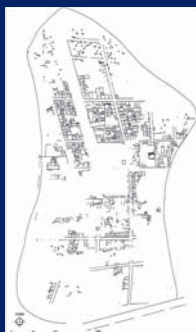


The origins of small towns

Besides the administrative centres – the cities – there developed in the northern frontier of the empire smaller settlements of urban character, which acted as centres for their surrounding countryside. In some cases their origins lay in a pre-Roman settlement; in most cases they were new foundations of the Roman period.

The appearance and function of these small towns varies not only from province to province, but also within provinces. As well as market centres, there occur industrial settlements and even villages of predominantly agricultural character.

Small towns of urban character are found principally in the southern part of Upper Germany and in Britain. While, for example, Vertault succeeded a pre-Roman Oppidum, Water Newton was a civilian town new to the Roman period. Camerton in Britain shows how strongly the economic basis of the community could influence the layout of a small town. As at Vertault, Camerton developed over a pre-Roman settlement. The scattered buildings, including some of the type found in agricultural villages, suggest that the inhabitants mainly practised agriculture.



Vertault (F) – a developed small town with pre-Roman roots in southern Upper Germany



Water Newton (GB) – a newly founded small town in Britain



Camerton (GB) – a British small town of agrarian character, with pre-Roman origins

With the exception of Britain and southern Upper Germany, the roadside settlement was the commonest-occurring type of small town in the northern frontier provinces. This kind of settlement developed mostly at important road junctions. These main roads were lined, left and right, with rows of houses. The majority of roadside towns were industrial in character. This is shown particularly clearly by the so-called strip houses, presenting their narrow end to the street frontage. Courtyards and accommodation to the rear gave these buildings an elongated rectangular form. This settlement type was prefigured by the civil settlements that developed surrounding military forts. With the departure of the garrison the settlements survived and became small towns.



Euskirchen-Billig (D) – a roadside settlement in Lower Germany



Butzbach (D) – a civil settlement by a military base in Upper Germany



Walheim (D) – a small town near or over an abandoned military base in Upper Germany

Especially in the more easterly provinces of Noricum, Pannonia, Dacia and Moesia, the houses of such roadside settlements have another form. Here the buildings are smaller and, especially in Noricum, show a continuation of older pre-Roman building traditions.



Gleisdorf (A) – a roadside settlement in Noricum



Caraş-Severin (RO) – a roadside settlement in Dacia