



Review

A History of the Congress of Roman Frontier Studies 1949–2022: A Retrospective to Mark the 25th Congress in Nijmegen. By D.J. Breeze, T. Ivleva, R.H. Jones and A. Thiel. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2022. Pp viii +185, illus. Price £38. ISBN 781803273020 (pbk); 9781803273037 (PDF eBook).

Covering almost three quarters of a century since the first Congress of Roman Frontier Studies in 1949, this book offers a retrospective on the origins and development of the conference. The congress is the main event in the calendar of scholars of Roman frontiers, taking place every three years. Rotating between locations in the east and west of the former Roman empire, each combines lectures with excursions to military sites. Their lasting legacies are hefty proceedings volumes, many of which have previously been reviewed in *Britannia*. Published to coincide with the 25th Congress of Roman Frontier Studies, the book is divided into two parts; an overview of all congresses to date, and a reflection about the development of the congress.

The first part of the book consists of a chronological overview of each of the congresses. These contain descriptions of individual conferences; dates, geopolitical situation at the time, key individuals, representation of female scholars, patronage of local authorities and heritage partners, session themes, format of the conference, excursions, and anecdotes concerning key figures in the field. The description of each congress is followed by a bibliography of works arising from the conference and reminiscences from participants. A captivating aspect is the work put into identifying participants in photographs and tracing their stories. This reveals much about the nature of academic networks and changing gender dynamics in the field. The material has been sourced from archives in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands and consists of photographs, documents, correspondence and personal notes, all illustrating the politics of running an international congress across the second half of the twentieth century. The overarching conclusion from these 150 pages is the extent of international networks forged by the congress. This part of the book reminds us of the relationship between the study of Rome's frontiers and the international geopolitical situation that was its backdrop. At the time of the first congress, some scholars were still prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, with the period of the Iron Curtain marked by scholars fleeing antisemitism, uprisings, and ultimately marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall. The volume also makes clear the detrimental role of political instability and conflict for the development of research and protection of heritage. This is well illustrated by excellently sourced evidence of the participation of ex-military personnel in efforts to protect frontier heritage during World War II and a reminiscence from the 1974 congress in Netherlands. The German delegation was greeted by the Nijmegen mayor's remark that it was good to see the Germans arriving by buses, and not by tanks (p. 53).

The second part offers an appraisal of the development of the format of the congress and its folklore; the 'singing bus', memorabilia, logos and its governance structures. Crucially, the section makes observations regarding the role of the congress in the development of provincial Roman archaeology. At the time of the congresses' inception, the emphasis on the distinctiveness of provinces was a radically novel idea, when most research focused on classical Rome. The section offers a case study of democratisation and modernisation of what used to be an academic structure dominated by male leadership. The next section deals with gender inclusivity in participation and publication, and highlights women's hidden services to the profession, starting in the inter-war era, progressively authoring increasing percentages of papers and taking on leadership roles. The congress is diverse in terms of European participation, but representation of perspectives other than those of white scholars remains an issue. The need for decolonisation of frontier studies is visible in only two congresses to date having been organised outside of Europe. Due to political uncertainties, it has never been possible to bring the congress to North Africa. With the volume of papers on Africa declining, efforts to diversify participation will be vital.

The congress has a reputation for studying the minutiae of military installations, but the volume successfully foregrounds its role in galvanising international collaboration and as a platform for heritage protection through Frontiers of The Roman Empire World Heritage Site. Modern congresses are springboards for multinational research, with impacts on international diplomacy, UNESCO nomenclature, and cultural provision for local communities. The Congress acts as a metronome of changes in the field, with recent focus on migration, mobility, deep frontiers, sexuality, appropriation of heritage, gender and imperialism reflecting issues of the modern day. It would have been interesting if the authors offered a reflection on where the research agenda of the congresses might be heading next – as the authors note, there is scope for frontier scholarship to grow its theoretical basis. This accessible and well-illustrated offering will be of value to those interested in historiography of Roman archaeology, the politics of heritage, and women's contributions to Roman archaeology.

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