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## Flavia Solva Retracing the Romans

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# Location

Flavia Solva is located in South East Noricum, on the western bank of the River Mur in the Leibnitzer Basin. The territory, the boundaries of which could still not be reliably determined, was surrounded by mountains in the south, west, north and north-east, and opened up to the east and the south-east; the most important transport connection was the road that ran alongside the river Mur. In terms of traffic routes the Flavia Solvia lay to the east of the route of the so-called Norica Main Road leading from Virumum to Ovilava and to the north of the so-called Amber Road. At the times that Flavia Solvia was also located on a ford, this street to the east in the direction of the Raab Valley was of lesser importance during the imperial era.

Very close to the preceding settlement from the La Tène Period at the Frauenberg, which at least since the Bronze Age occupied the important junction in terms of traffic routes of the road running east-west through the Sulm Valley and the one running through the Mur Valley, the location of Flavia Solva indirectly is evidence of the loss of importance of the Sulm Valley, and the upgrading of the traffic routes along the Mur.

Flavia Solva is named neither on the Tabula Peutingeriana, nor in the well-known Roman Itineraria. In Ancient literature, Flavia Solva is named only once, by Pliny the Elder in the Natural History. We owe this mention not only to the narrowing down of the dating of the time that the town's rights were granted under Emperor Vespasian, but also to the secured allocation of the territory and the town to the province of Noricum. The location of this town Flavia Solva, mentioned by Pliny, in Wagna (the district of Leibnitz) was identified more than 150 years ago by Richard Knabl based on epigraphic evidence. The definition of the territory's borders is likewise based on evidence, for example writings by officials of the town of Flavia Solva. Here it is above all the borders in the south and in the east that still provoke debate: whether the territory stretched beyond the River Drau as far as Slovenska Bistrica, and in the east, if it maybe follows the River Lafnitz as far as its merging into the River Raab, a border that does not seem to be natural.

# The Municipium Flavia Solva

The expansion of the town as it is known today is around 650 metres in a north-southern direction and around 450 metres in an east-western direction. In the east the city was bordered by the River Mur, in the west by the burial grounds, while the expansion in the north and the south is defined by geophysical investigations and excavations. As the basis of the orthogonal street grid, the street width of 68 Roman feet was proposed; the Insulae corresponded in their width and length to twice and three times the width of the street, from which resulted four different sizes of housing blocks.

The housing blocks, named Insulae by the excavator W. Schmid (Regional Archaeologist from 1911-1950), correspond in their interior decoration not to the block of flats found in the cities of the empire, described with the same term; rather they are standardised plots of land with varying degrees of building on them. These so-called Insulae could equally have town villas built on them or workshops, businesses, or several houses with a dozen households, too. The houses within the Insulae most likely consisted of half-timbered buildings for the most part, though stone-wood dwellings in various styles were also found, as were purely stone buildings.

Flavia Solva has no city walls and no sewer system. The water supply came from wells and cisterns; the disposal of waste water was managed via seeping pits. As for the public buildings, a spa complex could be located with some probability in Insula XXII-West, while the amphitheatre has been ascertained in terms of location and size. The origins of the amphitheatre have been placed in the first half of the 2nd century A.D. The construction was made of stone and wood, with the spectator rows made of wood. The amphitheatre in Flavia Solva can still be clearly seen today on the terrain. The city's sanctuaries could also be localised. The public buildings appear to have been located in the two more narrow rows of Insulae to the north and south of Street K.

Flavia Solva was laid out like an Italian colony with a regular orthogonal street grid. At the intersection of the two main streets called Cardo and Decumanus the town's public buildings were often to be found. Street K, which runs between the two narrow blocks, may be one of the two main streets, namely the Decumanus, while the main street running north-south, the Cardo, may be Street E. With this in mind, the Forum would be located in the area of the Insulae XIII and XXIV, even though the results of the geophysical measurements suggest a large, plastered surface surrounded by columned halls and found in Insula XXVI as the forum's location. The streets, up to 20 metres in width, were gravelled, and occasionally there was a covering of quarry stone; however, we cannot speak here of paving.

# The Burial Sites

Flavia Solva is the only Municipium that has its own tumulus burial grounds. There are four main burial sites belonging to the city: the one furthest to the west in Altenmarkt, the two at Spitalsgelände and Marburgerstraße, and one in the south-east at Johann-Maier-Straße. The oldest burial grounds go back to the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and can be found at the burial sites Marburgerstraße along street M; also Insula XL can be found there near to the River Mur, under which the early wooden building phases of the city were discovered. The burial grounds Spitalsgelände could be found along street H which connected Flavia Solva with the Frauenberg; along the street leading to the limestone quarry of Aflenz were the burial grounds Johann-Maier-Straße.

Originally the burial site of Altenmarkt was the same size as the city of Flavia Solva itself. Alongside tumuli there were also tombs made of marble. It is noticeable that of the excavated tumuli around 12% can be dated to the Hallstatt age which means that tumuli from the Iron Age and from the Roman period were right next to each other.

Both the burial sites of Marburgerstraße and Spitalsgelände are around 50.000 m<sup>2</sup> in size and are separated by a strip of land, around 100 metres wide without graves. The dead in the burial site of Marburgerstraße were buried in flat graves rather than tumuli. Here one can find the oldest burial grounds of Flavia Solva that go back to the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. The burial site Spitalsgelände was in use from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Next to individual tumuli one can also find tombs, urns and flat graves. The most notable fact though is that the majority of burials here were body burials rather than cremations, which is unique to this burial site.

The smallest of the Flavia Solvian burial grounds could be found along Johann-Maier-Straße. The most famous finding of this site is the so called Kraberkogel, the built-in grave of which today is situated on the area of the excavation site Flavia Solva.

# Municipal Government

The city and its territories were governed by elected civil servants who had to report to the governor of the province. Two 'mayors' called the *duumviri iure dicundo* presided over the community. Using the Roman city consuls as a model they controlled the fate of the city for one year only. Four of the mentioned duumviri that also had the power to administer justice are known from inscriptions, five more from the insignia of their office that were depicted on tombs (*sella curulis* and lictors with fasces respectively). Two subordinate aediles, five of which are known to us, were responsible for the supervision of the market, coordination of food supplies, maintenance of official buildings and organization of games. After their one year term in office the elected civil servants moved into the local council, the *ordo decurionum*.

The most famous inscription of Roman Austria is the answer by Emperor Septimus Severus and Caracalla to a request to Rome by the governor of the Noricum Province concerning a query by the civil servants of Flavia Solva.

The inquiry concerned the privileges of the *collegium centonariorum* and how to deal with them; the emperor replied on October 14, 205 AD that there was no reason to change the status quo. The inscription became famous because the council of the centonarii, a kind of guild for recycling textiles, was seen as one of the first fire brigades.

A consecration to the deified Emperor Galerius which can be dated earliest to the year 311 AD is proof that the *ordo* of Flavia Solva existed at least until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

# History

The prior settlement that existed simultaneously for about 50 years was located on the Frauenberg due west of Flavia Solva and was probably already called Solva. Underneath the Insula XL in the north-east of the city the remains of two wooden building phases were found that do not follow the grid of the town in their alignment. The divergence to the later grid of the streets amounts to about 9°. The oldest houses derive from around the turn of the eras which proves that the settlements of the Frauenberg and Flavia Solva existed simultaneously at least in the early period. Quite a lot of imported ceramics have been found from this early phase of Flavia Solva which might be an indication for the fact that this settlement on the Mur served as some kind of trading post. The early Romanisation was certainly also furthered by the nearby city of Poetovio where at the beginning the *legio VIII Augusta* and later the *legio XIII Germanica* were stationed.

With the granting of the Flavian town charter the new town plan is connected with a regular street grid and a new survey of the entire *ager*. Debate still surrounds the question of whether the verifiable layer of destruction from the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD in some of the Insulae can be connected with the Marcomanni or rather to local fires. The town's prosperity in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century AD shows itself in extensive building and reconstruction activities of the time. The numerous crossbow fibulae, also produced in Flavia Solva, that have been found could be an indication that a garrison might have been stationed there in the later years of the town; these fibulae used to be insignia of military ranks but also of the civil government.

Two leaden seals of the Byzantine Emperor Markian (450-457 AD) give us reason to believe that Flavia Solva was still populated in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century AD. In the course of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the remaining population seems to have retreated to the Frauenberg.

# Literature

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