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The frontiers of the Roman empire: some recent work

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STUDIEN ZU DEN MILITÄRGRENZEN ROMS III. (Vorträge des 13. Internationalen Limeskongresses, Aalen 1983) (Stuttgart 1986). 816pp., 637 figs. and pls. ISBN 3-8062-0776-3: ISSN 0724-4347.

In September 1983 the International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies was held in Aalen in southern Germany. This congress was the thirteenth in a series which began in Newcastle upon Tyne (England) in 1949 under the inspiration of Professor Eric Birley. Professor Birley was an active participant in the Aalen congress, giving one of the opening addresses, and the congress proceedings are dedicated in honour of the eightieth birthday of this scholar to whom so many of those working in the field of Roman military studies (not least this reviewer) owe so much. The publication of the first congress was 137 pages in length and contained a mere 11 papers. The present volume is 816 pages long and includes a total of 116 papers, even omitting some of the lectures given at a conference which was attended by not far short of 300 scholars — the largest of the fourteen gatherings so far held (the 14th Congress took place in Carnuntum in Austria in 1986): such is the measure of the growth of interest in *Limesforschung*. In his opening speech Professor Hans Schönberger summarises the history of the Frontier Congress, while Eric Birley traces the development of frontier research since the time of Ernst Fabricius and the foundation of the Reichs-Limes-Kommission in 1892.

The contributions to this volume are of several different types. There is a small number of general review papers whose purpose is to present the most significant results of frontier research over the past few years (i.e. such time as has elapsed since the last congress or the last such survey was given) within a single province or group of provinces. Secondly, there are thematic papers which look at particular frontier problems within individual provinces, groups of provinces, or the empire as a whole. Thirdly, there are summaries of recent excavations of individual sites (nearly a third of the papers are of this type), and finally there are papers on general military matters, units, forts, equipment, diplomas and the like. The volume is organised regionally, and it will be convenient here to treat the contributions in the same broad manner, though such a division cannot be rigidly adhered to since regional contrasts and comparisons must be made. Most of the frontier areas of the Roman empire, with the exception of the Cappadocian and Syrian frontiers, are touched upon to a greater or lesser extent in the papers. In an article such as this, it is clearly impossible to do justice to all the diverse aspects of this work; selection is imperative, and will inevitably reflect the interests of the reviewer. An attempt will be made to give the general flavour of the proceedings, to look at the major trends of work in progress, and to pick out the most significant developments which have occurred within individual provinces and frontier areas, and significant developments for army and frontier studies in general.

Britain

The general survey of work in progress in Britain was presented by David Breeze, who draws attention to a range of activity from excavation and field survey to publication and museum and monument display. New discoveries here (and the reassessment of old ones) are changing — sometimes quite radically — many of our previously held views. One example of this is in the matter of the early military dispositions in the province. Breeze refers to a number of recently investigated Roman military bases which reuse the sites of pre-Roman iron age hillforts, adopting positions which are far from our conception of the 'typical' siting of a Roman fort, where ease of egress and a readily accessible water-supply are regarded as two of the norms. This theme of hill-top siting is developed in two other papers in the volume, by Sheppard Frere and Malcolm Todd, whose starting points are their respective excavations at the sites of Brandon