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2

Organic Riches. The impact of organic resources on Frontier research

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Session Abstract: Although artefacts made of organic materials such as timber, leather and basketry have long attracted attention, they tended to be relegated to the 'daily life' sections of publications and have had little impact on the wider narrative of Frontier Studies. In recent years, however, some of the most exciting new insights in Frontier research have emerged from sites with good organic conservation and the application of scientific methods has further increased the informative value of organic remains.

This session is not so much about interesting finds as such, but aims to highlight the contribution of organic materials to new developments in understanding the workings of the Frontier system and the communities in and around the military garrisons. How has the information drawn from organic materials changed our perception of the Roman Frontier?

Topics that might be addressed are: dendrochronology and the impact on the timing of military construction projects, the ecological footprint, the sourcing and transformation of materials. What has research into organic materials added to our understanding of the nature and composition of the civilian communities? Can traditions in woodworking, basketry or clothing help define the origins of communities? Also of importance are the specific problems of excavation in conditions of good organic preservation and, related to this, the demands made on protection and site management.

The contribution of the organic materials has been greatly underestimated and it is time to recognise that the bias in survival has distorted our perception of all aspects of life on the Frontier