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*Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus, Germany
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Welcome to the Third International Congress on Construction History!

Following the successful congresses in Madrid (2003) and Cambridge (2006), now, in May 2009 the *Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus* has the honour of hosting the *Third International Congress on Construction History*. Like the meetings in Spain and Great Britain, the Cottbus Congress intends to transcend the constraints of traditional cultural and disciplinary boundaries. It is open to contributors associated with all disciplines focussed on and around the worldwide movement of construction history.

With just a cursory glance at the papers, one cannot help but notice the impressive breadth of this movement, both in terms of content and method. The fact that, meanwhile, more and more practising engineers and architects are maintaining a dialogue with historians reflects the increasing shift in construction practise from building new to developing existing structures; in this field, an intelligent and appropriate intervention is hardly imaginable without knowledge of the history of construction. But – construction history is far more than that. Since the end of the 20th century a distinctly professional attitude has been observed. One cannot resist the impression that a new discipline is in the process of establishing itself, transcending traditional academic demarcations. It is history of architecture, history of technology, history of science, archaeology, not to forget restoration of historical structures, yet it does not fit into any of these categories.

If we understand construction as a highly interconnected process between creativity and routine, between craft and science, between invention, innovation and tradition, or in other words as the never ending process for developing a specific link between nature and culture - then the role of construction history is no more no less than to provide an explanation of the act of producing this hinge in all its cross-linkages, interdependencies, and processes of interchange, right up to the use of practical applications and technology. If the process of construction in its fascinating entirety constitutes construction history, it thus concerns far more than the narrow technical question of "how it was made?" It concerns a wide range of different practices of building and it has to recognise them as the results of different human and historical conditions.

Understood in this way construction history is an open-ended adventure - the adventure of discovering the act of constructing as a deeply human and subjective process, or, to quote the initiators of the 2006 Cambridge Congress: "... to understand the way human beings have approached building." Construction history in this sense is the challenge to meet human beings, to encounter the *homo faber* again and anew across the millennia. In doing this we are confronted with the genealogy of such central aspects of twenty-first century technical culture such as progress, identity, responsibility, quality of life. Understood in this way construction history in all its facets turns out to be no less than a technical anthropology. We do hope the Cottbus Congress will afford the opportunity for a serious reflection on construction history in this sense and the great questions regarding it - its cognitive interests, its subject matters, its methodology, its agenda and – last but not least – its potential significance at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The Congress would not have been realisable without the engagement and constant support of a wide range of colleagues, friends and institutions. We cordially want to thank all our sponsors and collaboration partners for their generous sponsorship and benefits as well as the Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus for its engaged backing. Special thank goes to our friend and colleague within the Berlin-Brandenburg Construction History Group, Andreas Kahlow for his help and assistance, to the colleagues of the National Support Group and to all members of the International Scientific Committee who double peer reviewed about 400 abstracts and 250 papers submitted to ensure a high scientific quality among all contributions. Last but not least, we want to express our sincere thanks to all members of the Chair of Construction History and Structural Preservation at the BTU Cottbus and its fantastic Organising Committee, and first of all to Volker Wetzck. It's more than two years ago that we started our work without any premonition of the problems waiting for us. Due to the Organising Committee's unflinching dedication and enthusiastic work now, finally, the Congress is ready to begin.

In the name of the organising team and all supporters we cordially welcome our guests. We are sure the Cottbus Congress will offer you an open forum for presenting the broad field of research into construction history as well as discussing the numerous themes and questions connected with it. And we also hope that among paper sessions, keynotes, panel discussions and excursions, there will nevertheless be plenty of time and opportunity for what modern science needs: The vivid exchange of concepts, ideas and experience among international academics, practicing engineers and architects, building researchers and archaeologists from across the world.

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Werner Lorenz, Cottbus
Chair of Organising Committee

Dr.-Ing. Karl-Eugen Kurrer, Berlin
Chair of International Scientific Committee

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