

Editorial

The restoration of the Roman Empire – Holy or otherwise – is not among the aims and objects of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies. Admittedly, there have been moments over the past two years when the radically changing scene in Central and Eastern Europe made one wonder how far the clock *would* be put back – but it has proved not to be to 1806, let alone to 476.

Nonetheless, the unity of Europe – or the revived unity as we may construe it – is much in the news, and the year 1992 (it is widely claimed) will mark a turning point in progress towards closer integration. Students of Roman provincial history and archaeology may feel that they are already doing their bit, despite the declining position of Greek and Latin and even of modern languages in the educational system; but when one surveys the spectrum of international, inter-provincial, organisations which bring their academic interests into focus, the situation appears surprisingly uneven.

The first International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies was held at Newcastle in 1949 on the initiative of Eric Birley (the fifteenth took place at Canterbury in September 1989) and the series must rank as the senior pan-imperial gathering. Publication of the proceedings, however, is the responsibility of the host country and there is no formal membership. On a much smaller scale those concerned with Roman military equipment have held since 1983, and published, regular seminars on their material; as the research group has grown, it has acquired a European dimension and now promises to print its own journal.

Social and economic studies, however, are less well served than military: for there are no umbrella organisations, only many smaller, and exceedingly active, special-interest groups and working-parties.

The *Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautores* are among the longest established. They hold regular plenary conferences, publish intermittently a periodical, and have a formal membership. The Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique is also well known, and there is now a fledgling in the wings: the Association Internationale pour la Peinture Murale Antique. The latter, after holding five successful congresses since 1978, has recently taken on the form and function of a learned society.

While the above and others like them are primarily concerned with the Graeco-Roman world, some special interest groups have broken out of, or were never in, a period straitjacket: the Nautical Archaeology Society, the Historical Metallurgy Society, and the North-European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles come to mind. In many technical fields a multiperiod approach is essential.

Whatever their precise structure may be, all such organisations improve communications, and at the same time set and raise standards in their specialisms across political or provincial boundaries. Perhaps 1992 will spell the end of provincial myopia.

Sheppard Frere's 75th birthday falls in 1991, and in affection and admiration we dedicate this number of *Britannia* to him. Readers will need no reminding that he was the journal's founding editor, established and edited its monograph series, and for the last twenty years had either masterminded or directly compiled that vital record 'Roman Britain in 19xx'. But for us the best part is that he is still in business: *emeritus* perhaps, but of his own volition not *immunis*.