

Archaeologists discover Roman gladiator school

By [Tony Paterson](#)

1:55 PM Tuesday Sep 6, 2011



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A virtual presentation of the Roman gladiator school that was found by underground radar beneath the former Roman settlement of Carnuntum, in modern-day Austria. Photo / AP

Archaeologists using sophisticated radar equipment say they have located a remarkably well-preserved underground Roman gladiator school that will give them "sensational" new insights into the lives of the fighters 1700 years ago.

The site, 24 miles east of Vienna, contains the remains of a heated training hall for combatants. It was discovered beneath the former Roman settlement of Carnuntum, which is already home to one of the finest amphitheatres ever found. Archaeologists say it is the first gladiator school ever found outside Italy.

Frank Humer, an archaeologist with Vienna's Ludwig-Boltzmann Institute, which found the school while conducting a detailed radar scan of the site, said: "The wooden post that gladiators traditionally used as their mock opponent during training is still visible in the middle of the school's arena."

Humer told Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine yesterday that the find had been possible only because of significant advances in ground-penetrating radar equipment, which allowed archaeologists to clearly identify structures beneath the earth.

"We now know what is down there and we can take our time before deciding whether to excavate," he said.

The Vienna institute team has been able to make detailed images of the gladiator school. They reveal that its centre was dominated by a circular arena equipped with wooden benches.

The school houses a heated training hall which combatants would have used during cold central European winters. There are also administrative offices, a bath house and small cell-like rooms for the gladiators themselves.

Roman gladiators took their name from the Latin "gladius", or sword, and were pitted against each other or wild animals for the entertainment of both emperors and the public.

Many were admired for their bravery, celebrated in artworks and even buried in ornate graves as a mark of respect. But only a few were volunteers. Despite their fleeting fame, the majority were slaves doomed to die an early and violent death.

Carnuntum was the capital of the Roman province of Pannonia, which covered Austria and much of what are now the Balkans.

Experts say the school was founded in the middle of the first century AD, when the settlement became the headquarters of Rome's Legio XV Apollinaris and had a comparatively large civilian and military population.

Bloody gladiator games reached their peak between in first century BC and the second century AD and

continued until the fourth century AD, by which time Christianity had become the official religion. The last known gladiator games took place in the late 5th century AD.

To cope with the high demand for gladiatorial entertainment, the Carnuntum settlement boasted two amphitheatres: one for Roman legionnaires and one for the common public, which was situated close to the gladiator school.

Humer said radar images of the site showed that it also contained what was probably a gladiators' graveyard.

He said the immediate plan was to use the radar images to build a life-sized model of the gladiator school.

"If all goes well, we may not even have to dig it up – we will be able to leave it in the ground where it won't be damaged," he added.

– INDEPENDENT

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