

## The Valley of the Three Castles – Rosenberg, Rabenstein, and Tachenstein

When you travel through the Altmühl river valley, you cannot miss the impressive Castle of Rosenberg rising above the town of Riedenburg. Even today, it visibly bears witness to the power of its former lords. And yet, the sight was certainly far more awe-inspiring in the High Middle Ages, when there was not just one castle, but three of them. In addition to mighty Rosenberg, there were two more proud castles in this area of the valley around 1300: the smaller Rabenstein Castle and the defiant Tachenstein Castle.

Why were these three castles built here in such close proximity to each other? Rabenstein Castle was probably built in the early 12th century as a fortress for the Lords of Rabenstein, an otherwise unknown family of knights. It is built on a rock above Riedenburg, but a little lower than Rosenberg Castle, so even in its heyday, Rabenstein surely appeared smaller and less stately than Rosenberg Castle only 130 meters away.

Not very far from there was another imposing building: Tachenstein Castle. It is first mentioned in the records of the late 12th century. The first lord of the castle to be known by name, though not its builder, was Friedrich von Tachenstein. As a descendant of a collateral branch of the Babonen dynasty, he had inherited the property at the Altmühl.

What use could there be in building three castles so close to each other above Riedenburg? At wartime, the castles were strongholds and provided refuge from enemies. But most of the time, they served the noble families as representative residences. Standing out from afar, the castles' location, size, and facilities revealed a great deal about the rank and wealth of their lords. This was also the reason for building them on hilltops and lofty crags. Besides keeping an eye on the valley, the primary purpose was for the castles to be prominently visible and demonstrate their lords' claim to power.

Neither Tachenstein nor Rabenstein survived the times. Rabenstein Castle was already derelict in 1400. Tachenstein was probably inhabited and used for longer, but its downfall eventually came. By the mid-16th century, this castle, too, was listed as a ruin.

Nevertheless: if you travel through the Altmühl valley with open eyes today, you will still distinctly identify the remains of these castles with their once stately appearance and eventful history.