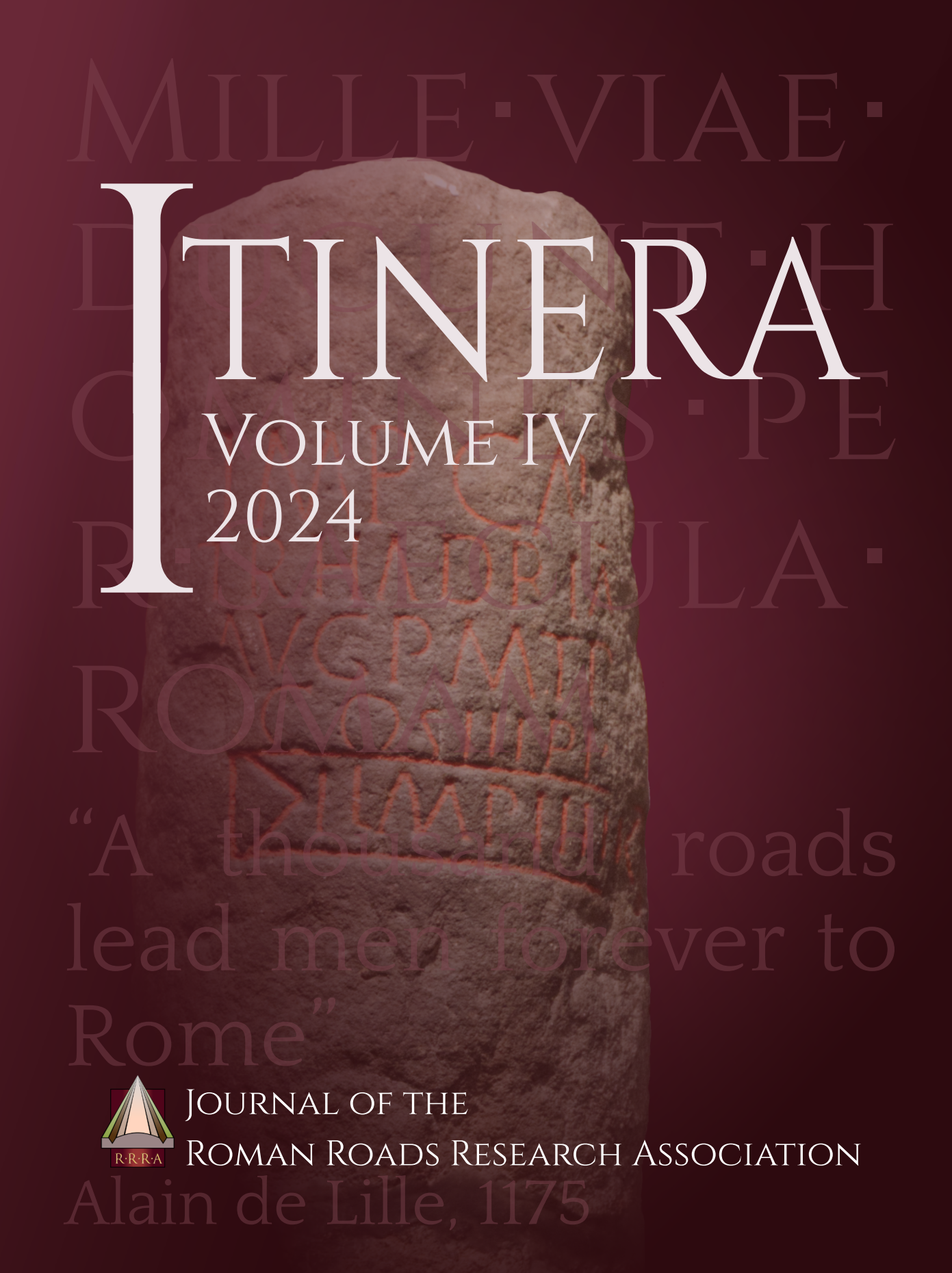


ITINERA

Volume IV
2024

"A thousand roads lead men forever to Rome"

Alain de Lille, 1175

Journal of the
Roman Roads Research Association

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ROMAN ROADS RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

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About the Association

by Mike Haken



The late Hugh Toller and I founded the Roman Roads Research Association to provide a focal point for what we thought was a fairly small group of individuals with an interest in the study of Roman roads and connectivity throughout the former Roman province of Britannia. I'm not sure that Hugh, who sadly died in 2016, could have imagined that at the end of April 2024 we would have an international membership totalling 556, a figure that continues to grow. We are a very broad church, ranging from those with just a general interest in the Roman period, through to professional archaeologists from both commercial and academic sectors, not forgetting those those like myself who have had a lifelong passion for the subject (some might say obsession!). The Association welcomes all new members, whatever their background.

The continuing growth in membership may well have been fuelled, at least in part, by some of the things we have achieved. For example, we have just concluded the fourth season of our online lecture series, which we launched in 2021 during the pandemic. As part of our key policy of ensuring that our work is always made as accessible as possible, our talks are open to everyone, are always free of charge, and regularly attract audiences of 200 people or more from across the world. Another excellent programme for our fifth season is being prepared by our Secretary, Dave Armstrong, and details will be released soon. You can catch up with previous seasons on our YouTube channel.

Since 2018, we have conducted over 200 Ha of geophysical survey with our own gradiometer cart, accurately identifying the course of many roads and examining Roman period sites along them. Our most recent survey, assisted by a group of local volunteers from Southwell (SCAG), was near East Stoke (*Ad Pontem*) in Nottinghamshire. This confirmed the location of the junction of RR59(x) from Ancaster with the Fosse Way, making the existence of RR59(x) now beyond dispute. We always welcome suggestions for other potential survey sites, no matter where in the country they might be.

Above all, however, our greatest achievement is *Itinera*, the only journal in the world dedicated to the study of Roman roads and transportation infrastructure. Published entirely in house by our large team of volunteers, we are proud that our standards are as high as most academic publishing houses. Indeed, As Rob Entwistle points out in the following Editorial, it is a measure of our growing credibility that *Britannia*, a journal of the Roman Society, guides authors of reports on Roman roads that would have previously been published in *Britannia* towards *Itinera* instead.

Looking forwards, the wealth of new research and discoveries that have been reported by *Itinera* have, if nothing else, highlighted the urgent need for an accurate map that reflects the true state of knowledge of the Roman road network in Britain, and the sites it served, since the national maps that do exist are either decades out of date or simply inaccurate and misleading. To rectify this situation we will soon be recruiting volunteers to assist with a nationwide project which aims to accurately redraw the map. In line with our Open Access policy, the results will all be made freely available.

Finally, I am sure that our enthusiastic membership will enable us to continue to expand and develop our activities, ensuring that the next decade is even more productive than our first decade has been.

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Editorial

Robert Entwistle



The late Hugh Toller, co-founder of the RRRA with Mike Haken, was sadly lost to Roman road research when the Association was only a year old. Earlier I had become aware of his work through his part in identifying the long-sought line of the Lune valley Roman road out of Lancaster, my native town. Identifying it through Lidar and on foot, he followed its route up and over Lancaster Ridge towards Caton and the southern flank of the Lune valley.

It is therefore a pleasure to see David Ratledge's contribution to this volume of *Itinera*, a memorial to Hugh's work in the Exeter region, developed in the light of further studies. It is appropriate that this same volume contains a significant paper by Mike Haken identifying *viae vicinales* in the north-east Midlands which perhaps should no longer be regarded as somehow 'lesser' or 'minor'.

Itinera has a record of examining different aspects of Roman road studies, not necessarily restricted to our corner of the Roman empire. The 2024 volume sees a new contribution from the Spanish archaeologist and presenter, Isaac Moreno Gallo: the first publication in English of his work analysing road construction methods and transport development. His trenchant views provide a counterbalance to other accounts, reminding us that the evidence of the trowel is always subject to interpretation.

A new departure for this volume is the incorporation of a 'Focus' section with multiple papers exploring a single theme. The subject is the Devil's Causeway – a road which branches off Dere Street just north of Hadrian's Wall to head (via Learchild fort) determinedly towards modern-day Berwick and the mouth of the Tweed – where no Roman site is known. This theme originated in a 2023 conference held in Berwick-upon-Tweed and coordinated by Dr Lindsay Allason-Jones and the Border Archaeology Society with support from the RRRA, exploring the riddle of the road. Expert presentations have been developed into these papers. We would be happy to repeat, in future volumes, similar suites of papers focused upon a single theme or aspect: suggestions for themes and contributors would be welcomed by the Editor.

As always, this volume treats different geographical parts of Britannia, ranging from the south-west (Exeter) to the north-east (Berwick). Paul Booth explores aspects of the Roman road network in the Oxford area, Mike Holmes considers issues around the River Glynde in East Sussex, and Nigel Rothwell examines the possibilities for a Thames crossing linking St Albans and Silchester.

In a full volume, however, we regret the lack of papers on Wales and Scotland, even though these countries are represented in our annual round-up across Britain. Potential contributors suggesting interesting papers on these areas of would find us warmly receptive. *Itinera* continues to welcome every submission from contributors established or new, and if necessary, will endeavour to advise authors where further work is needed for key improvements. A short proposal to the Editor of what is intended, before making a full submission, is often helpful.

Editorial

We take pride in a professional standard of production maintained entirely through the work of volunteers: our editorial board (Mike Haken, Dave Armstrong, Mike Bishop and Paul Booth, all of whom contribute endless hours to the production of each volume); our academic advisor (Pete Wilson); our index compiler (Chester Forster); and postmaster (Chris Webb). Without the dedicated work of the whole team Roman studies would be the poorer.

We are greatly heartened by the respected position that *Itinera* has achieved in the short period of its existence. The long-established journal, Britannia, acknowledges this in specifying that submissions on Roman roads for their annual update section should be limited to brief summaries of the main points of interest if accounts are also published in *Itinera*, with our journal cited for those fuller reports.

An important part of our role, alongside publicising research, is (through the RRRA) the regulation and classification of new discoveries, as Margary's original system of nomenclature strains to adapt to an expanding known road network. This volume therefore contains a list of newly attributed numbers and a proposal from Mike Haken on the classification of non-standard Roman roads.

This year we have taken the decision to slightly reduce the font size to bring *Itinera* more into line with other similar journals and to control printing costs. Even so, readers will find that 2024 marks a bumper issue: the largest volume we have yet produced.

We trust that RRRA members and all readers will enjoy and profit from this 2024 volume of *Itinera*.

Robert Entwistle

(Hon Editor, *Itinera)*

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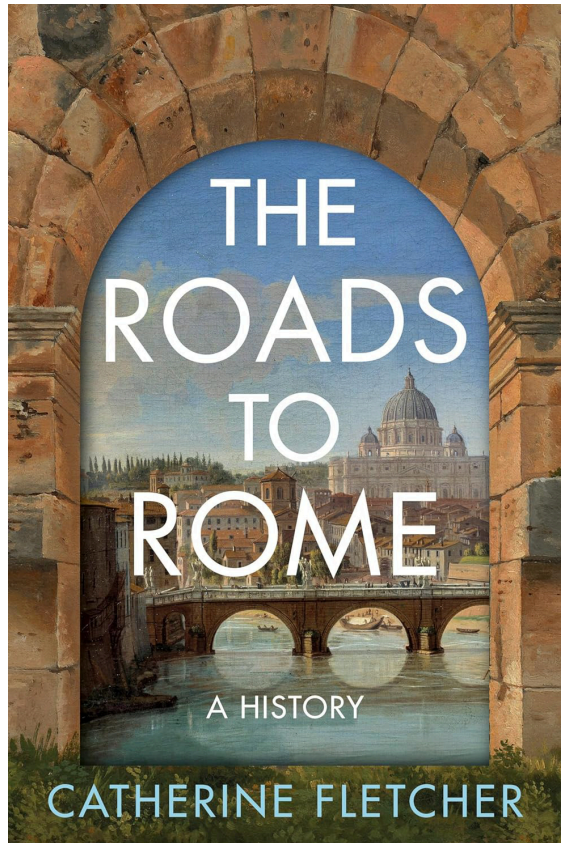
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Book Review

The Roads to Rome: A History.

By Catherine Fletcher.

London: The Bodley Head, Pp 400 In hardcover June 13th 2024. Price £39.58.
ISBN-13: 978-1847928030.



How did a Roman traveller experience the roads in antiquity? Asks Catherine Fletcher in her new book *The Roads to Rome: A History*. It's an ambitious question, typical of this wide-ranging historical survey that seeks to people the roads the Romans built -- and especially those literally leading into Rome – with 2000 years of travellers. She begins her answer by taking us into the Capitoline museum to look at a votive tablet engraved with pairs of feet facing in both directions for the journey out and the journey home, telling us that at one roadside shrine several such offerings have been found, presumably left by travellers praying for a safe trip. It's a lovely example of how much we can demand of the traces that remain if we are prepared to use our imaginations; also of how the ancients were both like us and nothing like us at all.

It is in asking questions like this that the first sections of the book, which deal with the origins and early history of the roads, are at their most interesting, although where she asks more familiar questions about Roman roads, her answers are inventive enough to make them feel fresh. Those sacrificial feet lead her to wonder how fast people travelled along the roads and she turns to the testimony of court hearings, since summonses took into account how long it would take people to travel to Rome.

Her search for evidence yields fascinating details that help to build a picture of the road network in its heyday that is teeming with life: an account of one of Cicero's trials reveals that wealthy travellers might quite reasonably take to the roads with as many as 30 armed attendants to clear the way for them (little wonder that plebeian wayfarers made offerings to the gods before setting out).

She isn't afraid to ask questions that are harder or impossible to answer: did a certain traveller get blisters, walk in the blazing sun or a cooling breeze, contend with water planing on rutted stone? Done sparingly this is both charming to read and a useful technique for activating the historical imagination – one of the book's declared aims. Another is to invoke what is implied by the historical or archaeological remains. Consider the tombstone of Regina now at Arbeia Roman fort at South Shields, erected by her husband Barates from Palmyra, inscribed in Latin and Aramaic and based on a Syrian design – we can't help but imagine the very real journeys along the roads of languages, ideas, fashions and flesh and blood individuals who are far from home.

Fletcher prefaces her book with a nod to the speech that Tacitus put into the mouth of Calgacus before the battle of Mons Graupius, with a dedication, 'To those who wore out life and limb to cut through marsh and forest.' It is a fitting tribute to those whose labours had such an impact on the landscape and life of the Roman Empire and its inheritors, but taken as a whole the book is more a memorial to those who travelled the roads after the decline of Rome than to those who built them.

Although she made her name as a Renaissance historian, Fletcher is not afraid to flit through history, sometimes in the space of a few paragraphs, between the Spartacan revolt, the building projects of the sixteenth century, Romantic poets and the modern day. These snapshots and comparisons across time of places, topics and themes enrich a story whose main organising principle is simply chronological. The book is in five sections of several centuries each, spanning the period from 350BCE to the present. This long story has four inter-weaving through-lines: the author's own journeys, undertaken in the last few years, often in the footsteps of historical figures or following itineraries; a history of the roads from earliest times with the emphasis on those who travelled them; an outline history of Europe over two thousand years, with the city of Rome at its centre; and finally a history of people's changing notions of the past, of those who were interested in the roads as monuments of ancient Rome and for their romance or symbolism. One or more threads regularly coincide, for instance when Napoleon's general Berthier marches on Rome and speaks from the Capitoline, making no end of references to ancient Rome, foreshadowing his Emperor's aping of Roman imperial pomp and imagery. This melding of threads is even more notable in Fletcher's treatment of the Italian campaign in World War II, when world history turns its eye on the Italian capital and the roads to Rome are again used for their original martial purpose. The war correspondents who describe the advance on the city are ever sensitive to the weight of history and on the look-out for analogies to the horrors of war in the ancient past.

As a history of travel from Roman times until the present, it is an excellent source book with compelling accounts of journeys by pilgrims, soldiers, merchants, diplomats, popes and royalty. By the eighteenth century there is a proliferation of more self-conscious travel writing to draw upon and thus an embarrassment of riches for Fletcher that culminates in the Romantic period. The best line here is not from Goethe or Wordsworth but comes from Lady Morgan with her observation in eye rhyme that the Roman pavements '*read,* better than they *tread*' – a nicely succinct observation on their meaning for lovers of the antique and their ongoing utility for travellers. By the time Henry James and late nineteenth century writers tour Italy, these earlier accounts are themselves part of the ancient past adding multiple layers to their descriptions of the sites and their journeys.

Fletcher follows the routes some of her subjects took and while she is an excellent historian and thoughtful writer with a talent for selecting and presenting evidence that edifies and evokes, she occasionally seems less sure of herself when trying to find relevant things to say about her own journeys. Her trips happened at different times – as she outlines in an appendix – and this might

explain the lack of evenness in her approach. In the introduction we get some brief and appealing lyrical moments, later quick segues from observations in the present to the past. Further into the book, she seems to abandon the search for relevancy and resonance and simply gives us notes on what she encounters, someone ordering a bottle of wine for instance. Earlier in the book, this might have led to a consideration of the transport of amphorae and the wine trade in the ancient world, but now it is just some bloke having a bottle of wine to himself. Of course, we might imagine that she is deliberately writing for posterity and leaving a report for future historians of travel. After all, when we learn of the 4th Century lawyer Theophanes of Hermopolis' journey from the Nile Valley to Antioch, the quotidian details, his meals and his daily expenses, we find these fascinating at such a distance.

I was particularly interested to follow the last of the threads that begins with the anonymous author of the *Gesta Francorum,* a chronicle of the First Crusade, whose sense of the past muddled history and legend. While they call the *Via Egnatia* the 'Old Roman Road', the northern route to Constantinople, the *Via Militaris* is unnamed, but described and credited to Charlemagne based on a legendary journey he was thought to have made. In time, artists, writers and antiquaries would start to separate fact from fiction once they began to carefully record and draw the monuments and inscriptions of Rome, especially on the *Via Appia*. It is the three roads mentioned here that inevitably have the lion's share of the story. The latter for its remains, proximity to the centre and attraction to sightseers and the others because for much of the Middle Ages all roads no longer led to Rome but eastwards to Constantinople and Jerusalem. By the time of the Grand Tour, Rome once again asserts its pull and the *Via Flamina* from the north is frequently encountered, but it is still the Appian Way that monopolises most prose and verse.

It is comforting to learn that as long ago as the fifteenth century, popes Alexander VI and Pius II both appreciated the beauty and importance of Rome's remains, including its roads, and took measures to safeguard them, albeit with limited success. The battle to preserve them continues into the present moment, with ongoing efforts to get the Via Appia added to Unesco's world heritage list.

The Roads to Rome is predominantly a cultural history of the Roman roads leading into Rome over the long durée -- with the occasional detour to northern Britain and elsewhere. It is done with the confidence and aplomb of an experienced and sensitive historian with an ear for a story, for selecting evidence that is both informative and evocative. Reading it makes me want to read her earlier books.

Review by Christopher Hadley (author of 'The Road')


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