

Roman staff building (Principia)

The staff building in a Roman camp was both an administrative and religious centre. In Latin, the plural "principia" was used for this building, which underlines its importance. In fortified forts, it stood at the intersection of the most important fort roads, the "via praetoria" and the "via principalis". From the middle of the 1st century BC, the principia in all forts had roughly the same ground plan. One entered the building through an entrance in the large transverse hall. The entrance led to the inner courtyard around which the building wings were arranged. The courtyard was surrounded by a portico, a covered walkway. In some staff buildings, a well or water tank stood in a corner of the courtyard. Often there were water pipes and sewers underground in the courtyards. During excavations, foundations of statues and altars were found in the courtyard of some staff buildings.

The buildings on the long sides of the courtyard contained magazines and armouries. Sometimes the chambers were also used as prisons. In many staff buildings, the most important rooms were located in the rear wing of the building. These included offices, meeting rooms, the troop treasury and writing rooms. The entire administration of a fort took place in the writing rooms. Daily reports, morning reports, detachments, guard lists, leave lists and marching orders were administered here. Files were kept on each soldier of the respective garrison, containing information on years of service, promotions and pay.

The most important room was usually architecturally highlighted according to its importance. The flag shrine was located in the middle of the rear wing of the building, was larger than the surrounding rooms and had a prominent roof. On a pedestal in the flag sanctuary were insignia that the Romans worshipped. A picture of the emperor also hung there. On Roman army holidays, the insignia were taken out of the sanctuary, placed in the courtyard of the staff building and decorated in a solemn ceremony. Each garrison had its own field emblems, which were presented with the founding of the garrison. The foundation day was celebrated annually with the "natalis signorum" (the "birthday of the insignia"). In the course of time, however, the emperor cult increasingly replaced the flag cult.