Lungenschmid

With:

Roman Kosta (mayor of St. Pantaleon-Erla)

Margot Nazzal (Federal State of Upper Austria, Director of the Department of Culture)

Martin Grüneis (Federal State of Lower Austria, Deputy Director of the Department of Art and Culture)

Irmengard Mayer (Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport, Division IV: Arts and Culture, Department 4: Architecture, Baukultur, monument protection and UNESCO World Heritage)

Rebecca Jones (Video Message; Co-Chair of the International Limes Congress)

Research Network Circum Lauriacum:

Stefan Traxler (OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH)

Gerald Grabherr (University Innsbruck)

Barbara Kainrath (Research Archaeology)

Klaus Löcker (Geosphere Austria)

Eva Thysell (Forum Donaulimes)

Julia Klammer (Forum Donaulimes)

Christian Hemmers (Forum Donaulimes)

Public lecture: ‘The Lost City’

23 September 2026, 6.30 pm | Parish Centre Enns-St. Lorenz

SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND

The Lost City

The discovery of two Roman forts in Stein (St Pantaleon-Erla) – a timber-and-earth fort dating from the 1st century AD and a stone fort from the 2nd century AD – is clear evidence of the site's strategic importance. These military installations served primarily to control a crossing point over the Danube in the area where the Aist flows into it from the north. The Aist Valley is one of the shortest transport routes between the Danube and the Vltava and is therefore of particular importance for trade with regions outside the Roman Empire. The military sites along the Roman Empire's borders were chosen not only on the basis of military strategy, but also for economic reasons.

Civilian settlements generally always develop in the vicinity of Roman forts that were in long-term use, to supply the troops. However, the construction of a settlement covering 25–30 hectares with an orthogonal street grid – as evidenced by the geophysical surveys carried out here – is, for an auxiliary fort housing 500 men, unprecedented throughout the entire Roman Empire. The settlement was planned from the ground up and, in terms of its appearance, fits into the tradition of the autonomous Roman towns of the province of Noricum. The designation as a city is therefore more than justified and provides further evidence of the strategic importance of the site.

Cemeteries were situated along the roads leading out of the Roman settlements. A particularly large cemetery was in fact discovered in the north-west of the town. Geophysical survey results reveal countless graves, burial structures and burial mounds, some of considerable size, which in turn suggests that the deceased were wealthy.

Confirmation of the city's urban character and its special significance is provided by the discovery of an amphitheatre. It is the largest known to date in the province of Noricum and is of the same dimensions as the amphitheatre in the military town of *Carnuntum* (Pannonia), which could seat around 8,000 people. However, this inevitably raises the question of the city's name.

Claudivium?

Claudius Ptolemy, a geographer of the 2nd century AD, mentions a place called *Claudivium* and coordinates that would correspond to the Roman town of Stein (St Pantaleon-Erla). At the same coordinates, he mentions a river flowing in from the north, which could refer to the Aist.

The archaeological finds, particularly coins, suggest an abrupt end to the city and also to the fort around 180 AD. The site was never settled again after that. This is consistent with late antique sources, in which the name *Claudivium* no longer appears.

This unusual discovery makes the site at Stein a time capsule and a significant location for international Limes research. The fact that it had been forgotten meant that the area remained undeveloped and is now used for agricultural purposes, in stark contrast to other sites along the Austrian Danube Limes.

“This discovery is an archaeological sensation and demonstrates once again what treasures our history still holds in store for us. An entire Roman city, which had been forgotten for almost 2,000 years, is gradually being revealed here, piece by piece. This is of great significance not only for international research, but also for our country and our shared cultural heritage.”

Governor Mag.^a Johanna Mikl-Leitner

The fateful Year 180 AD

In the spring of 180 AD, the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius died. That same year, his son Commodus brought the Marcomannic Wars – which had been raging since 166 AD – to an end by concluding a peace treaty. It cannot be a coincidence that, in 180 AD, the fort and settlement of *Claudivium?*/Stein were systematically abandoned. The neighbouring *Lauriacum*/Enns, until then a tranquil settlement at a crossing point over the River Enns, became a base for a legion from around 175 AD, that is, whilst the Marcomannic Wars were still ongoing.

With the death of Marcus Aurelius and the end of the Marcomannic Wars, a decision was evidently taken to retain and expand the legionary fortress at Enns. At the same time, *Claudivium?*/Stein (St. Pantaleon-Erla) was abandoned. This decision reflects a fundamental new strategic orientation along the Danube Limes under Emperor Commodus.

Whilst the abandoned *Claudivium*? now served only as a quarry and thus fell into oblivion, *Lauriacum*/Enns began to flourish. Fifty years after the relocation, *Lauriacum* was about three times the size of the former Roman city at Stein.

“Here in Upper Austria, history is literally on our doorstep. The new findings from Enns and St Pantaleon-Erla impressively demonstrate the mark the Romans left on our region and just how much more there is still to discover. The Danube Limes is far more than just a look back at the past: as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it connects regions and people across borders. We want to explore and preserve this special heritage together and, above all, bring it to life for people to experience.”

Governor Mag. Thomas Stelzer

Circum Lauriacum

Despite ongoing development, the area around *Lauriacum* continues to boast a particularly rich archaeological landscape. In the region between Enns and St Pantaleon-Erla, research carried out in recent years has made it possible to identify virtually all the elements that constitute the outstanding universal value of the Danube Limes World Heritage Site. In addition to the legionary fortress at Enns and at least two forts, in Stein, there is a legionary fortress construction site at Albing, also in St. Pantaleon-Erla. This is a unique site because only foundation trenches and, in some cases, massive foundations for the fortifications and the headquarters building were constructed here. However, no standing walls were ever erected. The planned legionary fortress was never completed.

North of the Danube in Obersebern (Naarn in the Machland region), the remains of several temporary camps have been identified, the sort that are frequently found in the vicinity of important military bases. Their location on the other side of the Danube is likely a clear indication that the Roman Empire repeatedly turned its attention northwards and that its influence did not end at the Danube.

The region’s enduring strategic importance, even in late antiquity, is evidenced, amongst other things, by a chain of watchtowers. Watchtowers of this kind are otherwise only attested in Austria in such a high concentration in the Wachau region. They are further characteristic features of the Danube Limes.

All this evidence and these new findings were made possible by close collaboration within a dedicated team. The aim of the CIRCUM LAURIACUM research network is to conduct systematic, centrally coordinated, cross-institutional research into the region. The ongoing exchange between the participating researchers ensures a continuous stream of new findings and ideas for future research.

Special thanks go to the landowners, the supportive residents and the local authorities, without whose willingness to cooperate this research would not have been possible.

“Our story is far from over. Time and again, through their tireless work – even across regional boundaries – scientists make spectacular discoveries possible that broaden our understanding of the past. The latest archaeological findings in the Enns and St Pantaleon-Erla area provide striking evidence of this. They also broaden the scope of the Upper Austrian KulturEXPO 2027: the intangible cultural heritage of Upper Austria and the four UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which include the Danube Limes.”

Mag.^a Margot Nazzal, Director of Culture for Upper Austria

Potential and Outlook

From a scientific perspective, the Enns–St. Pantaleon-Erla region should be regarded as a model region for international Limes research. All the elements that constitute a Roman river frontier are brought together here and can be studied in the context of the changes and dynamics brought about by nearly 500 years of Roman rule. *Claudivium*?/Stein is also of particular scientific relevance as a time capsule. Excavations and the analysis of the finds would undoubtedly yield far-reaching new insights into the chronology between the Flavian emperors (69–96 AD) and the Marcomannic Wars (166–180 AD).

The findings to date should therefore be regarded as the starting point for a comprehensive strategic investigation of this region. The potential offered by a modern combination of methods – including aerial archaeology, geophysics, targeted excavations and the involvement of various scientific disciplines – is enormous.

At the same time, the region can also be seen as a prime example of the challenges facing archaeology in Austria. Since the Neolithic period, the Danube region has been a favoured area for settlement, and has undergone enormous changes over the past 200 years. Urban development in many areas – including in and around Enns – is advancing relentlessly. Although the archaeological sites in areas used for agriculture – for example, in Stein, Albing and to the north of Enns – are not under immediate threat, farmland cultivation is leading to their gradual destruction. Action is therefore needed here too. Several parts of the forgotten city of *Claudivium*?/Stein or the northern settlement area of *Lauriacum*/Enns could be destroyed within a few decades, regardless of any heritage protection measures.

Despite the region's supra-regional significance and enormous potential, as well as the threat of further destruction and depletion, it has not yet been possible to secure medium- to long-term funding that would enable research to be carried out in accordance with international standards.

„Yet as it is geophysical survey, it has, literally, only scratched the surface, and demonstrates what huge scientific potential still lies in the ground.“

Dr. Rebecca Jones, Co-chair of the International Limes Congress

Figures:

fig. 1: The settlement landscape between Enns and St Pantaleon-Erla (©OÖLKG)

fig. 2: The settlement landscape between Enns and St Pantaleon-Erla, with visualisations
(©OÖLKG/7reasons)

fig. 3: Geophysical measurements (magnetometry) in Stein/St. Pantaleon-Erla (©GeoSphere Austria)

fig. 4: Geophysical measurements (radar) in Stein/St. Pantaleon-Erla (©GeoSphere Austria)

fig. 5: The lost city of *Claudivium?* / Stein: Interpretation of geophysical measurements and visualisation
(©GeoSphere Austria/7reasons)

fig. 6: The *Claudivium?*/Stein amphitheatre: geophysical data and visualisation (©GeoSphere Austria/7reasons)

Institutions involved:

ArchaeoPublica – Verein zur Förderung der Bürgerbeteiligung an Archäologie:

www.archaeopublica.eu

Forum Donaulimes:

<https://danube-limes.org>

GeoSphere Austria, Archeo Prospections:

<https://geosphere.at>

Lower Austrian Provincial Collections, Roman Archaeology:

<https://landessammlungen-noe.at>

OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH (Upper Austrian State Museum), Archaeology:

Roman period, Middle Ages, Modern era: www.oekultur.at

Research Archaeology

www.researchaeology.at

University Innsbruck, Institute for Archaeologies:

www.uibk.ac.at/archaeologien

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