



Universiteit
Leiden

Good men? Civic virtues in Roman memory culture

Applicants

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Dr. Miko Flohr	LUIH / Ancient History
Dr. Christoph Pieper	LUCAS / Classics

Project description

What makes a Roman a good Roman? And how were good Romans remembered by later generations? This interdisciplinary project explores the role of civic virtues in Roman memory culture, and the way in which they were negotiated both in literature and in the urban infrastructure. On the one hand it studies a set of inscriptions that were attached to honorary statues in Rome and other Italian cities; the aim is to understand which virtues are regularly evoked and with which linguistic (or even literary) means the inscriptions persuade the inhabitants of their general value for the city. On the other hand, it looks at literary texts that deal with the same virtues in the context of a discourse of exemplarity. As this permeates almost all Roman literature, this project focusses on texts that are explicitly dedicated to the commemoration of virtuous individuals and which can be related to an educational context.

The idea that informs this project is that commemoration of civic virtue was ubiquitously present in the visual and literary landscape of Roman citizens; the question that it addresses is whether the different media participate at an overarching discourse, and if they do (as we suspect), how their specific elements enrich this discourse and enlarge its persuasiveness. For example, it will be interesting to see whether communities shape honorific inscriptions according to canonized examples of the past; and whether the commemoration of canonical figures in literature reacts to the physical presence of honorific statues in public space.

Combining these two approaches, the project integrates a philological and a historical perspective on the importance of civic virtues in Roman cultural practice. It will enable the research trainees to get accustomed with new and complementary research methods from closely related, yet institutionally divided disciplines.

(293 w)

Research Trainee Profile

Research Trainee A (3rd year BA history): Landscapes of virtue in the cities of Roman Italy

This research trainee will explore how personal virtues were represented in inscriptions on the pedestals of honorific statues in the cities of Roman Italy. From the first century BCE, urban communities in Roman Italy began erecting statues to honour citizens, often in the central plaza of the city—the *forum*. Accompanying inscriptions highlighted the virtues of the people for whom these statues were erected. Thus, urban space became a place where civic virtues were negotiated and celebrated. The traineeship involves collecting and interpreting the relevant inscriptions, but also reconstructing the context in which they once stood. The work will develop in two steps:

- First, the student will compile and analyse a small database of inscriptions commemorating the erection of statues. This will be done on the basis of secondary literature and online databases. It is envisaged that in total some 50 inscriptions from at least four cities (e.g. Rome, Pompeii, Puteoli, Paestum) will be included, making it possible to look at the texts to some detail, while maintaining a comparative basis: what virtues keep recurring? In which contexts are they highlighted?
- Second, the locations where these inscriptions once stood will be drawn into the picture, and it will be assessed how these texts and their statues were positioned in the landscape. This makes it possible for the student to prepare a preliminary analysis of the discourse of virtues in these cities included in the research. How visible was this virtue discourse in the city?

These tasks start from the research skills typically developed in a BA3 seminar in Ancient History, and apply them to a context where there is limited secondary literature to fall back on, thus creating a challenging project for a talented BA3 History student. Some background knowledge of Latin may be helpful, but this is not a requirement.

Research Trainee B (MA/ResMA Classics) : Virtuous exempla in rhetorical training

The second research trainee will collect and analyse how the same personal virtues commemorated in inscriptions were monumentalized in literary texts. It will look at two corpora that both are related to the beginning of the Imperial period of Rome, when the large-scale urban inventions of the Roman emperors changed the image of the cities and also the visual commemoration.

- The first work to be studied is the huge collection of famous sayings and deeds of great men of the past by Valerius Maximus, which was written for rhetorical teaching in the time of Emperor Tiberius. The manifold memorable events are organized according to virtues; often one individual is used in several categories. The trainee will compile a small database of the most important virtues and the individuals that are connected to them. In a second step, (s)he will identify which (groups of) individuals appear more often: do they belong to famous families, do they share specific character traits, or do they represent an overarching virtue of civic behaviour?
- In order to corroborate the findings of this study, in a second step the trainee will look at the 84 short biographies of an anonymous collection *On famous men*. Even if we possess it in a form that stems from late antiquity, it is generally accepted that it goes back to the time of Emperor Augustus and is connected to the dedication of statues of famous men in his own Forum. The trainee will analyse the lives of those individuals that have been identified as prominent in Valerius Maximus' exemplary collection.

The main research question for this trainee will be whether we can identify similar overarching civic values in this collection as well, and secondly, how we can relate this exemplary discourse to the visual commemoration of trainee 1. As the trainee will have to read a relatively huge amount of non-canonical texts and will have to familiarize herself with the rather complex exemplary discourse of early Imperial literature, a thorough knowledge of the more canonical texts of this period is necessary. Therefore this project has been assigned to an MA or ResMA student.

Collaboration

While classical philologists and ancient historians study evidence from the same region and the same broad period, they have developed radically different perspectives on the Greco-Roman world, and participate in debates that are mostly or wholly unconnected. Even in 2020, this remains true internationally, nationally, and also locally in Leiden.

At the same time, it is clear from the history of both fields that successful collaborations can have significant cross-disciplinary impact, and debates where historians and philologists interact on a more regular basis often draw a lot of interest from both sides of the disciplinary divide – continuing philological and historical output on the cultural and ideological revolutions of the Augustan period (27 BCE – 14 CE) can serve as a key example.

It is our idea that the discourse on virtues in Roman society is a topic where interdisciplinary interaction can potentially make a meaningful difference in both fields. After all, for learned Romans walking through their city, the values and virtues communicated through statues and inscriptions were directly linked to the literary culture that dominated their intellectual life. To understand the role of virtues in civic discourse, both aspects should be brought together, and doing this, in turn, can strengthen both disciplines.

Moreover, we also feel that such an effort can strengthen the interdisciplinary ties between classics and ancient history at Leiden at the interface of teaching and research. Students of Classics are generally not very well trained in dealing with epigraphical material and with historical questions, whereas students of Ancient History often lack linguistic competence in Latin and are less sensitive to the methods and merits of literary studies. Having both groups represented in one project makes it possible to consider interdisciplinary efforts of a more structural nature in both teaching and research. (294 w.)

Deliverables

The objectives of the project are:

- (1) two databases to document civic virtues in inscriptions and in Valerius Maximus
- (2) two sets of case studies as described above
- (3) a first assessment of the interaction between epigraphic and literary material
- (4) a symposium to be held in September 2021

The deliverables coincide with these objectives. The research trainees will work on an two small databases as described above. This inventory will be the basis for (and annex to) the case studies that the two will sketch in the form of two shorter papers, which they will present at the final symposium. As a last step, all members of the team (trainees and supervisors) will start conceptualizing an article (in Dutch or English) to be published in an adequate journal that brings the individual findings together. Additionally, the two trainees will design a poster that summarizes the results of the project and which can also be shown and discussed at the final symposium. The research results and (new) expertise will open up new fields of inquiry, relevant to current debates on citizenship and civic virtues. (186 w.)

Planning

Phase 1: close-reading the evidence (February – April)

Focus on studying the evidence and compiling the databases. Regular project meetings serve to identify and discuss intermediate findings and key hypotheses.

Phase 2: analyzing virtues (May – June)

Focus on a select number of case studies; interpretative analysis of the uses of virtues in literature and in honorific epigraphy. Regular project meetings test, and try to refine, the key hypotheses.

Phase 3: connecting discourses (July – August)

The final phase of the project addresses the central question of to which extent and in which ways literary and epigraphic discourses interacted. Work on the individual papers and on the conceptualizing of the common article.

At the end of the project, a little symposium will be organized at which the trainees and supervisors present their findings to the public; for this symposium we also plan to invite a keynote speaker.

(142 w.)

Student Application

Students should apply by sending a CV (incl. an list of relevant courses followed), a concise letter of motivation and the name of one referent to both applicants:

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