



Session Proposals Limes Congress 2021

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'In the Empire of Desert, Water is the King'. Water, *limites* and local peoples on the arid frontiers of the Roman Empire

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Session Abstract: The session aims to have a fresh look at the relation of the resource water and the *limites* in arid areas of the Roman Empire. It engages with conceptions and regional appearances of Roman borders in dry zones and takes issues such as resource availability and control, strategic considerations, local socio-economic conditions as well as interaction with local communities into account.

The arid regions of Africa, Cyrenaica, Aegyptus, Arabia and Syria became provinces of the Roman Empire under different historical circumstances bringing Rome into contact with differently living local people; they bordered to different kinds of socio-political entities in the South and East and were part of the distant fringes of the *oikoumene*. Hence, the borders took various shapes in North Africa, Egypt, or along the fringes of the Arabian Desert. Whether along roads with chains of military bases and structures, spotty in the desertic regions, or interconnecting existing landmarks, the organization of these frontiers of the Roman Empire adapted to the local ecological, topographical as well as the socio-economic conditions. In order to understand the interdependencies of water, demarcation and local conditions in the arid environments of the Roman Empire, the contributions to this session focus on specific ecological and economic conditions of dry areas as frontier zones, such as scarceness of the resource water and the control over it, mobile life strategies, low population and settlement density, which entail methodologically little and spatially spread evidence for past periods. The specific strategic and historical backgrounds in the local environments are considered as well. To this end archaeologists, philologists, ancient historians and scholars from other disciplines like for instance hydrologists are invited to address the following questions:

- implications of arid environments for the organisation of the frontier and pertaining structures and institutions
- interactions with locally employed forms of connectivity (controlling, communicating, moving) and of the perception of water(s)
- handling of the resource water (detection, collection and control, use and distribution)
- impacts of Roman presence on resource availability and socio-spatial organisation of arid environments
- influence of local communities and their life-strategies on the Roman strategies of border control (population densities, settlements and economic potentials)
- reflections on these issues in literary, epigraphic, or administrative texts



The contributors to this session embrace a wide range of regions of the Roman Empire and come from different disciplinary backgrounds in order to complementarily analyse the factor water for the organisation of the arid fringes of the Roman Empire.