

I have been crossing the Eiserner Steg (Iron Bridge) over the river Main every day since I moved from London to Frankfurt in August 2012. I live in the Sachsenhausen district, opposite the south bank of the Main River at a walking distance of Germany’s best-known museums, also called the Museum Embankment (or [Museumsufer](#)).

The 170 m long Eiserner Steg is a pedestrian-only bridge which connects the Römerberg (meaning “Roman Mountain”) and Sachsenhausen. It was built in 1868 and was only the second bridge to cross the river in Frankfurt. After World War II, when it was blown up by the Wehrmacht, it was quickly rebuilt in 1946. Today around 10,000 people cross the bridge on a daily basis.

When I crossed the bridge for the first time I was surprised to see an inscription written in ancient Greek and wondered for a long time about its meaning.

The inscription reads ΠΛΕΩΝ ΕΠΙ ΟΙΝΟΠΑ ΠΟΝΤΟΝ ΕΠ ΑΛΛΟΘΡΟΥΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥΣ which translates to [[while sailing over the wine-dark sea to men of strange speech](#)].



ΠΛΕΩΝ ΕΠΙ ΟΙΝΟΠΑ ΠΟΝΤΟΝ ΕΠ ΑΛΛΟΘΡΟΥΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥΣ

Eisener Steg, Frankfurt

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I was amazed to discover that it was a quote from Homer’s *Odyssey*. It is taken from book I line 183, when Athena goes to Ithaka disguised as Mentos, a family friend of Odysseus, to speak with Telemachus. She persuades him to make a journey to Pylos and Sparta to ask for any news of his father.



Eiserner Steg, Frankfurt am Main

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The Greek motto is actually a remnant of the 2001 [Museumsuferfest](#), when Greece was the guest country of the Frankfurt Book Fair.

The inscription is believed to have been chosen for the bridge as Frankfurt's population is made up of many different nationalities and languages (40% non German... including me!); it is meant to symbolise the desire of humanity to cross waters and meet with people of multitude of languages. How great!!



Eiserner Steg, Frankfurt am Main

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On the north bank of the river in the area of the Römer, Roman settlements were established, probably in the 1st century AD; some artifacts from that era are found even to this day and ruins of a Roman bath house can be seen which may have belonged to a larger complex, possibly a fortress.



Roman bath ruins, Frankfurt am Main

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The city district Bonames has a name probably dating back to Roman times—it is thought to be derived from *bona me(n)sa*. Further north, Nida (Heddernheim) was also a Roman *civitas* capital. Frankfurt is located in what was originally a swampy portion of the Main valley, a lowland criss-crossed by channels of the river. The oldest parts are therefore to be found on the higher portions of the valley, through which passed the Roman road from Mainz (Roman *Moguntiacum*) to Heddernheim (Roman *Nida*).

I recently visited the [Archaeological Museum of Frankfurt](#) where are exhibited most of the finds from Nida. Also worth seeing in this museum is their unique collection of religious monuments from places of worship dedicated to the god Mithras, and the group of Jupiter columns.



Recreation of the Mithraeum III from Nida (Heddernheim, Germany) in the Archaeological Museum of Frankfurt.



Group of Jupiter columns in the Archaeological Museum of Frankfurt.

Apparently the military occupation in Frankfurt was abandoned during the 2nd century and replaced by a villa. Several farm buildings have also been excavated nearby. A similar building complex to that of the Roman bath was discovered at the modern Günthersburgpark in the Frankfurt-Bornheim portion of the city.

With the retreat of the Roman border to the west bank of the Rhine in 259/260, the Roman history of Frankfurt came to an end.

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