

Ludwig Leiner's Last Laugh

Konstanz Münsterplatz 1872 – 2005

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Abstract: In 1872 Ludwig Leiner, apothecary, city councillor, antiquary, scholar, city archaeologist and founder of the Rosgarten Museum in Konstanz witnessed the digging of a narrow trench for a water pipe traversing the Cathedral Square (Münsterplatz). He reported and published his observation in 1882 using succinct, clear wording, though with only vague sketches of his findings based on a map of Konstanz (LEINER 1882). During the following decades, his observations were repeatedly quoted in archaeological publications, but never seem to have been given much weight. In some cases their very validity was questioned, even though Leiner described what he considered to be the remains of Roman architecture and, over the decades, the question of the Roman settlement of Konstanz has been one of the great remaining archaeological mysteries of the City. Why were Leiner's observations so poorly received, not taken seriously or even misinterpreted by antiquaries and archaeologists? Were there perhaps hidden motives? Or did simple misinterpretation of his notes and sketches or plans lead to their negation? During the Cathedral Square excavations in Konstanz 2003-2005 the water trench seen by Leiner was revealed, slicing through the middle of the site. And it was once again possible to see what Leiner saw. Finally, the questions on his observations that had remained unanswered for 130 years could be addressed. Were archaeologists over the years right to make little of what he reported? Or, in the end, did Ludwig Leiner indeed have the last laugh?

Keywords: Antiquary, Romans, Interpretation, Urban Archaeology, Excavation

patriciorum

Ludwig Leiner (fig. 1) was born on 22nd February 1830 in Konstanz as the only son of the apothecary and city councillor Franz Xaver Leiner of Konstanz and Louise Stark from St. Blasien in the Black Forest.

Originally from St Gallen in eastern Switzerland, the Leiners had for three hundred years belonged to the "patricians" of Konstanz, moneyed urban aristocracy. They were part of a wealthy dynasty which since the late Middle Ages had achieved material prosperity and reputation through the linen trade. By the 19th century they had become apothecaries and Ludwig Leiner followed his father into that profession. Fig 2 shows a plan of Konstanz made around the time of Leiner's birth. It was the Konstanz he knew, still essentially the late medieval town. But old Konstanz was disappearing around him...



Fig. 1 – Ludwig Leiner, 1830-1901



Fig. 2 – “Ground Plan of the City of Konstanz in the Grand Duchy of Baden in the Year 1826”

Ludwig Leiner’s interests were many: local history, geology, botany and zoology, art – both actively and passively - and especially archaeology – about which he also expressed himself as a poet (SCHMIDT 2011):

»Mancherlei Fremdes / Mag uns hier zeigen / Was tief im Boden / Noch unter uns starrt / Was unserer Heimath wohl auch ist eigen / Und nur des Hebens ans Tageslicht hartt«

»Some strange things/Show us here/What slumbers out of sight/Deep in our homeland soil/Just waiting to be lifted to daylight«

Between 1839 and 1867, a time of mechanization and change, three town gate towers were demolished: the Schottentor, the Emmishofertor and the Kreuzlingertor (fig. 3) (all sketches by Leiner).

From the early 1860s onward Leiner, already a city councilor, actively canvassed for the conservation of the cultural heritage in Konstanz, managing in 1861 to rescue the Rheintorturm, which is still standing today (fig. 4). Leiner was awarded the title of “District Curator of Art and Ancient Monuments” of the City of Konstanz and was invested with various grades of the Knight’s Cross by the Grand Duke of Baden. Later, on his 70th Birthday in the year 1900 he was also invested with the honorary title of *Hofrat* or “court councillor” in recognition of his services to culture and science in his home town.

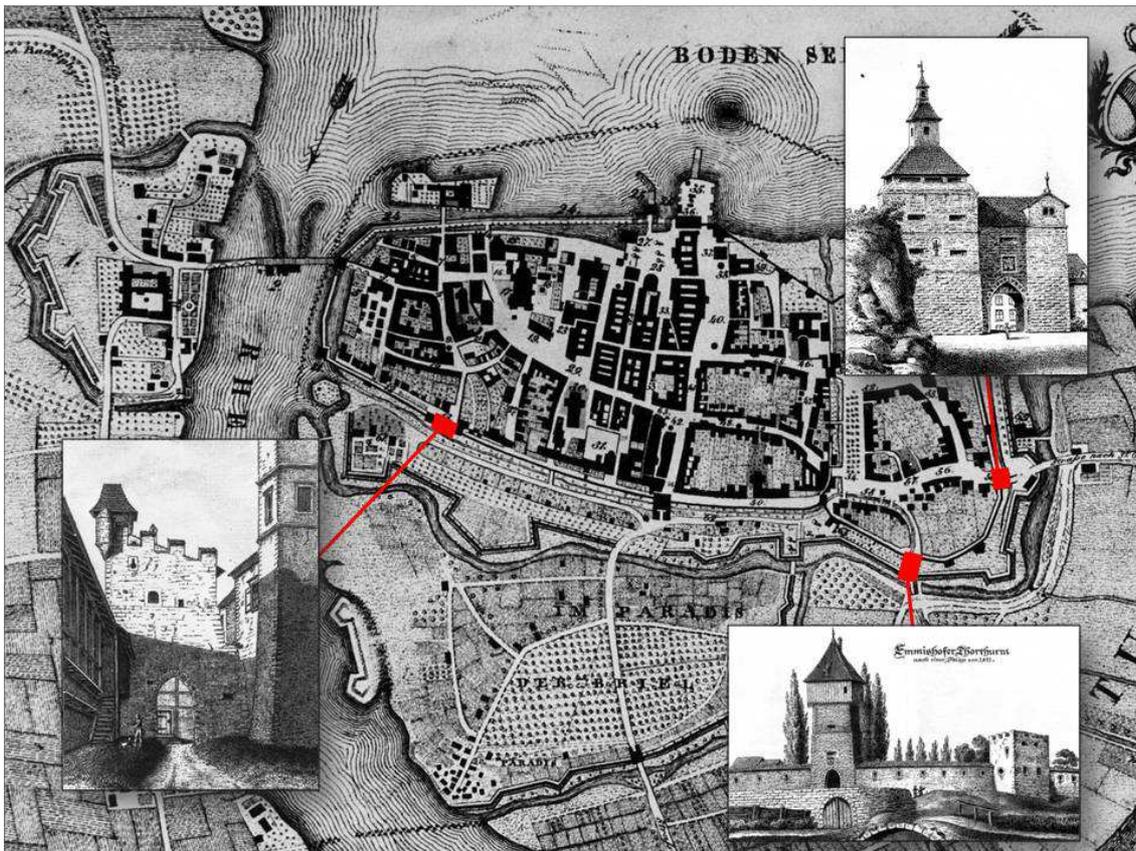


Fig. 3 – Town Gates in Konstanz demolished between 1839-1867. Schottentor (bottom left), Emmishofertor (bottom right), Kreuzlingertor (top right). All sketches by L. Leiner



Fig. 4 – Konstanz – Der Rheintorturm (13.09.2012, Jeanny, www.staedte-fotos.de)

romans

In the year 1872 Leiner discovered what he considered to be Roman masonry in the ancient centre of Konstanz on the Münsterplatz. For this discovery the present town Archivist Jürgen Klöckler honoured Ludwig Leiner as “to this day the original excavating discoverer of the Roman origins of Konstanz”. (KLÖCKLER 2003) But Klöckler only wrote this with hindsight at the end of 2003 after the first discoveries of the modern excavations had confirmed the presence of substantial Roman remains there. And in a Doctoral thesis on the history of Leiner's Rosgarten Museum we find stated that:

“Leiner's research provided one of the first reconstructions of the Roman settlement history of Konstanz, which could finally be confirmed by the large scale excavations on the Cathedral Hill 2003-2004” (SFEDU 2006).

And with some justifiable surprise:

“it is astounding that the theories of the museum founder on the Roman settlement and position of the castle were underestimated for decades after his death.”

So why were Leiner's theories “underestimated for decades after his death”? What happened?

To try to answer this question we must start by going back almost one and a half centuries, to the Münsterplatz in Konstanz in 1872 and let Leiner describe the situation in his own words. During the winter of 1871/72 the city was in a spate of development and Leiner was out and poking into the spoil heaps of every new foundation trench he came across looking for finds – as he says himself

“like a crow looking for seed” (LEINER 1882).

Leiner goes on to report that in 1872:

“A new network of water pipes ploughed ... deeply through the streets, lanes and squares.... and, taking it in turns with friends, I was in the trenches and on the churned up heaps of soil almost all of the time. On the square to the north of the cathedral ... a wall came into sight running in a different direction from the present line of building. In a northerly direction from the northern cathedral portal toward the Straub'sche house (Münsterplatz 7) runs walling two meters in width. One then leaves a space of 12 meters consisting of natural soil followed by walls each one meter thick, eight meters apart. In this gap, 1.15 meters under present street-level is a partially eroded cement floor with small tile fragment inclusions.”

Leiner continues:

“The stonework as far as it was visible, was maritime tertiary shell sandstone....rather than bed load and boulders of Julian Granite and other rocks from the Rhaetian Alps. Toward the east from this third wall 63 – 66 cm under present street level continued the remains of a carefully worked screed floor speckled with many small tile fragments and the whole structure was unmistakably identifiable as being of Roman origin.” (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 – Orientation to Leiner's description of his findings. Red blotch below: northern cathedral portal. Red blotch above: the "Straub'sche house" (Münsterplatz 7)

Leiner gives us a very thorough, detailed description of substantial Roman remains. What is remarkable is his description of the stone, distinguishing his finds from the Glacial boulder from which ALL the medieval foundations and many medieval walls in Konstanz are constructed. But despite Leiner's detailed description, here we find the first problem. Leiner did not make a plan of his findings at the time and what he later recalled to accompany his publication 10 years after the event caused confusion until the first decade of our Millennium (fig. 6).

Reviewing post-Leiner archaeology in Konstanz, the next publication we find, is an 1890-paper, also in the "Papers of the Society for the History of Lake Konstanz and Environs", entitled the "History of Roman Konstanz" by Konrad Beyerle, a student, 18 years of age at the time (BEYERLE 1890). As a school boy Beyerle, later Professor of Law at the University of Munich, had assisted Ludwig Leiner in his archaeological perambulations around Konstanz. In his paper of 1890 Beyerle merely notes that the excavations of 1872 are "sufficiently well known" and then goes on to describe his own findings in various parts of the town especially in the Brückengasse just to the north of the Münsterplatz, where he describes two Tufa walls, interpreting them as Roman. He reminds us that Roman finds have already been made on the Münsterplatz but does not try to make any further connection (fig. 7).

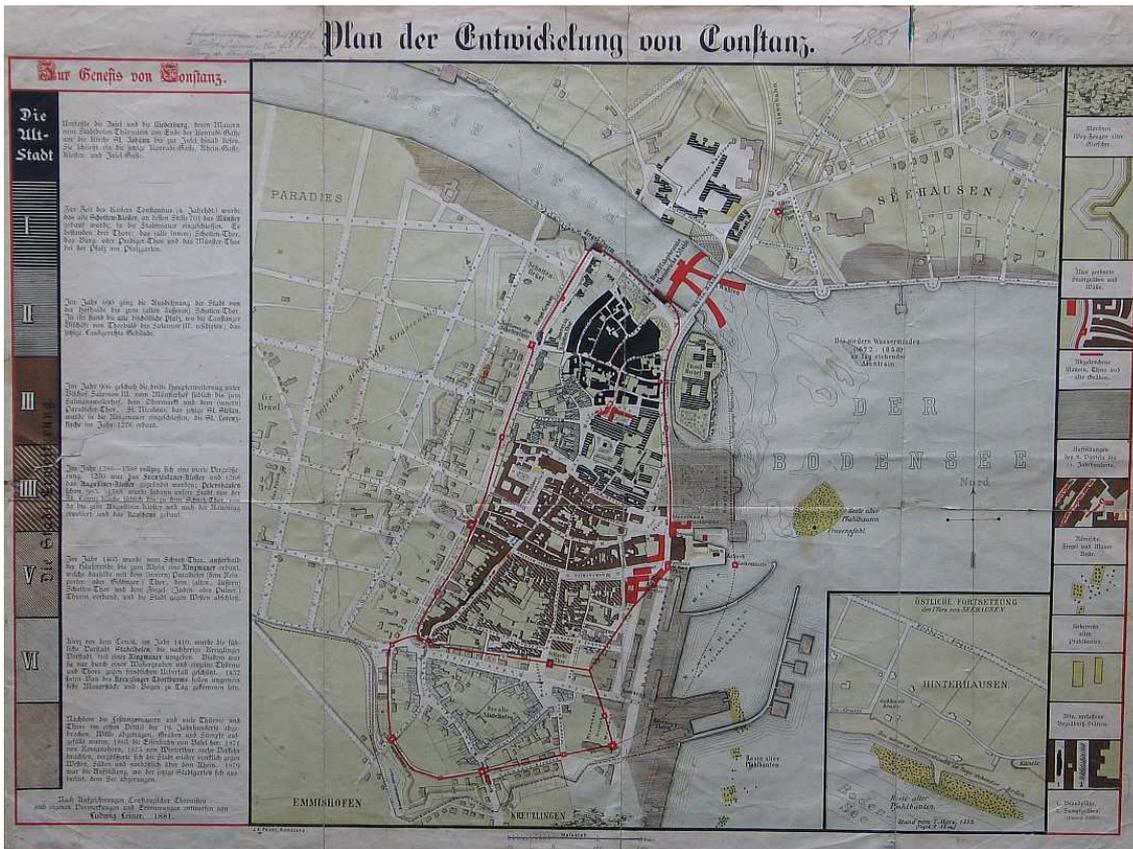


Fig. 6 – „The Development of Konstanz“. Plan attached to LEINER (1882) "Die Entwicklung von Konstanz" *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte des Bodensees und seiner Umgebung* 11/1882

The most remarkable thing about this report is that Ludwig Leiner is not mentioned once. It is hard to imagine that Leiner, the District Curator of Art and Ancient Monuments, Director of the Rosgarten Museum and acknowledged expert on the archaeology of Konstanz was not somehow involved.

conjectura

Between the end of the 19th century and the early 1930s there was little archaeological activity on the Münsterplatz in Konstanz. In 1931 secondary school teacher and later curator of ancient monuments in Konstanz, Alfons Beck undertook an excavation at the south end of the Cathedral Garden, where he cut through what he considered to be the remains of an early Roman Fort (fig. 8). It took until the late 1950s and early 1960s for him to publish his findings (BECK 1958, 1961). Near the beginning of his 1958 paper “Konstanz until the end of the Roman Rule” Beck speculates on the Diocletian defenses of the North part of the Old Town (*Niederburg*), he only perfunctorily mentions Leiner and in fact explicitly states

“the earlier findings – including house and walling remains from the year 1872 on northern Münsterplatz will not be dealt with here”.

This is puzzling because in a letter to the local newspaper in the same year, in which he comments on plans to resurface the Münsterplatz, Beck writes that, before the surface is resealed a sondage should be driven

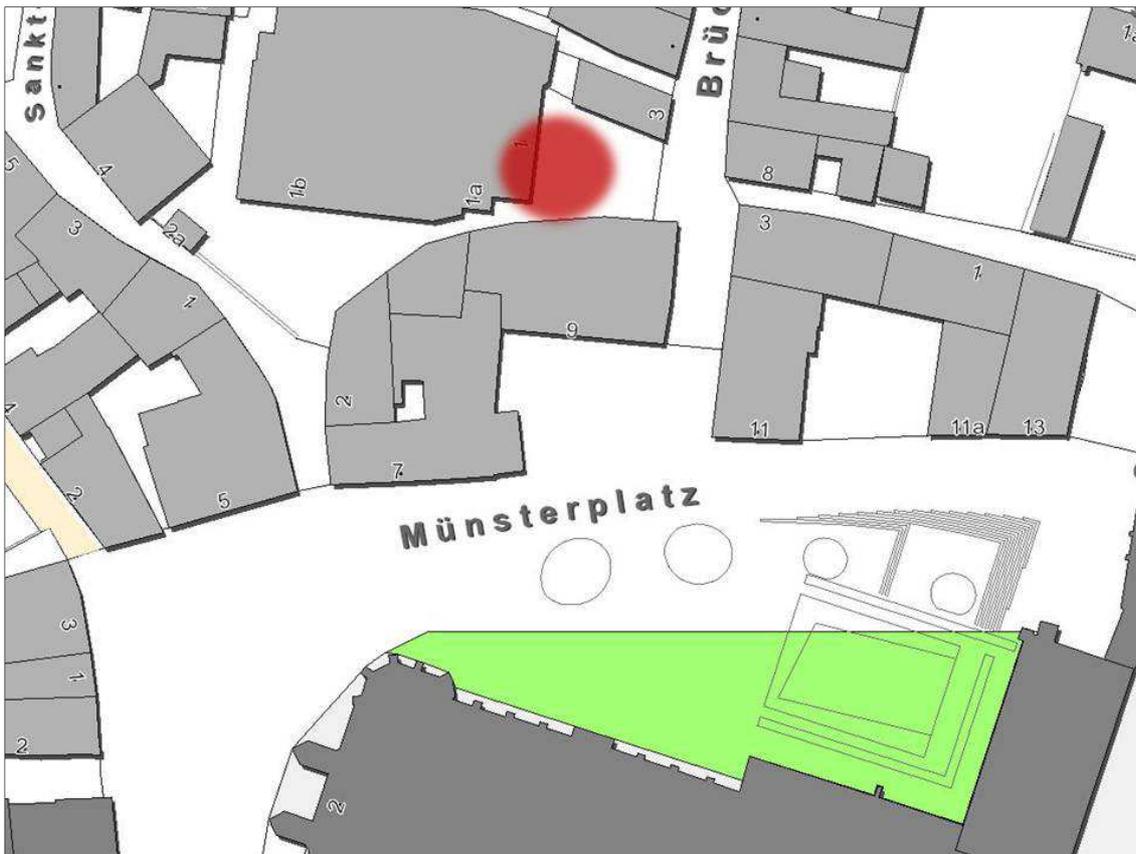


Fig. 7 – Approximate position of Konrad Beyerle's excavation in the Brückengasse 1890 (red blotch)

“3-5 m wide in a northwesterly direction from the Cathedral Portal toward the street, this is where the roman ruins lie that Ludwig Leiner partly recorded during the laying of the Konstanz water Pipes in 1872... Leiner thought these to be the castle wall”

(N.B. Leiner never described his discoveries as “Castle walls”). In his letter to the Newspaper Beck continues:

“We only know the approximate position – at the time they were not properly measured in... it is a vital task to fix the position of the remains including a mosaic floor (N.B. Leiner does not report a mosaic) with the methods of our surveyors department.” (BECK 1958, 2).

Beck shows a strange reluctance to completely believe or accept the accuracy of what Leiner reported, willing only believing the (potential) results of the “modern methods” of his own era. Beck in turn also became a victim of this phenomenon. Judith Oexle, the then City archaeologist writing in 1989, of a small excavation which had taken place that year in the cathedral garden, wrote

“As was to be expected the north-south trench ... cut the pointed ditch already cut in... 1931 by Beck... It is clearly Roman. Therefore the old findings which had been called into doubt can now be re-evaluated.” (OEXLE 1990).

At the beginning of the 21st century, at the time of the new large scale excavations which uncovered undisputable Roman remains on the Cathedral square, newspaper articles and popular scientific journals reported in the same vein on the “sensational” proof of Roman presence in Konstanz, which has finally been uncovered after all those years of speculation(!)



Fig. 8 – Approximate position of Alfons Beck's excavation in the Pfalzgarten 1931 (red blotch)

“Sensational finds offer us a view into Roman times. Archaeologists discover the remains of a Roman fort on the Münsterplatz. Historians and archaeologists have long suspected it, up until now though the proof has been missing! But now the researchers' excavations, 30 – 50 cm deep, have discovered a wall 2.2 m wide and the ruins of a multicornered tower 5 x 7 m in dimensions. A sensational find for the archaeologists. The fact that the Romans were in Konstanz has been long known, but up until now little was known about their defenses.” (SUDKURIER 13.11.2003)

Or in a popular archaeological magazine in 2004, at which point the Münsterplatz excavations were well underway:

“Long suspected, now proved! The late Roman Castle Constantia ... A large scale excavation yielded sensational results with regard to the Roman history of Konstanz... especially the long sought after late Roman castle.” (HEILIGMANN & RÖBER 2005)

From the 1930s to the beginning of our millennium Roman archaeology in the centre of Konstanz concentrated on the area around the Cathedral garden. Even though there was some archaeological activity there in the late 1950s and the early 1970s there was no real opportunity to dig there on any scale until the redevelopment of 2003. So Leiner's contribution faded more and more from awareness and by the 1990s ideas on the nature of the Roman presence there had become quite speculative. Fig. 9 is a summary of “the state of knowledge” in 1995 showing only two out of twelve find spots situated north of the cathedral.

Position 9 in fig. 9 refers to an attempted graphic representation of Leiner's report and as we will see, it is completely wrong. This representation seems to refer back to Leiner's plan drawn from memory for his 1882 paper (fig.10) showing a schematic series of Roman walls on the Münsterplatz.

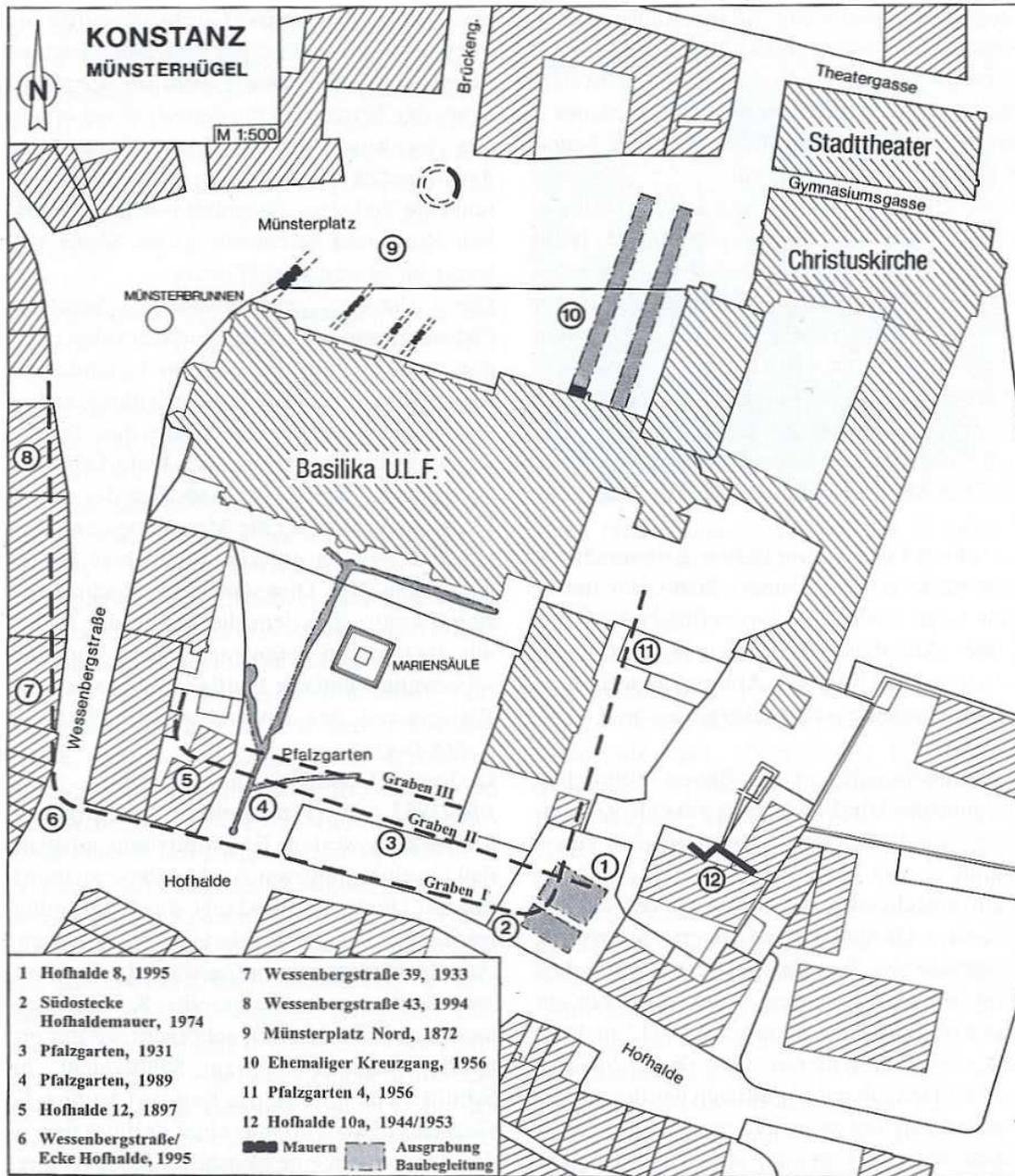


Fig. 9 – Summary of the state of knowledge on Roman features in and around the Münsterplatz, 1995 (DUMITRACHE 1996)

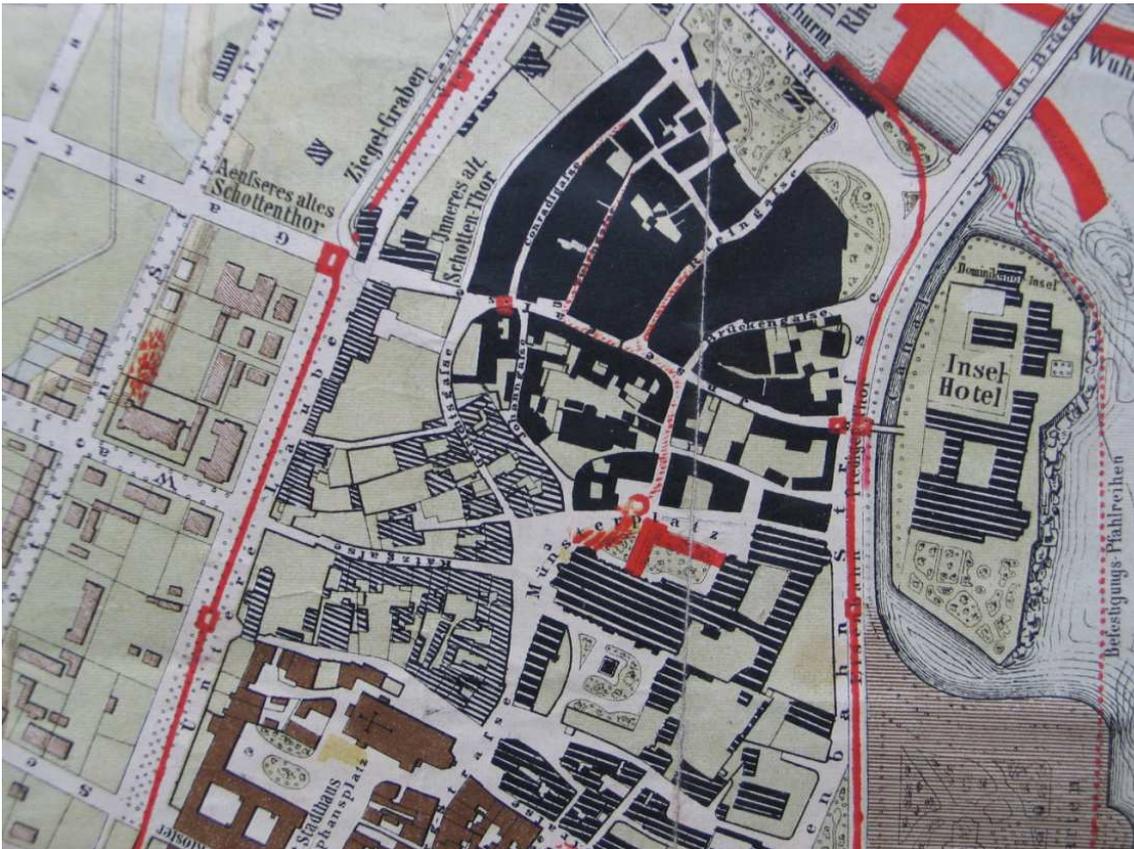


Fig. 10 – Detail from „The Development of Konstanz“. Plan attached to Leiner (1882) "Die Entwicklung von Konstanz" *Schriften des Vereins für Geschichte des Bodensees und seiner Umgebung* 11/1882

But the 1995 plan (fig. 9) does not seem to have derived its representation of Leiner's findings directly from Leiner's own plan (fig. 10). We find also the walls on another rather shabby map from 1908 (fig. 11) showing historical and archaeological features of Konstanz even more schematically. Through the years Leiner's walls (which had been inaccurately remembered by Leiner in the first place) drifted around within a buffer of around thirty meters.

And by 1995 (fig. 9) the features had morphed completely from series of parallel, approximately north-south running walls, to a series of north-south running trenches cutting east-west running walls, thus compromising Leiner's credibility almost completely; the position of the findings indicated by this sketch being basically uninterpretable.

Oblique criticism of Leiner can be found in mid 1970s in the summary of the archaeology of the Konstanz Münsterplatz, both Roman and medieval, by Erdmann and Zettler (ERDMANN & ZETTLER 1997). They acknowledge that Leiner did recognize the remains as Roman, but qualify their statement with the remark that the archaeological research of "Constanzia" lay under a poor omen. They also comment that only two "scientific excavations" had taken place in the environs, referring, it seems, to Beck's in 1931 and their own in 1974. If it was felt necessary to describe them as such, what does this make Leiner's observations?

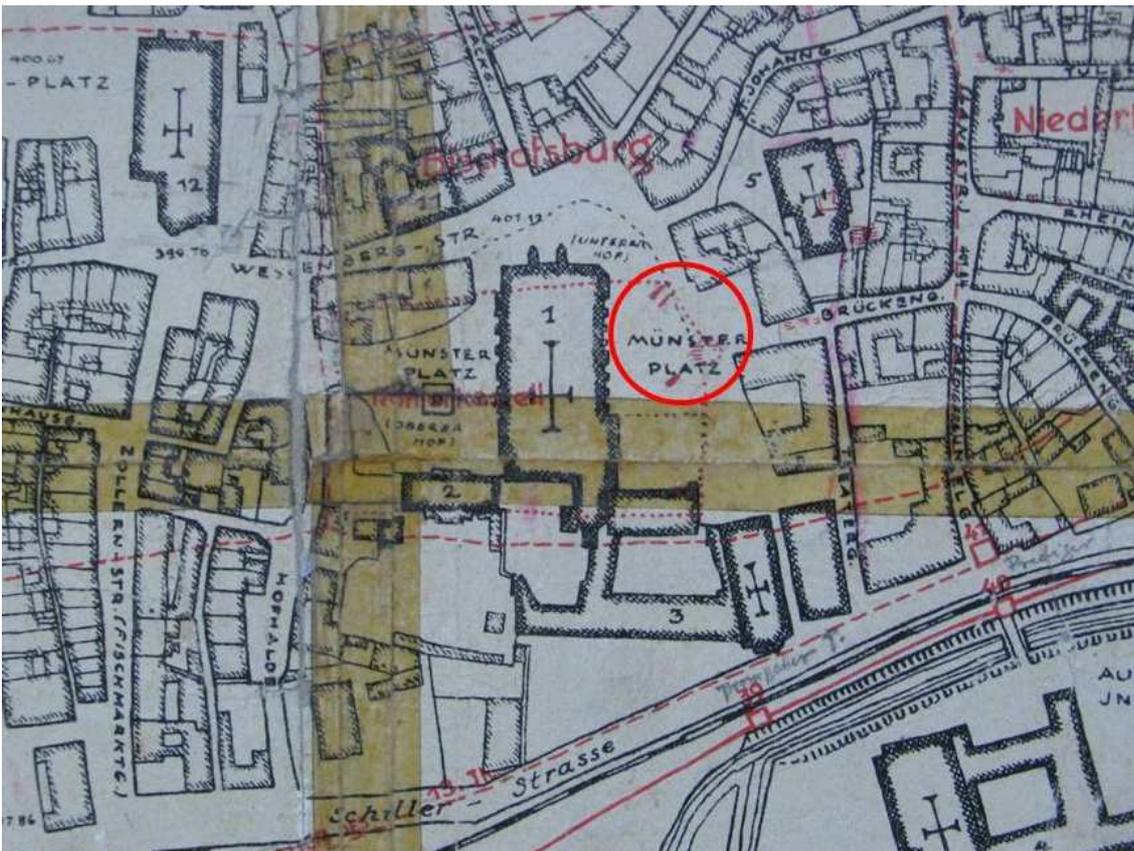


Fig. 11 – Detail from an unidentified plan Münsterplatz, 1908. Entitled “Konstanz Old Town, urban situation 1908 with the development of the city and defences”. City Archive Konstanz, Beck papers, no signature

Finally in the mid-1980s Hans Stather, after his retirement as police chief in Konstanz, wrote a doctoral thesis at the University of Konstanz entitled “Roman Military Politics on the upper Rhine with particular consideration of Konstanz” (STATHER 1986). He took the view that there was no proof what so ever of the presence of a Late Roman castle in Konstanz. His opinion culminated in his paper of 1993 entitled “Was there a late antique Castle in Konstanz?” (STATHER 1993). In this paper he correctly rejects the evidence for the presence of a Late Roman fortress in Konstanz postulated by the Gerhard Bersu in the aftermath of a small excavation he carried out on the Münsterplatz in Konstanz in the 1950s (BERSU 1959). But with the phrase “today no architectural findings can be proved” he also negated all the other evidence, including Leiner’s. Leiner was, as had become usual by this stage, only mentioned in a footnote.

Summarising the above we can identify three problems facing Leiner’s Münsterplatz report

- 1) The fact that he made no plan or sketch of his description at the time of observation
- 2) Oscillating interpretations of what Leiner saw in 1872 and remembered in 1881
- 3) The unwillingness of later generations of Archaeologists to accept what earlier generations have seen until they see it with their own eyes

These three points could really happen anywhere and probably do. But there is a fourth point, which is quite specific to southern, especially South Western Germany and especially relevant to Konstanz in the second half of the 19th century.

ecclesiastica

In German it is called the “Kulturkampf”. The “Cultural Struggle” describing a fierce conflict and battle for political and cultural power between ultra conservative, so called “ultramontane” Roman Catholics, and reform-inclined liberal Catholics. It resulted from the 1st Vatican council (1868 -1870), one reaction to which was the formation of the so called “Old” or Independent Catholic Church in its present form by Dutch and German Catholics who rejected Roman dogma. In Konstanz the “Kulturkampf” raged fiercely.¹ Leiner took the side of the liberals and in 1873 was a founder member of the anti-Roman “Old Catholic” church in Konstanz. And in his capacity as responsible City Councilor in the year 1876 he started removing religious streets names, replacing them with secular or even provocative historical ones: amongst others the Sanct-Lorenz-Str. became the Wessenbergstr, and the Sankt-Paul-Str. Hussenstr. (ENGELSING 1983)

In 1901 Ludwig Leiner’s funeral eulogy was given by the Roman Catholic lawyer and historian Karl Beyerle. Beyerle underplays Leiner’s political activities and – it seems – reduces him to his cultural role in Konstanz, which in Beyerle’s opinion, toward the end of his life, finally became acceptable. Near at the end of his talk Beyerle reflects that:

“in his later years, after the “Kulturkampf” had run its course L. Leiner... took up a more moderate position and tried to do justice to the church history of Konstanz” (BEYERLE, Karl 1901).

Karl Beyerle was the father of Konrad Beyerle, who, as already mentioned, as an 18 year old student published a paper in 1890 describing his excavations in the Brückengasse. These excavations were in the forefront of the building of a church hall for the Roman Catholic Church community of St Johann. The building was financed by a funding system organized and chaired by Karl Beyerle. And as we have seen, there was no mention of Leiner in the report ... The inception of a practice which seems to have perpetuated itself from the late 19th century into the next century and beyond.

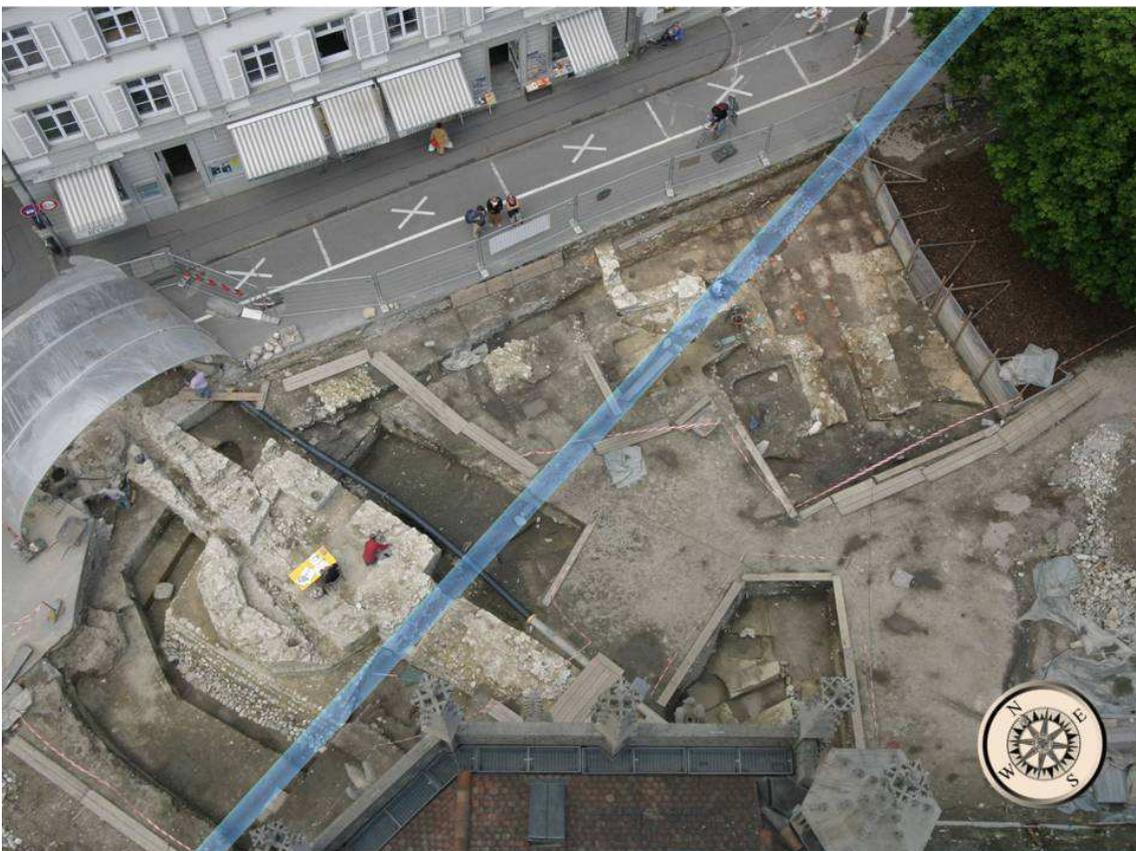
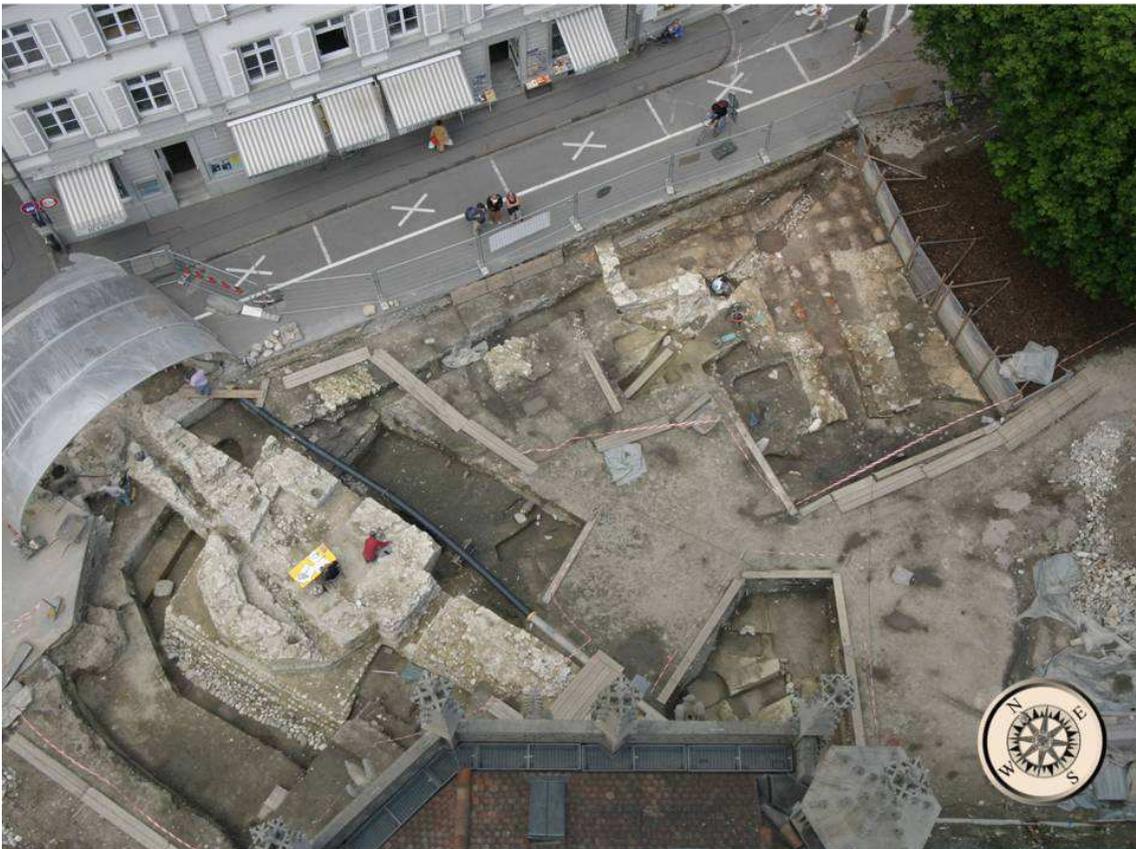
fossio recens

So what did Leiner actually see? Did he err gravely or was he right all along? During the large scale excavation on the Münsterplatz in Konstanz prior to resurfacing and redevelopment to its present form, the water trench Ludwig Leiner had seen in 1872 was quickly identified (fig. 12 a, 12b).

Leiner described the features he found there thus:

“... a wall came into sight running in a different direction from the present line of building. In a northerly direction from the northern cathedral portal toward the Straub’sche house (Münsterplatz 7) runs walling two metres in width. One then leaves a space of 12 metres consisting of natural soil followed by walls each one meter thick, eight meters apart. In this gap, 1.15 meters under present street-level is a partially eroded cement floor with small tile fragment inclusions.”

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Catholic_Church



Figs. 12a, 12b – Birds eye view of the Münsterplatz excavations in Konstanz 2003-2005. The water trench observed by Leiner in 1872

What Leiner had actually seen, recorded and interpreted as Roman was (from west to east) was the western wall of the Late Roman Fort of Konstanz (2 m), a stretch of (for him) featureless earth (12 m), the western exterior wall of Roman baths (1 m), the razed lower floor of the bath's *caldarium* (8 m) and finally the eastern exterior wall of the baths. Even a quick glance at fig. 12c shows that in the end Ludwig Leiner did indeed had the last laugh!

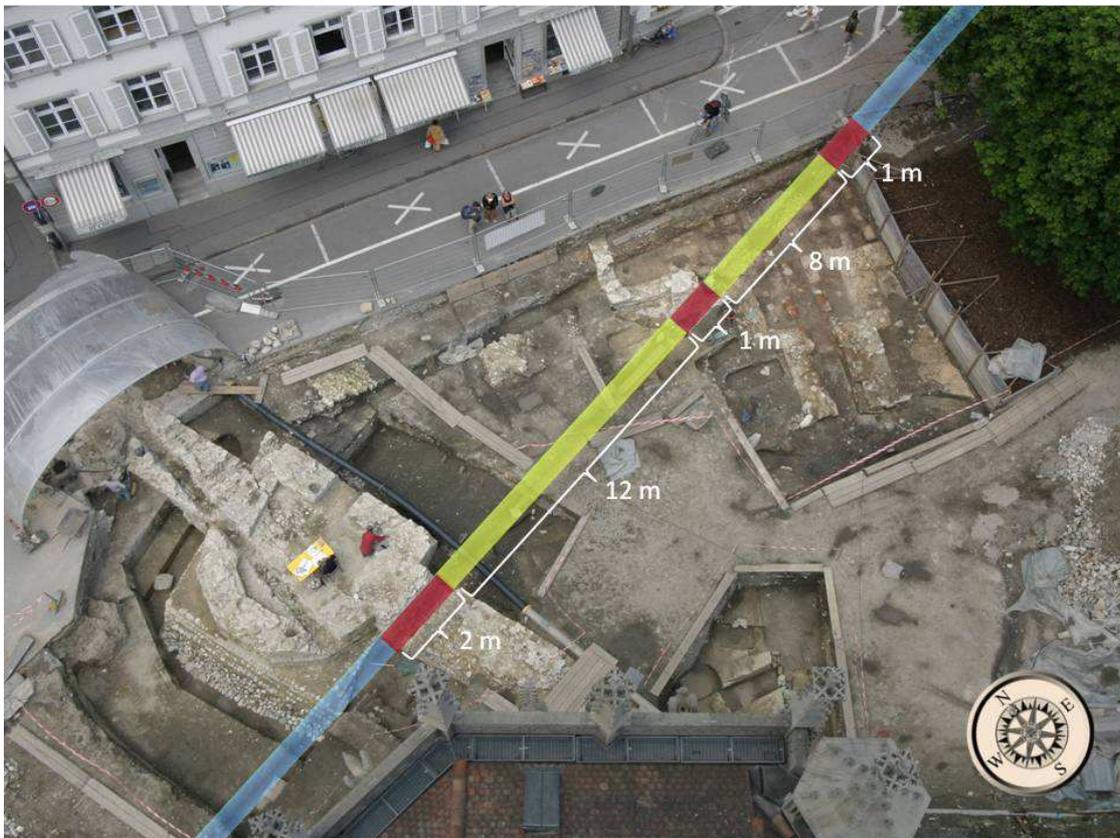


Fig. 12 c – Birds eye view of the Münsterplatz excavations in Konstanz 2003-2005. The water trench observed by Leiner in 1872 with Leiner's measurements

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