

# Vienna's lost castle – Topography and lordship in the early city

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*Vienna (Austria); urban castle; properties; jews; houses*

This article draws upon recent research in the area around Judenplatz and Am Hof, above all on excavations at Judenplatz and structural archaeology in the so-called Palais Collalto (Am Hof 13/Parisergasse 1).

Vienna was built on the site of the Roman fort *Vindobona*, which was abandoned in the early fifth century. Although pottery has shown that from the ninth century onwards people were living within the north-eastern corner of the defences, by the early twelfth century the settlement was still confined largely to this original nucleus. Two roads, *Tuchlauben* and *Wipplingerstrasse*, in the thirteenth century known as *Wildwerkerstrasse*, connected the southern and western gates of the fort respectively with the settled area. Vienna had three churches at this time, St. Rupert's, St. Peter's and St. Stephen's, apparently at least one market, *Kienmarkt*, and possibly a castle, the *Berghof*.

## The Duke of Austria builds a castle

The Babenberg family supplied the Count (Markgraf) of Austria from 976 onwards. Count Leopold III took over the lordship of Vienna, including considerable property in and around the settlement, shortly after 1130, but Vienna did not immediately become a centre of the dynasty's interest. When Leopold's second son Henry II was deposed as Duke of Bavaria by the German king Frederick I (Barbarossa) in 1156 he went at a price: Austria was elevated to a duchy. Written sources appear to indicate that from around 1156 onwards Henry made Vienna his chief place of residence.

Henry built a castle on empty land in the south-western corner of the former Roman

fort. The area remains today as the large square *Am Hof* ("At the Court"). The castle appears to have been larger than many of those built by Barbarossa. Until recently written sources and archaeology had provided only a bare minimum of information. The southern and western perimeter walls of the castle were essentially those of the fort, although excavations in *Am Hof 9* uncovered a medieval renewal of the Roman line. In *Heidenschuss*, at the south-western corner of the castle, a stretch of medieval wall was found facing northwards into the road. It was of squared stone, arranged in courses of varying height, a structure typical of the twelfth century and may have been part of a gate opening towards the *Schottenkirche* ("Scots' Church"). The exact line of the castle's northern and eastern perimeter is unknown, but the palace (*Herzogshaus* or "Duke's house") stood in the eastern part of the castle on the site of the present-day church (*Kirche am Hof*) and neighbouring buildings. A chapel (*Johanneskapelle*) is also mentioned here. Medieval walls were observed, but not accurately dated, at *Am Hof 2* in 1914.

At around the same time as the castle Henry founded the "Scottish" church and monastery outside the fort to the west of the castle. This was a colony of Irish Benedictine monks sent from a monastery in Regensburg, which Henry had got to know during his time in Bavaria. He and his second wife, Theodora Comnena, are buried there.

There are many examples of castles built in a corner of Roman or medieval fortifications, but it is unlikely that Henry chose the site solely for defensive purposes. The castle perimeter must have been too long (more than 500 m)



to be conveniently defended and the Scots' Church was left outside the walls despite there still being building land in the north-western part of the fort. Henry was not signalling his readiness to respect and peacefully coexist with the previous settlement. By constructing his residence beside the built-up area and inside the same historic line, he was showing who was now in charge.

### The impact of the castle

The construction of the castle began a building boom. An epic study of medieval ground rents in Vienna has shown that in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries first the remaining land inside the Roman walls and afterwards a wide area outside were divided into properties and built upon (Perger 1963–1964; 1965–1966; 1967). Henry and his successors gifted the land to religious institutions or dis-

tributed it to retainers. This process was accompanied by the construction of a new town wall, which appears to have been finished by the early thirteenth century and enclosed an area several times larger than the Roman fort. Recent archaeological projects, above all at Judenplatz to the north-east of the castle, have confirmed and extended this picture. Judenplatz began the twelfth century as an open area of dark earth from which stretches of Roman walls projected sporadically. A road, excavated at Judenplatz, and encountered again in Parisergasse, was laid out on the dark earth. It ran north-south across today's square. Several phases of wooden buildings were excavated over an extensive area to the west of the road. These depended on sill-beam foundations or on posts or a combination of both. The floors were usually of stamped yellow brick-earth. Oval fireplaces and round storage pits were among the other typical context types. The pottery from this stratigraphy has not yet

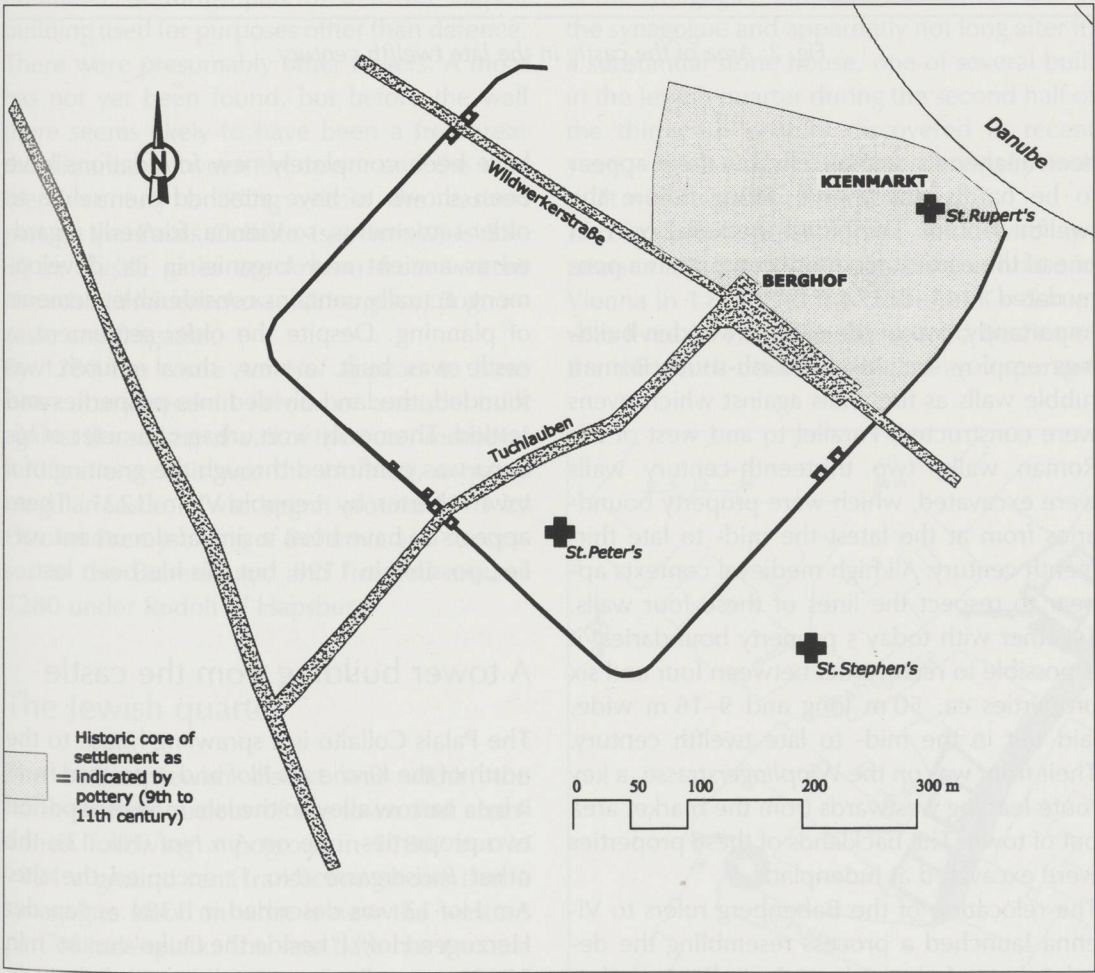


Fig. 1: Vienna in the early twelfth century.



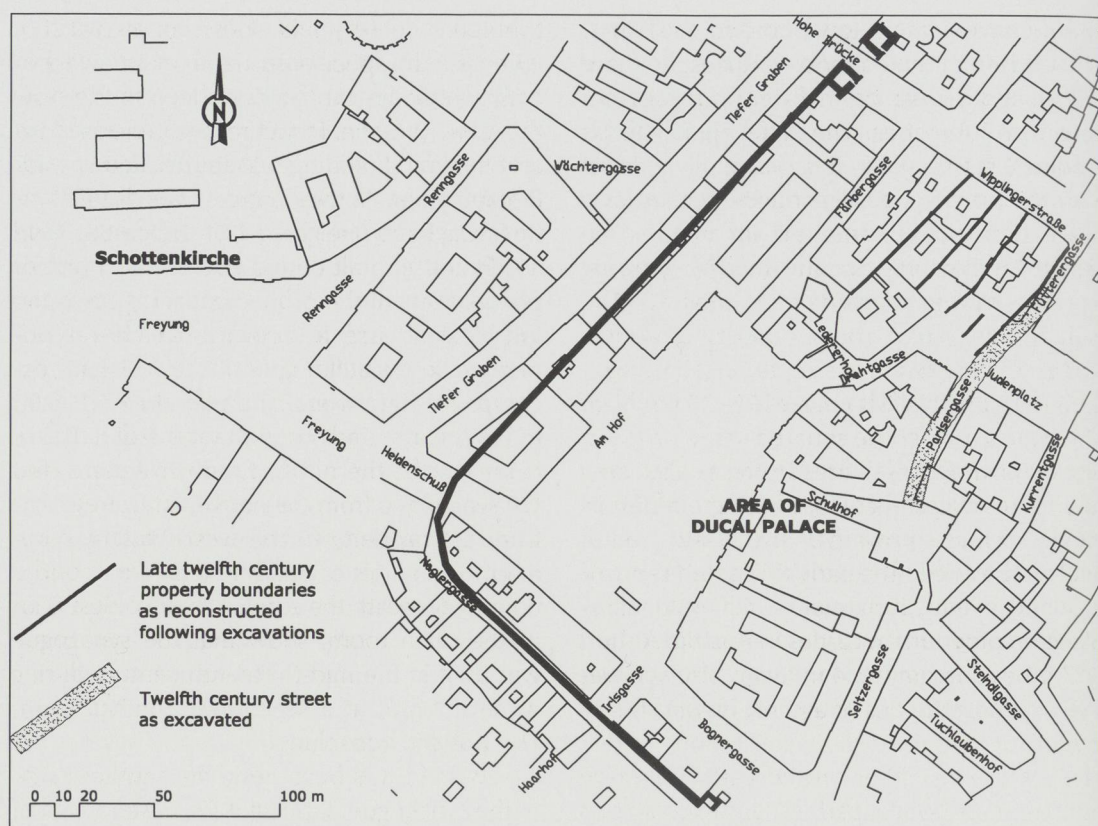


Fig. 2: Area of the castle in the late twelfth century.

been analysed systematically, but there appear to be hardly any sherds dating before the twelfth century. The oldest medieval coin, in one of the earliest medieval contexts, is a penny dated 1141–1177.

Importantly, two of the earliest wooden buildings employ sections of north-south Roman rubble walls as fire walls against which ovens were constructed. Parallel to and west of the Roman walls, two thirteenth-century walls were excavated, which were property boundaries from at the latest the mid- to late thirteenth century. All high medieval contexts appear to respect the lines of these four walls. Together with today's property boundaries, it is possible to reconstruct between four and six properties ca. 50 m long and 9–16 m wide, laid out in the mid- to late twelfth century. Their front was on the *Wipplingerstrasse*, a key route leading westwards from the market area out of town. The backlands of these properties were excavated at *Judenplatz*.

The relocation of the Babenberg rulers to Vienna launched a process resembling the development of planned or 'planted' towns elsewhere. Just as many towns long considered to

have been completely new foundations have been shown to have attached themselves to older settlements, so Vienna, formerly regarded as ancient and 'organic' in its development, actually contains considerable elements of planning. Despite the older settlement, a castle was built, a new, ducal church was founded, the land divided into properties and settled. The newly won urban character of Vienna was confirmed through the granting of a town charter by Leopold VI in 1221. There appears to have been a similar document earlier, possibly in 1198, but this has been lost.

### A tower building from the castle

The Palais Collalto is a sprawling house to the north of the *Kirche am Hof* and separated from it by a narrow alley. In the late medieval period two properties, one on *Am Hof* (No. 13), the other *Parisergasse* (No. 1) occupied the site. *Am Hof* 13 was described in 1384 as "an der Herzogen Hof" ("beside the Duke's court"). In 1999 a round room was discovered there in the cellar.



The round room is a tower and formerly part of the castle of the Babenberg dukes. It is four metres in diameter internally and survives to a height of 3.6 metres. The walls appear to be around 3 metres thick. It is in fact the cellar of a tower, for an original entrance at that level opens towards the castle interior. Neither the arch of the doorway, nor any trace of a passage or cellar on the other side have survived. The wall of the round room consists of rubble stones around 20 cm in size, arranged in regular if not quite perfect courses 15–25 cm high. The wall is neither the squared stone or ashlar work known from the area in the twelfth century, nor as irregular as walls from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. The tower seems likely to belong to the early thirteenth century, a period when substantial works were taking place on other urban castles in Austria. A short (1.7 m) wall fragment, 4 m away, also survives from the foundations of a castle-period building.

The tower was either on the castle's eastern perimeter or forms part of a tower-shaped building used for purposes other than defence. There were presumably other towers. A moat has not yet been found, but before the wall there seems likely to have been a free area: the distance between the tower and the thirteenth-century building within the eastern part of the Palais Collalto (see below) is 25–30 m. Castle gates are known from written records at *Heidenschuss*, *Färbergasse*, *Bognorgasse* and *Irissgasse*.

By 1280 the castle *Am Hof* appears to have been abandoned in favour of a castle built against the southern wall of the outer medieval fortifications. This was the *Hofburg*, a quadrangular castle. It was begun around 1275 by Ottokar Premysl, king of Bohemia and successor to the Babenbergs, and finished around 1280 under Rudolf of Hapsburg.

## The Jewish quarter

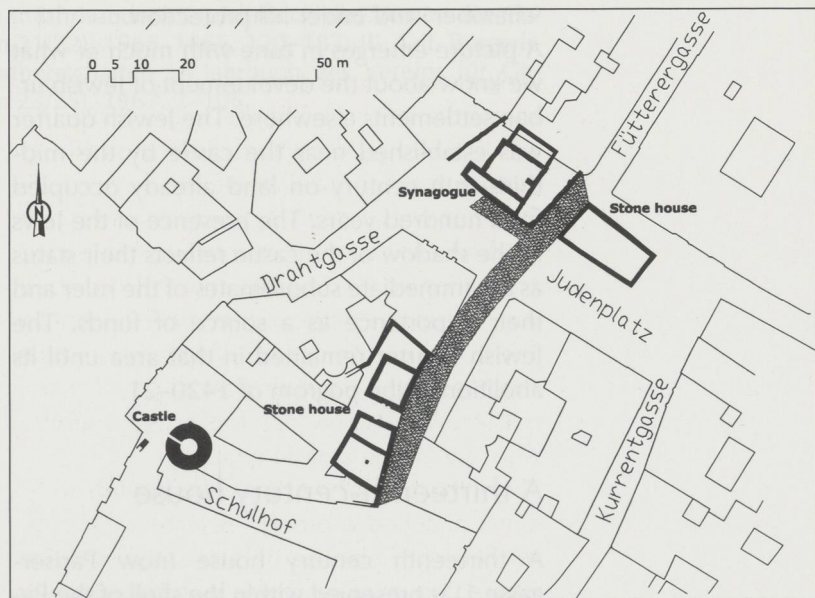
The earliest Jewish district was within the north-eastern nucleus of the town and abandoned following a pogrom in 1196, but in 1294 a ground rent transaction shows that a synagogue stood in what is now the western part of Judenplatz. This late date has encouraged some historians to speak of a migration of Jews into the Judenplatz district during the

thirteenth century and above all after 1280, when it was speculated, land may have become available on the periphery of the now abandoned castle. In fact recent projects show that the Jewish quarter was established considerably earlier. At the centre of the district was the synagogue (Helgert 1997; Helgert/Schmid 1999–2000), built on the backlands of one or possibly two of the properties facing on to the *Wipplingerstrasse*, as a one room east-west orientated stone building of 12.15 x 9.4 m, accompanied by a women's annex (15 x 3–3.6 m) to the south and an entrance hall (10.6 x ca. 4.5 m) to the north. Courtyards separated the synagogue from the north-south street and from the property to the west. Pottery, comparative analysis of building techniques and a coin underneath the surface of the oldest floor of the main room, show that the synagogue was built in the mid-thirteenth century during or after 1236, at a time when the castle *Am Hof* was still occupied.

A new road was built along the southern side of the synagogue. Opposite the eastern wall of the synagogue and apparently not long after it, a substantial stone house, one of several built in the Jewish quarter during the second half of the thirteenth century discovered in recent years, measuring 19 x 10 m externally was built with its gable to the street.

Two important personalities, Teka, who appears in a property deal signed in his house in Vienna in 1235, and the rabbi Isak Or-Sarua, who lived in Vienna in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, indicate an important

Fig. 3: Castle and Jewish district, mid-thirteenth century.





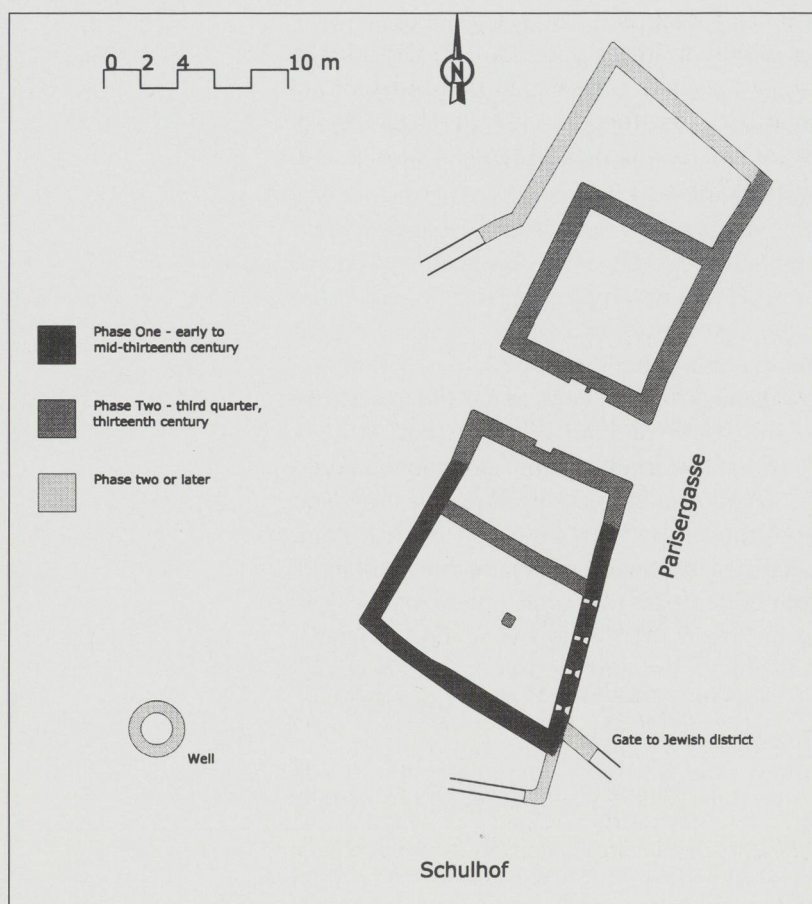


Fig. 4: The thirteenth century house at Parisergasse 1.

Jewish settlement in Vienna around the time the synagogue was being built. In 1238 a charter of rights was granted to the Jews of Vienna by German King Frederick II. These rights were confirmed and extended to all Jews in Austria by the Babenberg duke Frederick II in 1244. The Jews were vassals of the king, but were also considered by the duke to be part of his 'chamber' and under his protection.

A picture emerges in tune with much of what we know about the development of Jewish urban settlements elsewhere. The Jewish quarter was established near the castle by the mid-thirteenth century on land already occupied for a hundred years. The presence of the Jews in the shadow of the castle reflects their status as the immediate subordinates of the ruler and their importance as a source of funds. The Jewish quarter remained in that area until its abolition in the pogrom of 1420–21.

### A thirteenth-century house

A thirteenth century house (now Parisergasse 1) is preserved within the shell of the Pa-

lais Collalto. It is the closest building of the Jewish district to the castle (25–30 m from the tower building) yet discovered. It began with a trapezoid-shaped building measuring 10.9–12 x 10–13.25 m externally and built directly on the street front. From the ground floor four ca. 1.30 m high arched windows, 40–70 cm wide, but narrowing from both sides to around 30 cm, looked onto the street. Although apparently thirteenth-century, the walls retain their medieval rendering, making the dating of the first phase difficult.

In a second phase the northern wall of the first phase was demolished and rebuilt 2.5 m further north. An internal wall was inserted creating two rooms. Now or at a later date the floor of the southern room was excavated to create an undercroft, in which a central pillar supported probable groin vaulting. On the northern side of this two room unit a 3.25–3.5 m wide entry passage was built, on one side of which a double seating niche remains, 1.8 m high, 1.24 m wide (single arch) and 0.33 m deep, capped by pointed trefoil arches. The unit now built to the north of the passage was roughly 10 m square and retains part of a stone upper floor. The height of the ground floor was ca. 3 m. A medieval well was discovered in the open ground between the rear of the house and the castle.

The walls of the second phase can be dated roughly to the mid thirteenth century. The seating niche on the other hand can be dated comparatively to the second half of the century, so that a very approximate date of the third quarter of the thirteenth century emerges for the building's second phase. That means that the first phase was built in the early or mid-thirteenth century, possibly around the time that the synagogue was being built 50 m to the north.

The house was one of the houses confiscated after the pogrom of 1420–21 and probably part of the Jewish quarter from the beginning. It is not far from the centre of the quarter and dates to its early years. During the project, the foundation of one of the gates of the Jewish quarter was found built onto the south-east corner of the house and stretching across Parisergasse towards No. 2. The house's entry lay always to the north of the gate and therefore within the quarter, although the foundation itself is probably from the fourteenth century.



By at the latest 1342 the buildings which formed the eastern core of the castle had become the Vienna mint. The mint was converted to a Carmelite monastery after 1365/70. Am Hof 13 became a private house. The castle had been the main residence of the Austrian rulers for around 125 years. From this centre

the dukes had reorganised and developed the town in their image and interests. Outside the castle wall they encouraged the settlement of their servants, the Jews. The archaeology of the district is rewriting the history of high medieval Vienna.

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