



Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie
Ludwig-Lindenschmit-Forum 1
55116 Mainz
www.leiza.de

Press release

Mainz | 23 June 2026

How Stone Preserves History

New ERC project "ConstruEnS" deciphers Roman monumental buildings as sources for understanding society, environment and imperial governance

Mainz. How did construction projects shape the development of the Roman Empire? What impact did they have on the environment, resource management and social structures? And what role did monumental buildings play in the organisation of one of the largest empires in world history? These fundamental questions are at the heart of a new interdisciplinary and cross-regional research project led by the Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie (LEIZA) in Germany and partner institutions. Over the next five years, the project will receive almost €2.5 million in funding through an ERC Advanced Grant awarded by the European Research Council.

The new research project, "ConstruEnS - Construction, Environment, and Society on the Rhine and Danube Frontiers of the Roman Empire", pursues an innovative approach. For the first time, the interactions between Roman architecture, social structures, environmental conditions and imperial decision-making processes will be investigated systematically. "While monumental buildings continue to shape public perceptions of the Roman Empire, they have so far been viewed primarily as evidence of architectural or artistic achievement," explains project leader Professor Dominik Maschek, Head of the Research Division 'Roman Archaeology' at LEIZA and Deputy to the Director General. "ConstruEnS, by contrast, understands these structures as complex historical archives that preserve information on resource flows, labour organisation, technological innovation, environmental change and social dynamics, among many other aspects," Maschek continues.

With this approach, the project aims to bring about a fundamental paradigm shift within the humanities. Historical buildings will no longer be regarded merely as the outcomes of past developments, but as key sources for reconstructing social, economic and environmental history. To achieve this, ConstruEnS will develop innovative digital tools, analytical methods and modelling approaches that establish new benchmarks for the study of pre-modern societies.

Interdisciplinary Research on Buildings along the Rhine and Upper Danube

The project focuses on Roman monumental buildings in Xanten, Cologne, Mainz and Regensburg in Germany and in the Roman city of Carnuntum in Lower Austria. Between the first and fourth centuries AD, major urban centres and military sites emerged along the Rhine and Upper Danube, whose development is exceptionally well documented in the archaeological record.

Methodologically, ConstruEnS brings together archaeology, architectural history, archaeometry, geosciences, ancient history and computer science in a highly interdisciplinary research programme. The resulting data will be analysed using newly developed digital tools and integrated into a freely accessible online database. "The project establishes pioneering standards for the study of the ancient world and demonstrates how research on Roman monumental architecture can open up new perspectives on key challenges faced by human societies - from the organisation of complex infrastructures to the management of environmental and natural resources," says Professor Alexandra W. Busch, Director General of LEIZA and Vice President of the Leibniz Association, highlighting the project's ambitious approach. "We are delighted to host ConstruEnS at LEIZA, as this research agenda closely reflects our institution's commitment to learning from the past for the benefit of the present and the future," Busch emphasises.

European Excellence in Collaborative Research

The project ConstruEnS is being carried out jointly by LEIZA, the University of Trier and Ruhr University Bochum. In addition, it brings together leading heritage and research institutions located along Europe's former Roman northern frontiers: the Archaeological Park Xanten (APX), the Romano-Germanic Museum (RGM) in Cologne, the General Directorate for Cultural Heritage Rhineland-Palatinate (GDKE), the Office for Cultural Heritage of the City of Regensburg, as well as the Archaeological Park Carnuntum and the Museum Carnuntinum in Austria.

"The successful acquisition of an ERC Advanced Grant, one of the most prestigious research awards worldwide, is a tremendous achievement," says Clemens Hoch, Minister of Science, Further Education, and Health for the State of Rhineland-Palatinate, congratulating the researchers involved. "This funding decision clearly demonstrates the strength of our research landscape. Interdisciplinary and cross-regional initiatives such as ConstruEnS not only generate new knowledge, but have

also proven their merit in a highly competitive environment through their innovative research approaches. In doing so, the project will further enhance the international visibility of our state as a centre of scientific excellence," Hoch adds.

Funding through the European Research Council

The European Research Council (ERC) is an institution established by the European Commission to fund frontier research and scientific excellence. The ERC is financed through the European Union's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon Europe. Its mission is to support the most talented and creative researchers in exploring and developing new ideas across all academic disciplines. Particular emphasis is placed on interdisciplinary approaches that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and offer strong potential for innovation.

Through its Advanced Grant scheme, the ERC supports outstanding and established researchers seeking to open up new fields of enquiry. Successful applicants may receive up to €2.5 million in funding over a period of up to five years.

Further information on the ERC Advanced Grant:

<https://erc.europa.eu/apply-grant/advanced-grant>

Scientific contact

Prof. Dr. Dominik Maschek
Project leader "ConstruEnS"
Head of the Research Division "Roman Archaeology"
Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie (LEIZA), Mainz, Germany
Tel.: +49 (0) 6131 8885 131 | Mail: dominik.maschek@leiza.de

LEIZA press office | Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie

Stephanie Mayer-Bömoser M.A.
Tel.: +49 (0) 6131 8885 165 | Mail: stephanie.mayerboemoser@leiza.de

Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie (LEIZA)

As a Leibniz Research Institute and Museum for Archaeology, LEIZA studies humans and their development based on material remains that span three million years across time and space. The fundamental insights we gain improve our understanding of human behaviour, actions and the development of societies. In this way, LEIZA enriches our knowledge of humans from an archaeological perspective and creates essential foundations for reflecting on the present and shaping the future. With archaeology, LEIZA views human beings in context and shares the knowledge gained in international dialogue. LEIZA is active worldwide and has successfully and comprehensively conducted research in various regions of Africa, Asia and Europe. The unique concentration of archaeological, scientific,

restoration and information technology expertise, combined with important workshops, laboratories and archives, makes it possible to conduct object-oriented research into the archaeology of the ancient world (Asia, Africa, Europe) from the beginnings of human history to modern times. As one of eight research museums in the Leibniz Association, LEIZA combines excellent science with exhibitions and, with its educational mission, is also a place for dialogue with the public.

Until its renaming on 1 January 2023, LEIZA was known internationally as the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum (RGZM), which was founded in Mainz in 1852 by resolution of the German Historical and Antiquities Societies. Since 2024, LEIZA is represented at four locations in Germany: Mainz, Neuwied, Mayen, and Schleswig. www.leiza.de

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Bluesky @leizarchaeology