

Consortium meeting Constructing the Limes report

September 21, 2022

On September 21, Constructing the Limes organized a meeting with the project's various stakeholders. The meeting was hosted by the National Museum of Antiquities (RMO) in Leiden and the goal was to reconnect with the partners and share ideas about our current and future collaboration. The program included presentations about the work packages and a round table discussion with several partners. It was great to see everyone live again. Below you will find a summary of the meeting.

Jasper de Bruin, curator at the National Museum of Antiquities, opened the meeting with a word of welcome.

After Jasper's word of welcome Saskia Stevens, principal investigator of Constructing the Limes, gave an update on the project. She discussed how the team is set up and collaborates from different disciplines. A workshop at the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome in November last year served as kick off. Since then, we have had regular Limes Lab meetings to discuss current development within our fields. In addition, the internal logistics were organized, such as the management team, the advisory board, etc. Besides that, the website, and social media channels (Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram) were set up during the project's first year.

Limes Archaeology

Jeroen Oosterbaan presented work package 2: *Limes Archaeology*. This work package works together closely with Portable Antiquities of the Netherlands (PAN) which connects with amateur archaeologists and volunteers. Several sessions have been held in which volunteers are trained to enter finds into the PAN database; they are currently working on Castellum Hoge Woerd and its collection. Also, old archaeological research, like Kops Plateau in Nijmegen and the cemetery at Valkenburg-Marktvelde, is currently being revisited and is part of this work package's focus.

In September this year, Saxion University of Applied Science launched a Constructing the Limes-minor. In the minor, students work on two sub-projects: the investigation of potential temporary camps in the Netherlands (currently under investigation is the Veluwe area) by using drones, geophysical research, aerial photography, and, potentially, excavations. In addition, the students investigate the Roman cemetery near Valkenburg (S-H) by studying the excavation reports and excavated.

Two PhD students are connected to this work package. Arjan Ruiten focuses on the circulation of goods and ideas in the *limes* borderscape, and Anna van der Weij studies the development of funerary customs and religious practices in that same borderscape.

Within work package 2, there is already a lot of collaboration with various societal partners and Jeroen emphasizes that in the future further collaboration is desirable.

Limes People

Within work package 3, there are two research strands: one focuses on isotope analysis and one on environmental DNA (eDNA). Lisette Kootker presented the research strand on isotope analysis. Within this strand PhD candidate, Maura De Coster investigates human mobility in the *limes* borderscape via Sr-O-C (strontium-oxygen-carbon) isotope analysis of both inhumations and cremations. To contextualize the isotope data, Lisette is updating the current isoscape map of the Netherlands.

Arjen de Groot presented the research strand on eDNA. Applying this innovative technique, PhD candidate Kadir Toykan Özdoğan investigates the biodiversity in the *limes* borderscape. eDNA research is a new technique in archaeology, so method development is an important part this research strand.

Limes Heritage

Jaap Verheul gave the presentation on work package 4: Limes Heritage. This work package focuses on the way in which the Roman *limes* became a shared heritage, which ties in with the Unesco nomination by tracing what universal values were attributed to this heritage. Koen Ottenheim investigates the early period from the late Middle Ages on the basis of primary sources such as old town chronicles, maps, and regional rhetorical tracts. Ottenheim shows how the "discovery" of the Roman *limes* started in the east, in Constantinople, and over time moved west, via Bavaria, Germany and the Low Countries, to Hadrian's Wall. Gertjan Plets and PhD student David van Oeveren examine the 19th-century discourse in which "Roman" and "Germanic" references were used in the constructions of national identity and civilisation. For example, Van Oeveren studied Isings' widely used wall maps and other popular representations of Roman used in primary school curricula. Jaap Verheul focuses on transnational influences on the interpretation of the *limes* as the grans between civilization and wilderness. Examples are the influences of the American "frontier" and essentialist ideas about race at the end of the nineteenth century that were projected onto the Roman Empire border.

The Living Limes

Work package 5 focuses on the living *limes* and its connection to current-day geopolitical affairs, and particularly on contemporary ideas and discourses around the issues of borders, migration, citizenship, and territory. Paschalina Garidou explained in her presentation how Henk van Houtum, Luuk Winkelmoen, and she herself analyze in detail the contemporary bordering ideas and claims of political leaders for which the historical legacy of the Roman empire and in particular the Limesis (ab)used. In addition, in conceptually excavating the ideological and religious foundations of the Roman bordering practices, they hope to inspire and enrich the current discussions on borders and migration.

Dissemination projects

In addition to scientific output, the project has four main dissemination outcomes: an exhibition, a tv-documentary, a book for the general public, and an open-access *limes* database. Saskia presented the status quo of the various dissemination projects. Initial conversations about the scope of the exhibition and tv-documentary have already taken place. A brainstorm session on the exhibition, with several team members and partners, is scheduled. A dissemination product that has been completed is the Grensland board game, of which partner Romeinse Limes Nederland (RLN) has purchased 30 copies that will be presented to primary schools in the three *limes* provinces.

Round table discussion (main discussion points and takeaways)

After the presentations of the scientific output of the project, we invited the partners to express their ideas and ambitions for potential collaborations within this project, both with the scientific team members and other consortium partners. Jaap Verheul led the discussion and invited two partners to the stage with whom C-Limes has ongoing projects, Mariëlla Beukers from Romeinse Limes Nederland (RLN) and Anton Cruysheer from Landschap Erfgoed Utrecht (LEU). The main question was “in what way(s) are you contributing to / participating in the project and what would you like to get out of it?”.

The first point discussed regarded finding ways to tell the “new story”, an updated history, of the *limes* and the Roman period in the Netherlands, based on the project’s future outcomes. Can this be done via primary and secondary education, for example? In addition, there was a call for reaching out to a more diverse audience; how to reach this group? In relation to this point, we talked about the need for a national narrative with room for regional and local variations and focal points. Local and regional museums could play an important role in this. A desire for closer collaboration between the *limes* provinces was expressed, in which also the provinces north and south of the *limes* are included.

Saskia wrapped up the discussion by stressing she would like to include the partners in the research process. Everyone is invited to participate in the monthly C-Limes Labs at Utrecht. During these informal meetings, we invite speakers to talk on different topics related to the project followed by a discussion. This is also an opportunity to get in touch with the team and ask them questions directly. If you are interested in participating in the Limes Labs, please contact Lara Boon via limes@uu.nl.

Jaap concludes the discussion that it’s about the big picture and how we all work together to provide a more whole story of the *limes*. On that note, the meeting was ended, but not the discussion so we further discussed these topics over drinks.