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# THE NUMISMATIC PROJECT - CARNUNTUM

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## **Historical Background**

The Roman settlement of Carnuntum is situated approximately 40km to the east of Vienna, on the River Danube. Carnuntum was first mentioned in 6 AD when the future Emperor Tiberius (14-37) assembled his troops in order to campaign against the Marcomanni. The exceptional strategic significance of Carnuntum on the Danube *limes*, within the framework of the Roman defence of the border, soon led to the construction of a fortified military camp, which is dated to the time of Emperor Claudius (41 -54). This was joined by a civil settlement which, due to its favourable position at the crossing of the River Danube and the amber route, developed as a flourishing trade and administration centre of the Roman province of Upper Pannonia. Emperor Hadrian (117-138) raised the city to the status of a *municipium* and Septimius Severus (193-211) finally granted her the position of a *colonia*.

Besides her special regional significance as the capital of the province, world politics were also pursued in Carnuntum from time to time: When Marcomanni and Quadi penetrated the Danube *limes* in 171 and advanced as far as Upper Italy, Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) took up quarters for three years in Carnuntum and wrote a part of his famous "Meditations" there. In 193, the governor of Upper Pannonia, Septimius Severus (193-211), was proclaimed emperor by the Pannonian legions in Carnuntum and from here he started his victorious march to Rome. In 260, the unsuccessful usurper Regalianus let himself be proclaimed as emperor and even minted coins in

Carnuntum. A final political peak was reached in 308, when the former emperors Diocletianus and Maximianus Herculius met in Carnuntum for a conference with the ruling emperor of the Eastern Empire, Galerius (293-311). During the conference, Licinius (308-324) was installed as the new emperor of the Western Empire. However, already under Constantine the Great (306-337) the economic and cultural decline of the border area along the middle Danube *limes* began. When Emperor Valentinianus I (364-375) stayed in Carnuntum in 375, in order to fight, once again, the rebellious Quadi, Carnuntum had already been neglected and become completely run down. Later the Germanic tribes, Huns and Avars entered the country. In 791, Charlemagne (768-814) struck his camp in Carnuntum when he campaigned against the Avars, an event which is documented in the coin finds.

## **Archaeological Park Carnuntum**

Today, Carnuntum is the largest and most important Roman site in Austria. The famous historian, Theodor Mommsen, referred to Carnuntum, not without good reason, as "the Pompeii outside Vienna." The archaeological exploration of Carnuntum dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Methodical archaeological excavations were, however, only begun in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and are still in process today.

In 1986, the project "Archaeological Park Carnuntum" was initiated by the province of Lower Austria. Werner Jobst, head archaeologist in the province of Lower Austria, is responsible for the project. The aim of the project is to present the ruins of Carnuntum to the general public in

the form of an open-air museum. An archaeological park is to be made which gives the visitor the chance to learn about the historical and cultural development of the Roman city of Carnuntum, based on the results of the archaeological research. Its primary concern is the renovation and restoration of the exposed ruins and, further, the study, as well as finally the presentation, or rather transposition, of the results within the framework of the open-air museum.

The Archaeological Museum Carnuntinum, which was opened in 1904 by Emperor Franz Joseph, is integrated into the concept of the Archaeological Park, and houses the impressive collection of archaeological finds from Carnuntum. The museum was completely renovated within the course of the project and the collection was redisplayed and reopened in 1992. Part of the exhibition is dedicated to the coins which have been found in particularly high numbers at Carnuntum.

### ***Numismatic Project Carnuntum***

Carnuntum is, without doubt, the most important place in Austria where Roman coins have been found. When a group of English travellers visited Carnuntum in the 17<sup>th</sup> century they were very surprised to find Roman coins wherever they went whilst walking through the ruins.

Nowadays, modern metal detectors are used, with the help of which vast amounts of Roman coins are still being found. Unfortunately, these machines are not always used by authorized people. The group of self-styled hobby archaeologists has also grown considerably in Austria and, especially in Carnuntum, has caused great damage, time and time again. Archaeological contexts are thoughtlessly destroyed by those looking for treasure and the coins found are, in part, exported and sold on the international art market.

They are then lost forever for further analysis.

The Numismatic Project Carnuntum has set itself the goal of restructuring the extensive collection of coins of the Museum Carnuntinum, which contains coins only found in Carnuntum, both by recording all the finds and by preparing them for display in the museum. The collection will be open to the public and will be accessible for further research. Finally, the results of the research are to be presented to the interested visitor to the museum. The museum's collection of coins currently comprises around 50,000 pieces and is therefore the largest of its kind in Austria. It is therefore a source material of exceptional importance for research into the circulation of money in Roman Austria.

Numismatics has, for a long time, only reacted insufficiently. Robert Göbl, former chairman of the Institut für Numismatik (Department of Numismatics at the University of Vienna) first called to life the venture: "The coins of the Roman Period in Austria" ("Die Fundmünzen der römischen Zeit in Österreich" = FMRÖ) in 1971, which since then has been carried out by the Numismatische Kommission of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, which was founded by Göbl himself. The aim of this long-term research project is to record all the coins from the Roman Period found in Austria - ordered by province - and to publish them, and hence to make the material available both for further historical research and for the analysis of monetary history. The first volume of the series FMRÖ, published in 1976, was dedicated to the coin finds of Carnuntum, which shows the particular significance of Carnuntum. At that time the author, Wolfgang Hahn, was able to record 11,628 coins. These coins, however, did not come from the collection of the Museum Carnuntinum alone, but

also from other public and private collections.

The systematic search through the old excavation rubble from the last century, carried out over the past years with the help of metal detectors, has suddenly made the number of coins in the Museum Carnuntinum increase to over 50,000. This induced Robert Göbl, in 1993, to put the main emphasis of the commission's work, within the framework of the FMRÖ, on to the coin project of Carnuntum and, in his words, "to make of Carnuntum the numismatically best researched *limes* camp of the Roman world".

Since Göbl's death in 1997, I have now taken over the responsibility for this project and hope to be able to bring it to a successful end. The new FMRÖ volume 'Carnuntum', which is to be prepared, is to record all the coins in the Museum Carnuntinum according to the well-established guidelines of the FMRÖ and to replace the old publication from 1976. As a result, this unique complex, supported by an extensive illustrated section, will be made accessible to scholars all over the world. Deviating from the old concept of the FMRÖ, an analysis regarding the monetary history of the material will also be included as, seen from today's point of view, it would be seemingly meaningless to publish such extensive as well as all-encompassing material without including such a section.

Roman coins in themselves are an important source material and, furthermore, the study of such a unique find-complex leads to various further insights and realizations. Whereas, in the past it was the individual coins taken out of context which were of significance - as valuable and unknown types were primarily looked for - today the reconstruction of ancient minting systems as well

as the research of the currency in circulation is in the foreground. Only in this way are the objectives and results of Roman money politics illuminated and hence comments about the economic, social and settlement history can be made. One phenomenon worth mentioning is the numerous ancient forgeries in Carnuntum, which were - at least partly - tolerated by the Roman central administration. They represent a further highly-interesting aspect of monetary history.

Besides the purely scholarly aim, this project also has a very important further component in connection with museum work and the preservation of national heritage. As the Museum Carnuntinum currently does not have either an adequate inventory or its own numismatic specialist, the Numismatische Kommission has to look after the inventory, ordering and storage of the coins in the museum. In this connection, it has been planned to record all of the coins with an adequate description, classification and illustration in a data bank. This data bank is - besides a printed catalogue - to serve as a means for safeguarding the collection, and furthermore to give the opportunity, quickly to add new coins as well as efficiently to answer any questions and requests for photos sent to the museum. This data bank, in an adapted form, in which finally the results of the evaluation with regards to the monetary history are to be integrated, is to be made available to the interested visitor to the museum and to serve as a source of information. In connection with the exemplary exhibition as arranged by Robert Göbl this study may bring to life Roman monetary policy, based on the example of the coin circulation of a Roman provincial capital.