



Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie
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Press release

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Building Material for an Ancient Metropolis: New DFG Project on the Study of Brick Stamps in Roman Trier

Mainz / Trier. Trier developed into a major economic and political center in the Roman Empire's northern provinces, which as a result saw extensive construction activity, including the widespread use of fired bricks. By analyzing stamps on preserved bricks, researchers from Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, Goethe University Frankfurt, and the Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie (LEIZA) are investigating how the production and distribution of ancient building materials were organized in northern Gaul. The interdisciplinary project, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) with a grant of €340,000, will run for two years.

Trier flourished in the 4th century AD, when Roman emperors resided in the city. Monumental buildings such as the Imperial Baths and the Basilica of Constantine still bear witness to this era. The construction materials included fired bricks of various formats, used for walls, roofs, and heating systems. The majority of the approximately 4,000 stamped bricks from the Roman period are stored in the depots of Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbes (GDKE) Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier. Excavated since the early 20th century, this collection is among the largest from the northern Roman provinces. However, only a small portion has been studied to date. A team of researchers from the museum, Goethe University Frankfurt, and LEIZA now aims to systematically analyze them. Their goal is to gain insights into brick production as a key economic sector in the expansion of ancient Trier. "We assume that most of the stamped bricks date from Late Antiquity. This allows us to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how building ceramics were produced and used during this period," says Dr. Thomas Schmidts, a private lecturer at Goethe University and conservator in the "Roman Archaeology" area of competence at LEIZA in Mainz. "Brick stamps are also key to understanding the economic and social structures of Late Antiquity," he adds.

A key project focus is the spatial distribution of the bricks, which will help researchers trace the architectural development of Augusta Treverorum, the Roman Trier, which became known as Treveris in Late Antiquity. The study may reveal previously unknown state and public construction projects. Additionally, the researchers plan to quantify the efforts involved in late antique brick production, transportation, and construction. For the first time, archaeometric analyses will be conducted on Trier's bricks, examining their material composition - specifically, the chemical composition of the clay - to determine the raw materials used. This will allow researchers to identify or confirm the existence of specific workshops.

"We are very pleased that our joint proposal was successful in the competitive DFG process. A broad methodological spectrum is not just typical of LEIZA, it also is increasingly important to gaining groundbreaking new insights," emphasizes Prof. Dr. Alexandra W. Busch, General Director of LEIZA. "The project's findings will not only expand our knowledge of late antique building ceramics but also serve as a model study that integrates archaeological and archaeometric methodologies, helping us reconstruct Trier's historical development."

The project, titled "The Roman Brick Stamps of Trier - A Contribution to Research on the Organization of Ancient Building Ceramics Production and Distribution for the Expansion of a Metropolis in Northern Gaul," has been awarded €340,000 in funding by the DFG for two years. In addition to Dr. Thomas Schmidts, the project's lead applicants are Prof. Dr. Markus Scholz from Goethe University's Institute of Archaeological Sciences and Dr. Marcus Reuter, Director of Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier, which is part of the General Directorate for Cultural Heritage Rhineland-Palatinate (Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz, GDKE).

The project is also part of the "Research Focus on Roman Archaeology and Maritime Antiquity (FoRuM)" in Rhineland-Palatinate, a strategic research alliance between LEIZA, the University of Trier, and GDKE, dedicated to cutting-edge research on antiquity.

Weiterführender Link

- Link to the DFG project site:
<https://gepris.dfg.de/gepris/projekt/544457866?language=en>

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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

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