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Scientists discover gladiator school in Vienna was a prison for criminals and slaves

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- From: AP
- September 06, 2011 10:43AM
- Gladiator school discovered in Austria
- Fighters were often criminals & slaves
- "Definitely a school of hard knocks"

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Empfehlen

Registrieren, um die Empfehlungen deiner Freunde sehen zu können.



The fighters at the gladiator school found beneath the Carnuntum ruins in Austria were often criminals and prisoners of war.

Picture: AP / Ronald Zak

Source: AP

THEY were kept in cells barely big enough to turn around in and usually fought until they died.

This was life at a 1700-year-old gladiator school 45km east of Vienna in Austria, whose well-preserved ruins were unveiled yesterday.

The Carnuntum ruins are part of a city of 50,000 that flourished as a major military and trade outpost linking the far-flung Roman empire's Asian boundaries to its central and northern European lands.

The ruins of the gladiator school remain underground and have been mapped out by radar. Officials say the find rivals the famous Ludus Magnus - the largest of the gladiatorial training schools in Rome.

Researchers found the Austrian site is even more detailed than the well-known Roman ruin, down to the remains of a thick wooden post in the middle of the training area, a mock enemy that young, desperate gladiators hacked away at centuries ago.

"(This is) a world sensation, in the true meaning of the word," Lower Austrian provincial Governor Erwin Proell said.

The archaeological park Carnuntum said the ruins were "unique in the world... in their completeness and dimension."

Officials said they had no date yet for the start of excavations of the gladiator school, saying experts needed time to settle on a plan that conserves as much as possible.

Digging at the city site began around 1870, but less than 1 per cent of it has been excavated, because of the enormity of what lies beneath and to the painstaking process of restoring what already has been unearthed.

A virtual video presentation of the former Carnuntum gladiator school showed images of the ruins underground shifting into what the complex must have looked like in the third century.

It was definitely a school of hard knocks.

"A gladiator school was a mixture of a barracks and a prison, kind of a high-security facility," said the Roemisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, one of the institutes involved in finding and evaluating the discovery.

"The fighters were often convicted criminals, prisoners-of-war, and usually slaves."

Still, there were some perks for the men who sweated and bled for what they hoped would at least be a few brief moments of glory before their demise.

At the end of a dusty and bruising day, they could pamper their bodies in baths with hot, cold and lukewarm water. And hearty meals of meat, grains and cereals were plentiful for the men who burned thousands of calories in battle each day for the entertainment of others.

Thick walls surround 11,000sq m of the site, and the school and its adjacent buildings stretch over 2800sq m.

Inside, a courtyard was ringed by living quarters and other buildings and contained a round, 19sq m training area — a small stadium overlooked by wooden seats and the terrace of the chief trainer.

The complex also contained about 40 tiny sleeping cells for the gladiators; a large bathing area; a training hall with heated floors and assorted administrative buildings.

Outside the walls, radar scans show what archaeologists believe was a cemetery for those killed during training.

The institute said the training area was where the men's "market value and in end effect their fate" was decided. At the same time, it gave them a small chance for survival, fame, and possibly liberty.

"If they were successful, they had a chance to advance to 'superstar' status - and maybe even achieve freedom," said Carnuntum park head Franz Humer.

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