



Session Proposals Limes Congress 2021

3

Ripae et litora. Supply and security on the riverine and coastal edges of the Roman Empire

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Session Abstract: At its height the Roman empire's edges stretched over 29,000 km, half of which bordered the sea. While most of the imperial shores needed little protection, the northern provinces, both on the Continent and in Britain, saw military investment along the coasts in various forms and contexts from the 1st to the early 5th century. A special feature of this seeming backwater was the transport link between the German Rhineland and Britain. This corridor was a vital piece of infrastructure throughout the Roman period. With both the German and British fleets involved in its operation, and many harbour and military sites along it known, we are singularly well informed about this lifeline of the northern Empire.

This session will explore the interconnections between supply and security on the exposed water frontiers of the northern provinces. While Roman land frontiers have been studied in detail, they cannot simply be seen as a blueprint for coastal systems. The latter are often merely seen as extensions of land frontiers in reaction to seaborne raiders, but their purpose, development, operation and tactics are in fact more complicated, and unique for each situation, depending i.a. on the local geography, sealanes and flows of traffic. Recent work on the British shores and the North Sea and Black Sea coasts suggests that their military dispositions can be concerned not just with coastal defence, patrol and transport security, but also with taxation, logistics or communication. River frontiers also deserve a closer look, as they are functional hybrids, merging frontier security and river logistics. In the Rhine delta, especially, the picture gets blurred as coastal and riverine infrastructures merge.

This session intends to explore this broad theme of supply and security under four headings, concentrating on the northern shores and river corridors. The organisers invite papers on the following subjects:

- Hubs, harbours, ships
- River transport, navigation and the maritime seascape
- The range of activities of the German and British fleets
- Coastal security systems: southern North Sea, Cumberland Coast and Litus Saxonicum
- Comparative perspective from Danube and Black Sea region.