The Styrian Armoury

English

Landeszeughaus

Visitors' Guide



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History of the Styrian Armoury

The German name of the Armoury is *Zeughaus*, where *Zeug* is a medieval word referring broadly to ‘equipment and provisions’. As of the fifteenth century, *Zeug* increasingly came to be used to mean the artillery park, and ordnance stores were called *Zeughäuser*.

The origins of the purpose-built provincial armoury in Graz date back to the mid-seventeenth century. During this period, the Duchy of Styria was part of the Habsburg Empire and was situated at the south-eastern border of the power bloc. Due to its geographical location, the region became increasingly embroiled in wider conflicts from the fifteenth century onwards – caught between the Habsburg Monarchy, Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, that was relentlessly expanding towards Central Europe.

To prevent further expansion of the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburgs began constructing a defensive buffer zone about 70 kilometres wide from the early sixteenth century onwards. Situated in modern-day Croatia, part of this ‘Military Frontier’ was supplied with weapons, food and soldiers from Graz. That’s one reason why a new, modern ordnance depot – today’s Styrian Armoury – was built here between 1642 and 1647. For around one hundred years, it served as the most important ‘central depot’ in the southeast of the Habsburg Empire. The Armoury was financed by the *Landstände*, the Styrian estates. Representing the Styrian nobility, clergy and towns to the territorial Habsburg lord, they were obliged to assist him in defending the province.

With armed conflicts in the region on the wane, the Armoury began to lose its importance. In 1749, Maria Theresa issued a reform to centralise the army. The plan was to move all weapons to Vienna and shut down all existing armouries. The objection made by the estates swayed the outcome: on condition that they bore the costs, Maria Theresa allowed the Styrians to keep the Armoury as a ‘monument to the history of the land and the bravery of their ancestors’. The Armoury opened to the public for the first time in 1882. Ten years later, it was incorporated into the Joanneum.

Today, boasting some 32,000 objects, the Styrian Armoury is the world’s largest surviving historical armoury, attracting tens of thousands of visitors every year.

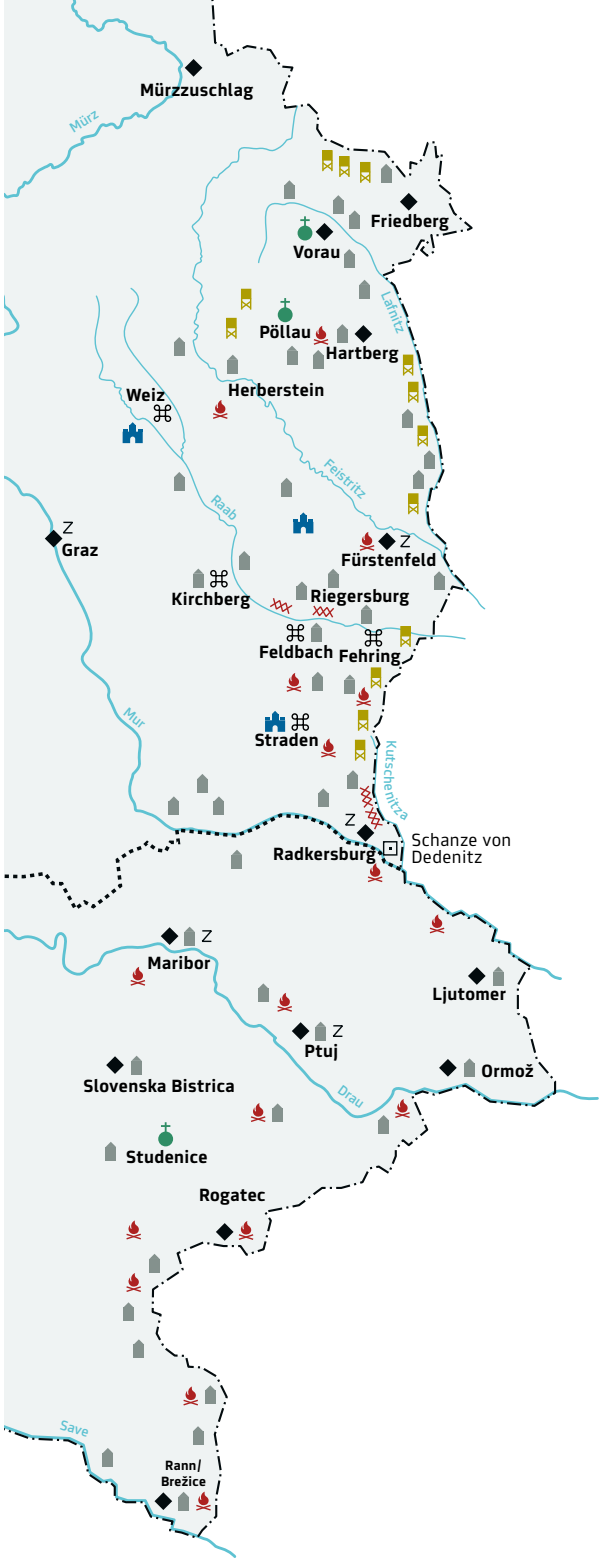


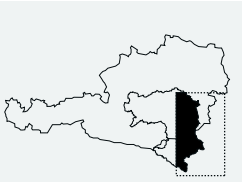
Field armour of Archduke Karl II of Inner Austria, made by Conrad Richter (Augsburg), c. 1565, Styrian Armoury, Graz

The Armoury and Styria

The Armoury played a key role in defending the province of Styria in the early modern period. It served as an important point of reference, above all for the villages and towns under frequent threat in the east and southeast of the Duchy of Styria.

From the fifteenth century onwards, this was a troubled region. For generations, people's lives were dominated by feuds, uprisings and armed conflicts. Sacking and pillaging, abduction and death were rife. To protect themselves from these dangers, people began turning their surroundings into a fortified landscape, constructing trenches, ramparts and earthworks. They adapted the medieval city walls to accommodate new weapon technologies. They built fortified enclosures – defensive structures consisting of walls, living quarters, stores and stables in towns lacking defensive walls. With the aid of additional walls and towers, churches were turned into fortified structures. Branches of the Armoury were established in a few select towns. But almost every town, monastic house and fortress made room for storing weapons for self-defence too. In the event of war, they received additional military equipment from Graz.





KEY

- Fortified town
- Tabor (fortified enclosure)
- Monastery
- Fortified church
- Fortification
- Chartaque
- Rampart, abatis
- Beacon
- Armoury
- Sconce
- Border of historical Styria
- Modern-day national border

0 10 20 km

The map shows the comprehensive network of defensive measures and structures installed at the east and southeast border of the Duchy of Styria from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

Graphic design: © UMJ, Katharina Schwarz, 2021

The Armoury and Europe

The Armoury is not just a central monument to the history of Styria but also to the early modern history of rule and conflict in Central and Southeast Europe.

For centuries, armed conflicts led to a movement of people, goods and ideas: weapons manufactured in Germany, for example, were transported via Graz to the Military Frontier in modern-day Croatia. This area was a melting-pot of different ethnicities and denominations: Styrian soldiers mingled with Orthodox ‘soldier peasants’ who had fled from the Ottomans to the Balkans. Mercenaries from different European regions found themselves alongside Italian master fortress builders. Cartographers from the Netherlands worked together with Viennese officials. Travelling salesmen supplied the local population with goods and news from the Orient and Occident. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire controlled large parts of Hungary and Bosnia. A ‘common European defence policy’ leading to various alliances and mutual assistance pacts served to prevent further expansion.

A major hub in this European network was the Styrian Armoury, that was incidentally planned by a Swiss architect. The holdings reflect a number of European styles and weapon technologies. It served as a base for hatching plans and defining strategies. One reason the Armoury became obsolete was the growing importance of an idea that would come to be a pillar of Europe: peace. This was a development that drove the expansion of transport routes and economic relations. Various legations and embassies were set up.



People began to travel, returning home with their impressions of ‘other’ lands. One cornerstone of this development was the ‘Treaty of Passarowitz’ in 1718 (today Požarevac, Serbia), that led to the rapprochement of two erstwhile enemy neighbours – the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire.

MILITARY FRONTIER

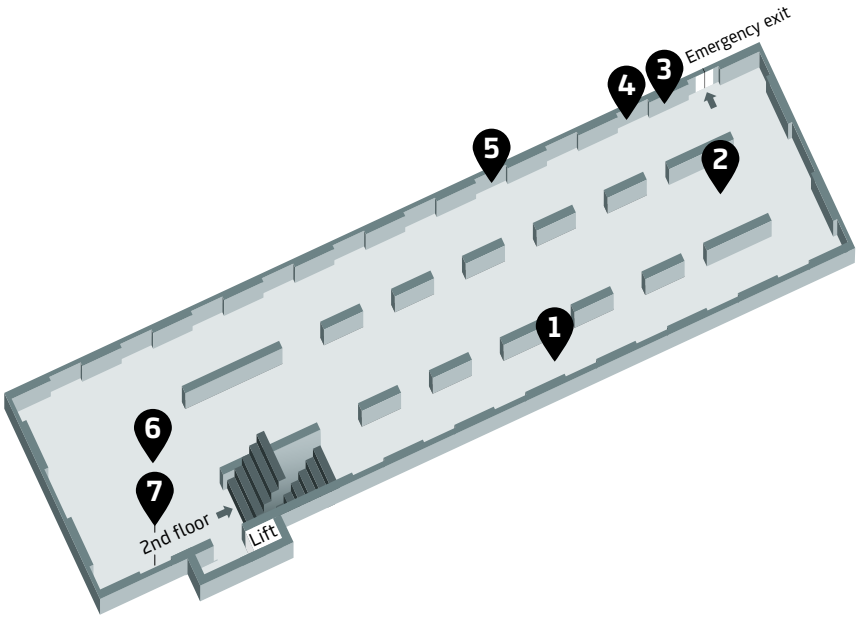
1. Sea frontier
2. Croatian frontier
3. Wendish frontier
4. Bajcsavár frontier
5. Hungarian frontier

Central and south-east Europe with the territory of the so-called Military Frontier and its sectors in the 16th and 17th century (simplified).

Graphic design: © UMJ, Katharina Schwarz, 2026

1st floor: Firearms

The first floor holds mainly firearms from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries: guns such as cannons, mortars and ‘Doppelhaken’ wall guns served in the defence of fortifications. At the end of the 16th century, muskets became the most important weapon for foot soldiers due to their increased range and force. The cavalry used smaller, lighter firearms such as pistols and harquebuses. The latter were only about one metre long and earned the lightly armed cavalry the moniker ‘harquebusiers’.



❶ Further technical developments in firearms led to specialisations in production. Locksmith, gunsmith and stockmaker all worked hand in hand. The numerous small private gun-making workshops of the 16th century were later replaced by large producers in Ferlach, Deutschfeistritz, Trautenfels and Steyr during the 17th century.



❷ The purchase, storage and distribution of weapons were the responsibility of the warders of the arms. The scales depicted here were used by the warders to weigh the arms, gunpowder and bullets on delivery, since these were paid for according to weight rather than per item.



❸ Due to their weight of up to 32 kilograms, ‘Doppelhaken’ wall guns were fired from walls or through slits.



❹ Bayonets are blades that were either stuck inside the barrel or slid onto a fixture next to the muzzle so that the gun could also be used as a stabbing weapon.



❺ Two pulleys mounted in the attic of the armoury were used for storing and transporting the military equipment. These were capable of moving large baskets filled with weapons.



❻ At the end of the 18th century, French troops also occupied Graz. In order to deprive them of access to the abundance of weapons stored at the armoury, most of the cannons were taken to what today is Serbia. Because they were later sold there, only a few of the original stock are preserved here at the armoury.



❼ In 1652, the Styrian estates ordered this mortar from the Graz gun foundry of Conrad Seiser. It bears the Styrian panther, the heraldic animal of its purchasers.

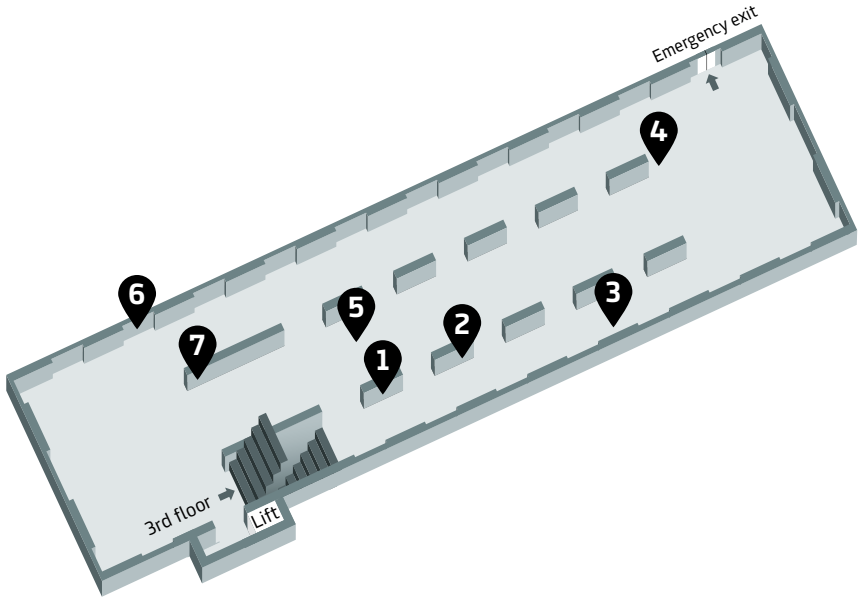


❽ Today, the greatest threat to the iron components is rust, caused by high humidity levels or improper handling of the objects. For the wooden shafts and leather, on the other hand, low humidity is a problem. Nowadays, a team of four restorers works to ensure optimum conservation of the exhibits.



2nd Floor: Helmets, Suits of Armour and Pistols

On the second floor you will find mainly suits of armour, designed according to the needs of different corps. What was known as the 'heavy' cavalry wore a 'cuirass' that reached down to the knee. The 'light' cavalry were protected by a 'Trabharnisch', or 'trotting armour', which had no short tassets. The 'deutsche Knechte' foot soldiers wore special Landsknecht armour.



❶ The type and shape of helmets changed repeatedly over the course of time according to developments in arms technology. The designs for cavalrymen included both completely enclosed visors and open-faced zischagges (also known as lobster-tail pots). Foot soldiers wore 'Sturmhaube' (burgonet) helmets or morions.



❷ The Styrian estates employed various incentives - including tax exemption - to attract the best plate armourers to Graz. One of these was Israel Burckhart from Augsburg, who came to the city in 1571. When the heavily indebted Burckhart later fled Graz, his wife was forced to run the workshop herself in order to repay her husband's creditors. Since part of the cost for nearly all of the armour she produced was withheld in order to pay back Burckhart's debts, Regina Burckhart needed to supply a lot of armour. Much of the trotting armour preserved here was produced by her.



❸ The producers of this kind of equipment were known as plate armourers. They used special tools to shape sheet metal into the individual pieces of armour and then linked them with leather straps and rivets.



❹ Wheel-lock pistols belonged to the equipment of both the heavy cavalry and the harquebusiers. These were kept in leather holsters that were attached to the horses' saddles.



❺ Up until the mid-17th century, the heavy cavalry formed the elite of the Styrian mounted militia. Although their suits of armour had the disadvantage of weighing up to 25 kilos, the visor helmet, collar, brassards, breast-plate and backplate, gauntlets and also short tassets reaching to the knee offered superior protection. The relatively small size of the armour is explained by the fact that it was made for an average body height of 160-165 cm.



❻ Many of the pistols designed for higher officers are richly ornamented. The decoration on these weapons is not made from ivory, but instead of inlay formed from cattle bones. A large number of these wheel-lock weapons have a distinctive ball-shaped pommel. Known as 'puffers', these were brought to Graz from Nuremberg in the last third of the 16th century.

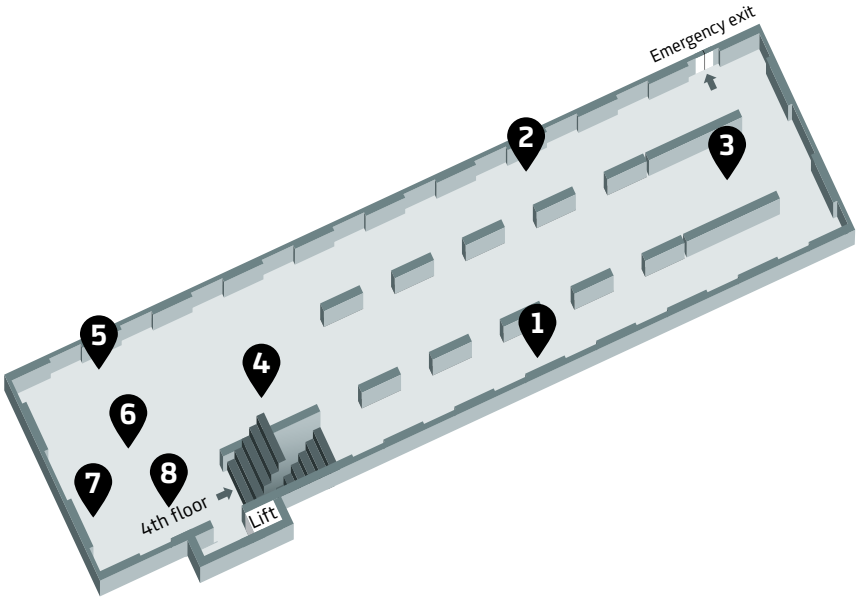


❼ Hussars were lightly equipped horsemen who wore a close-meshed mail shirt and 'ring mail' armour: the breast and backplate of this armour consisted of many iron rings bound together with leather straps and rivets so that the horseman remained agile.



3rd Floor: Firing Tests, Hallmarks and Horse Armour

The third floor mainly houses armour originating from German workshops. The imperial estates were prepared to offer financial assistance supporting Inner Austria in its struggles with the Ottoman Empire. This aid, however, was conditional on the required military equipment being purchased from German centres of weapon production. Hence the second half of the 16th century saw brisk trade with Augsburg, Nuremberg und Suhl. Another focus of the third storey is the equestrian armour made for nobles, and also equipment for tournaments.



❶❷ Some armour bears the hallmarks of the south German production centres of Nuremberg and Augsburg. These marks were regarded as a reliable proof of quality and superseded the requirement for tests.





❸ Michael Witz the Younger, an Innsbruck master craftsman in the production of plate armour, made this ceremonial suit of armour around 1550 for a high-ranking customer who unfortunately remains unknown. The armour is decorated with embossed and polished foliage that decoratively stands out against the blackened base.



❹ Many coats of armour and helmets bear dents that can be traced back to firing tests: in order to check the quality of the equipment purchased, various individual components were chosen from among a range of armour delivered to the armoury. These were then shot at with pistols from a distance of ten to twelve metres. If the bullets failed to penetrate the armour being tested, then the whole range would be bought. Otherwise, the plate armourer would have to provide replacements at his own cost.



❺ Many expressions in the English language originated from combat. The phrase full tilt means 'at top speed', 'with maximum force'. This comes from the part of the tournament known as jousting, which was once called tilting, where two knights on horseback charge at each other with lances and try to knock the other off his horse.



❻ Armour produced especially for horses is valuable. In 1814, Karl Graf von Stubenberg donated this suit - which weighs roughly 42 kilos - to the Joanneum. The armour is thought to have been made by the Innsbruck plate armourer Konrad Seusenhofer, while the decoration is attributed to the Augsburg etcher Daniel Hopfer.



❼ These coats of 'Riefelharnisch' or 'fluted' armour are among some of the oldest pieces in the armoury, appearing in an inventory dated 1557. The device of 'fluting' gave the relatively thin armour plate metal of the early 16th century greater strength, at the same time providing a fashionable look.

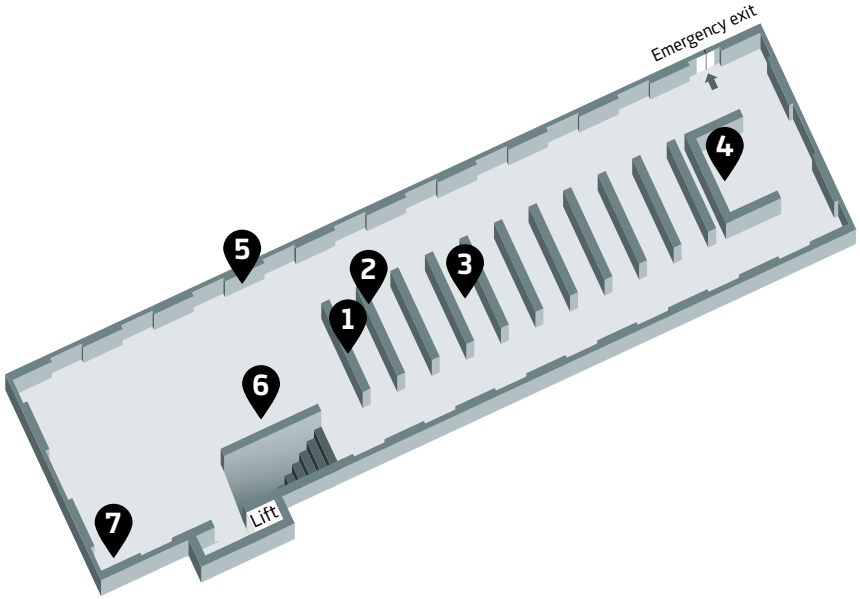


❽ On his tomb at the abbey of Stift Seckau, the ruler of Inner Austria, Karl II, is depicted in full armour. The original armour can be found today in the Landeszeughaus. It was made by the Augsburg plate armourer Conrad Richter, who had been brought to Graz by the Styrian estates on the strength of his outstanding reputation.



4th Floor: Maces, Halberds and Chevaux-de-Frise

Before the advent of firearms, edged weapons and staff weapons dominated warfare during this era. For a long time, staff weapons such as halberds, pikes and maces were the chief weapons used by foot soldiers, while the horsemen preferred edged weapons such as swords and sabres. As their penetration force increased, guns gradually replaced staff weapons on the battlefield, yet staff weapons remained in use as symbolic items of prestige - as guard weapons, for example. It was the same case for edged weapons, which came principally to signify status in the imperial civil service.



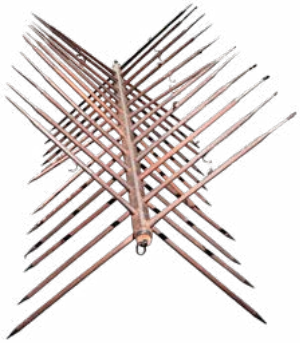
1 Many of the staff weapons stored in the armoury originate from Upper Austrian workshops and were transported to Graz on wagons that passed through several toll stations on their way. Because these consignments of pikes and halberds were considered vital to the war effort, the estates obtained letters of passage from the Prince Regnant for the suppliers so that they could avoid the usual toll charges.



2 In 1683, Vienna was besieged by the army of the Turkish Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa. The Styrian estates perceived a threat to the northern and eastern borders of Styria, and thus both well-armed enlisted mercenaries and peasant subjects were conscripted to protect the border. With little experience of battle, these men were equipped with maces: clubs covered in iron spikes fixed onto wooden poles.



3 The cheval-de-frise was a barricade consisting of a cross bar pierced in many places and covered with projecting spikes. The chevaux-de-frise shown here were used as a defence against cavalry attacks, for blocking roads and bridges or for protecting a camp ground.



4 The intricate etched decorations on these staff weapons are an indication of their users' standing. The first step in the etching process is to cover the iron surface with an acid-resistant material such as wax. An etching needle is then used to scratch out the desired image, which then has acid washed over it. Once the acid-resistant layer has been removed, the design is then blackened.



5 The production of edged weapons had to balance two contradictory aims: on the one hand, the blades needed to be hard in order to prevent rapid blunting; on the other hand, they had to be flexible enough to stop them breaking. This was the art of bladesmithing, and today you will still find the hallmark of bladesmiths on nearly all of the swords, sabres and rapiers in the armoury.



6 Developments in weapons changed the tactics of war and led, for example, to the infantry becoming more important: these rotella shields - which weigh up to 15 kilos - were intended to protect infantry units from bullets.



7 'Two-handed' swords were used to break through the enemy's ranks of pikes. Because of their length of up to two metres they had to be wielded with both hands, meaning that the soldiers who carried them required special training, but also received better payment.



Architecture and Operation

The Armoury in Graz was designed as a plain utilitarian building. On four floors spanning 2,000 square metres, the military equipment was stored according to practical considerations and so as to take up as little space as possible. Heavy artillery was placed on the ground floor. Rifles and pistols, armour and polearms were stored on shelves, ceilings and walls on the upper floors. Light came from torches.

Because the Armoury was financed by the Styrian estates, we now know a great deal about the history of its construction and its operation: 107 named craftsmen, carters, raftsmen and day labourers shared the 13,738 guldens 1 shilling and 21 pfennigs that were paid out as wages during the construction of the building.

Only a small, select group of people were involved in the day-to-day operation of the Armoury. The head of the Armoury was the Keeper. Together with his team, he took care of ordering, storing and issuing weapons. Other tasks included quality inspections, minor repairs and transporting weapons to local fortifications and the Military Frontier.

The Styrian Armoury was awarded the European Heritage Label in 2026.
It now belongs to a group of distinguished cultural sites and landscapes that play a special role in European history and the creation of today's Europe.

EUROPEAN HERITAGE LABEL

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