

Opening Doors to Museums - Access to Original Roman Sites

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Abstract:

Sumelocenna, thus Rottenburg's name in Roman times, surely belonged to the most important settlements in the province of Germania Superior on the right bank of the Rhine. The settlement was founded around 85/90 AD during the reign of the emperor Domitian. It lay on the highway connecting Switzerland with the *limes*. In the second century AD, *Sumelocenna* began to develop an urban character. Somewhere toward the end of the second century, it was fortified by an imposing town wall, 1.8 kilometers in length. The wall, which was two meters wide, reached a height of about five meters. It enclosed an area of more than thirty hectares. Three large public buildings have been localized within the walled area of the town: a temple district, a large bathing facility, and a public toilet, *latrina*, complete with sewage system. *Sumelocenna* existed for only about 170 years. The greater part of the Roman remains have been built over and replaced by the city of Rottenburg, which first came into being in the Middle Ages. To be sure, the investigation of the ancient town of *Sumelocenna* beneath the houses of today's Rottenburg am Neckar is not a closed chapter. Year by year, archeologists make new discoveries, old questions are answered, and new ones posed. To be sure, even today the fascinating ancient history of the city can be observed in many places throughout the city: in the preserved Roman bath, in the Roman pillars not far from the *porta suevica*, at the Roman *aqueduct*, and first and foremost in the *Sumelocenna* Museum – a museum with open doors and an original Roman site.

Resumen:

Sumelocenna, el nombre latino de Rottemburg en época romana, constituyó sin duda una de las poblaciones más importantes de la Germania Superior a la orilla derecha del Rin. El asentamiento se fundó en torno a 85/90 d. C., en época del emperador Domiciano, en la vía principal que conectaba Suiza con el *limes*. Con el tiempo, *Sumelocenna* comenzó a adquirir un carácter urbano, y hacia finales del siglo II d. C. se fortificó construyéndose una muralla de 1,8 km de longitud y 2 m de espesor, que llegaba a alcanzar los 5 m de altura. El recinto abarcaba un área de más de 30 Ha. En su interior se han identificado tres grandes espacios públicos: una zona con templos, otra destinada a baños y unas letrinas públicas, además de un sistema de alcantarillado. *Sumelocenna* tuvo una existencia de apenas 170 años, siendo sus edificios sepultados o destruidos con la construcción de Rottemburg. Sin duda, la investigación de sus restos bajo las casas de la moderna ciudad de Rottemburg am Neckar no es un capítulo cerrado. Año tras años los descubrimientos arqueológicos se suceden, antiguas preguntas encuentran respuesta y nuevas cuestiones quedan planteadas. Aún hoy, la fascinante historia de esta antigua ciudad romana puede observarse en numerosos puntos de la ciudad: en los baños, en los pilares conservados cerca de la *porta suevica*, en el acueducto, pero sobre todo y principalmente en el *Sumelocenna* Museum.



Figura 1. Sumelocenna Museum. Entrance.

In the City of Rottenburg in Baden-Wuerttemberg (Southwest Germany) there is a small regional museum with three departments in three houses: the Suelchgau-Museum in a historic building (17th century), whose permanent exhibition emphasizes especially the time between 1381 to 1806, when Rottenburg and vicinity belonged to Austria, to the Habsburg monarchy; an old synagogue (18th century) in the nearby village of Baisingen, which was not destroyed in Hitler-Germany (1938) and shows the special German-Jewish history; and the Sumelocenna-Museum, the Roman museum of Rottenburg, the special topic of this article.

I. Opening doors and site-museums

There are thousands of archaeological sites scattered over the world and the museological problem is always to decide whether to build a (small) museum on the site or to more or less leave the site to its fate and transfer what has been found on it to a conventional type of museum nearby. One example: To call the Sumelocenna-Museum in Rottenburg am Neckar (Southern Germany) a site-museum would not be strictly accurate, although it certainly houses and shelters an important archaeological site and greatly benefits from it.

II. Opening doors and museum education

The education department ("Museumspädagogik") creates stimulating educational programs that engage students to increase their achievement as well as to motivate "regular" visitors. This includes many different facets of educational programming - and entertainment.

III. Opening doors and marketing

Marketing a museum is the process of identifying the needs and wants of the visitor and delivering benefits that will satisfy or enhance their experience. Marketing also helps maximize the performance of the museum. It is a complex activity requiring extensive creativity, planning, organisation and problem solving.

I. OPENING DOORS AND SITE-MUSEUMS

Today Rottenburg on river Neckar is a city with 43.000 people between the Black Forest and the Swabian Alb, a forested hilly area very much like the Black Forest. Rottenburg is about 30 miles southeast of Stuttgart and pretty close to Tuebingen with the famous university, founded 1477.

ROTTENBURG – A CENTER OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH WITHIN THE STATE OF BADEN-WUERTTEMBERG

In the field of archaeology the Neckar valley between Rottenburg and Tuebingen belongs to the most intensively researched areas within the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. On few square miles several dozen of archaeological places could be located and many excavations took place in the last three decades. The archaeological evidence for former settlements is varied. Within the last 150 years the experts found graves or grave fields or/and settlements of almost all archaeological periods. For a long time the area around the town of Rottenburg has been famous for its rich archeological remains. The oldest finds belong to the Middle Paleolithic period, important is the Mesolithic time. Three years ago (2003), the Landesdenkmalamt Baden-Wuerttemberg (the Office for the Preservation of Archaeological Monuments) and the City of Rottenburg hosted the International Conference “After the Ice Age. Settlements, subsistence and social development in the Mesolithic of Central Europe”.

Settlements from the early and middle Neolithic and of the Iron age (Hallstatt, Latène) are known as well as grave yards from early Bronze and Iron age. Also the Roman town Sumelocenna and the medieval settlement Suelchen are objects of excavations. The archeological research in modern sense has a long tradition in Rottenburg and vicinity – starting around the year 1840, the historical society was already founded in 1852: Suelchgauer Altertumsverein. So archeology is an important subject in Rottenburg!

HIGH STANDARD – THE ROMAN CITY OF SUMELOCENNA

Almost 2000 years ago Rottenburg was a Roman settlement midway on the Neckar. There are many stones in Rottenburg that can tell you a story about the past. There are several locations in and around the city where you will find the Roman ruins that allow you to gain fascinating insights into the life of the once flourishing ancient settlement called Sumelocenna, as for instance: an aqueduct, about 7 km in length (Ober nau), a Roman mineral well (Bad Niedernau), Roman columns, the original site of a Roman bath, etc. And since 1992 there is a new cultural high-light in the city of Rottenburg am Neckar: the Sumelocenna Museum opened its doors to the public, presenting the city’s Roman past. It also includes a notable collection of Roman sculpture and monuments. The museum contains an excavated section of the ancient city.

BACK TO THE ROMAN ROOTS

The Roman city of Sumelocenna fell into decay long ago. It had its heyday 1800 years ago in the 2nd century AD. This period was described two hundred years ago by the British scholar Edward Gibbon in his famous work “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire” as follows: “In the second century of the Christian era, the Roman Empire encompassed the most beautiful countries of the earth and the civilized portion of mankind. Ancient glory and disciplined valor guarded the borders of this extensive monarchy. The mild yet powerful influence of laws and customs had gradually cemented the union of the provinces.” (Gibbon)

In one of these Roman provinces, *Germania Superior*, lay the thriving and important town of Sumelocenna. Its distance from the capital of the empire, Rome, was approximately 1000 kilometers. Sumelocenna was protected by its massive town wall. The Roman city prospered from about 85 to 260 AD, after which it was plundered and destroyed by the victorious Alemanni. Between the fourth and twelfth century the area remained unpopulated, and the Roman ruins were slowly covered by a layer of earth. The present city of Rottenburg was founded over seven hundred years ago – around the year 1280. Beneath many of Rottenburg’s houses lie the remains of Roman walls, and wherever construction is begun, one is almost certain to come upon Roman ruins. In several places, rather than removing these signs of the past, the excavated walls have been conserved as monuments, for example, in the case of the Roman bath beneath a local secondary school, and at the Roman Museum Sumelocenna.



Figura 2. Sumlocenna plane view of the excavation.

SECURE AND CONVENIENT FOR TRAFFIC: THE LOCATION OF SUMELOCENNA

The name Sumlocenna has been come down to us by means of many inscriptions. (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum XIII, 2506, 6358, 6365, 6384, 9084, 11726, 11727). The word itself indicates that the original inhabitants of this site were Celts, perhaps Helvetians. In Roman times several important roads passed through Sumlocenna leading in all directions to locations throughout southwest Germany. The most important of these was the large highway leading from Switzerland in the direction of the limes at the northeast border of the empire. This route is recorded on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a mediaeval copy of a Roman roadmap dating from the middle of the fourth century. Here, again, we find the ancient name of Rottenburg, specifically identified by a conventional sign displaying two towers, and bearing the spelling *Samulocenis*. Certain specific architectural features appertained to an imperial Roman city, and it was also necessary for Sumlocenna to display them: a town wall with towers and gates, hot springs, a theater, and, as a center for political and economic affairs, a forum – and a least three bathhouses!

SPECIAL TOPIC OF THE MUSEUM: HYGIENE - BATHING AND PUBLIC LATRINES

“At the civitas capital of Rottenburg an exceptionally well preserved public latrine 105 x 16ft (32 x 5 m) in size stood on the northern edge of the town’s baths. The latrine, accessible from the street, was paved with large sandstone slabs and had a row of timber latrine seats on one side.” (Carroll, 2001, 50) When the late Kenneth Hudson and Hans R. Woodtli, both member of EMYA committee visited our museum in September 1994 they wrote: “The most striking feature of the museum is what remains of an enormous Roman public lavatory, the water-borne sewage arrangements of which where constructed to the highest Roman standards.”



Figura 3. Latine inscription of Sumelocenna.

PUBLIC LAVATORY

The most impressive part of this section is a lavatory, whose lavishly decorated interior could be drained by means of a sewer. In 1986 it was possible to excavate a thirty-two-meter-long segment of the luxurious latrine preserved in the Sumelocenna Museum. The entrance was located at the north corner of the building. A visitor had to descend eleven steps before reaching the actual room with the toilets. A row of at least seven sandstone pillars plastered in white and three meters high visually divided the very long, narrow room down the middle. In front of the colorfully painted northern wall a conduit fifty centimeters wide and ninety centimeters deep provided drainage for the latrine by way of the *cloaca maxima*. Above this conduit was a row of wooden seats about sixty centimeters deep and forty centimeters high. The worn places in the stone floor in front of the conduit show that toilet seats were installed about ninety centimeters apart, so we can assume that there were about thirty-six seats in all. In front of the row of seats a little groove flowed with fresh water, which one could use to clean oneself. Perhaps sponges or moss were also used as cleansing aids. On the southern wall was a round water basin about thirty centimeters deep for washing one's hands. Ancient latrines were public in the truest sense of the word: here people met, sat next to each other, and conversed with those on the neighboring seat. The size of the facility and the worn-down stairs indicate frequent use.

The large public latrine of Sumelocenna, the largest of the preserved Roman latrines north of the Alps, demonstrates the high standard of hygiene enjoyed by this ancient settlement.

ROMAN BATHHOUSES

The highly developed public baths of Roman times reflect the recognition that bodily hygiene and health are closely related. Thus, all types of Roman baths – private, public, those found in forts, and the spas – served the primary purpose of cleansing and caring for the body. In addition to washing oneself, the program included not only cosmetic services, such as massage and hair removal, and sports, but also games and entertainment. The baths normally opened at the eighth hour (about 2:00 pm). Men and women bathed separately, either at different times or in different rooms.

Three bathing complexes are known to have existed in Sumelocenna. Within the walled area of the Roman town we know of two probably private baths in the east and of the remains of a large public bath almost in the very center of the town.

Bathroom I (in the north part of Mechthildstrasse) was first uncovered in 1899 and could recently be studied in more detail during renewed excavation in 1999. Bathroom II (beneath the Eugen-Bolz-Gymnasium, an exterior part of the Sumelocenna Museum) was thoroughly examined in 1962. The exa-



Figura 4. Sumelocenna.
Sculpture of Juno.

mination revealed that the hot-spring facility measured eighteen by eleven meters and contained all the necessary amenities: an entrance and dressing room, *apodyterium*, in the northwest part of the building; directly south of this, the tepid bath, *tepidarium*; in the middle of the complex, a cold bath, *frigidarium*, with the requisite *piscina*; and a hot bath, *caldarium*, with three apse-like projections in which the tubs of hot water stood ready. All rooms were plastered in different colors and in some places painted with figures. The outside of the building was plastered in red. This facility, which was in use during the second and third century AD, was separately located within its own walled courtyard. This could indicate that it was built, used, and maintained by a guild of artisans. The public hot-spring facility (III) was investigated in parts, first in 1983 in the Spiegelgasse, and then in 1991 during the construction of the parking garage in Sprollstrasse. It was about fifty meters long. It was possible to excavate the southeast corner of the bath behind the drainage ditch (now next to the entrance of the museum). This was probably a large dressing room.

SEWAGE SYTEM

Sumelocenna was also equipped with a sewage system. The part of the sewer that can be seen in the museum was probably the main sewage line, *cloaca maxima*, which carried waste out of the settlement and deposited it in the Neckar River. The sewer's height of 2.5 yards forms a passage spacious enough to walk through. In a very practical manner, the public toilets, the *latrina*, were built directly over it. Living and working quarters were only seldom connected to the sewage system; drains and garbage disposals had yet to be invented. Most residents probably did not have their own "flushable" toilets. They used chamber pots and night stools, or paid a fee to use a public restroom, which was usually run by a municipal leaseholder, *conductor*.



Figura 5. Sumelocenna.
View of the latrine.

II. OPENING DOORS AND MUSEUM EDUCATION

Reconstructed objects, models, pictures and diagrams and, of course, many originally excavated Roman artifacts are presented in an interesting as well as systematically informative way. The museum offers comprehensible texts, dealing with the Roman culture in general, but covering the latest results of scientific research in the Roman city Sumelocenna as well. The museum also focusses on the everyday life of the former inhabitants of the city.

For younger visitors (as well as adults) there is a diorama consisting of more than 650 tiny models showing many scenes in Sumelocenna. An "old-fashioned" slide show accompanied by spoken text offers an introduction into the Roman history of South-West Germany and a survey of the many interesting things to be discovered in the Sumelocenna Museum (also in English and French).

The education department ("Museumspädagogik") creates stimulating educational programs that engage students to increase their achievement as well as to motivate "regular" visitors. This includes many different facets of educational programming - and entertainment. There are special programmes for students as well as a special room, the so called "Roman class-room", for pupils and students.

III. OPENING DOORS AND MARKETING - ROMAN FESTIVALS, SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS, NETWORKING

First of all Sumelocenna is a small regional museum, 15.000 visitors/year (200.000 visitors since 20.11.1992), and naturally we got a museum shop with books, toys, replicas and so on.

SPECIAL EVENT

A Roman Festival every other year – or to use the term "historical reenactment"; "historical reenactment", is an activity in which participants recreate some aspects of a historical event or period. Most groups that concentrate on Roman reenacting focus on one particular Roman legion; nearly all of the legions portrayed actually existed historically, and the reenactors strive to recreate the legionary life as accurately as possible. This attention to realism generally extends to the equipment worn and displayed, and to the behavior displayed to each other and especially to the public; indeed, many public demonstrations attempt to recreate Roman military drills, e.g. Legio VIII Augusta (VEX LEG VIII) or the celtic group CARNYX. Experimental archaeology is an important part of many authentic living history events, where crafts and techniques are evaluated to see whether they make sense in the appropriate historical setting. For example, various combinations of armour can be tried to see if an item for which no historical evidence exists is actually easy to make with the tools available and practical to use in the battles of the time.

SPECIAL OR TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

In the museum were 18 special and temporary exhibitions on display since 1995, beside the "normal" presentation.

NETWORKING – IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ROMANS

Rottenburg and the Sumelocenna-Museum are a part of the so called Neckar-Alb-Aare Roman Route; the "modern" Roman Route, opened in 1999, gives visitors a chance to see and re-live the Roman past of the region between Stuttgart in Germany and Zuerich in Switzerland. This "modern" Roman route is a network of once Roman cities, museums and historical societies in Southwest Germany and North Switzerland with common goals and a corporate marketing. The Neckar-Alb Roman Route retraces historical Roman roads and forms a link between a great many interesting classical sites. Different types of Roman settlements are encountered along the way, such as the rural estate, the village settlement, the fort and the capital of a *civitas*, or "district". Excavated sites, monuments and museums all along the route are impressive testimonies to the history of the Roman province of *Germania Superior*. The Neckar-Alb Roman Route cuts through the Swabian mountains, a region with one of the greatest proliferation of castles anywhere in Germany. The route runs for approx. 400 km from Koengen (near Stuttgart) to Windisch/Brugg (Switzerland, near Zuerich) and passes through remarkable scenery shaped by human activity whilst revealing many Roman treasures along the way.

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