

Call for Papers

Standardisation and Localism in the Legal and Economic world of the Romans

Brussels and Ghent 8-10 June 2023

A conference organised under the umbrella of the Structural Determinants of Economic Performance in the Roman World group (<https://www.sdep.ugent.be/>)

More info at: <https://www.sdep.ugent.be/events/standardisation-and-localism-in-the-legal-and-economic-world-of-the-romans>

Description

The adoption of standards in the Roman world is manifested in the production of objects, the use of measuring units, the construction of infrastructure, but also in symbolic representations of power by means of material culture, as well as in the use of standard contracts or reproducing legal formulaic writings. The effective use of these standards shows that individual beliefs, cultural norms, and formal institutions were aligned so as to reinforce trust among parties. Rome saw a proliferation of such abstract systems of trust, for example, by using standard weights and measures, which profoundly affected people's lives from the most public settings to the most intimate.

However, one of the paradoxes of the Roman world is that, while standard objects or practices echoing Roman influences spread along different areas, the extension of these involved in many cases the further development or assimilation of foreign practices, objects or concepts, mixing cultural traditions or instead, reinforcing self-identity at a local level. One key example are the weights employed at different eastern Mediterranean ports, which translated Roman imperial units into local ones.

This international conference will be devoted to the study of the manifestations of standardisation and localisms in law and the economy of the Roman world, and consequently, their impact in diverse phenomena such as symbols, legal culture or commercial practices, but also in material culture, infrastructure and landscapes. The event also aims to recontextualize standards not only as echoes of Roman domination but as evidence of diverse socioeconomic practices and cross-cultural encounters, and how these are materially reflected echoing issues such as integration, assimilation, resilience, or a combination of imperial and provincial practices.

The conference focuses on six research questions:

- What is imperial and what local in the use of standards in different contexts? What does that imply about scale and integration in the Roman world?
- How did people in the empire negotiate and integrate “Roman” standards in their society, economy, and culture? And vice versa?
- What are the ethnic, cultural economic, legal or political reasons behind the attribution of specific names to phenomena or items linked with numeracy metrology or scale (e.g. *pecunia* from *pecus*, sheep)? Vice versa, what is the impact of a standard’s “identity” on how people perceive phenomena such as numeracy or scale?
- How idiosyncratic or diverse could local adaptations of standards be in order to be understood by different economic agents?
- How accurate were standards in the Roman world expected to be?
- How did Roman standardised objects (e.g. *amphorae* or coins) or practices (e.g. legal procedures) and their particularities relate to their descriptions in textual sources?

Sessions

Session 1. Law and Legal Symbols

Keynote Kaius Tuori (University of Helsinki)

Session 2. Numeracy, Money, and Coinage

Keynote Serafina Cuomo (Durham University)

Session 3. Infrastructure: From Buildings to Socio-Economic Phenomena

Keynote Astrid Van Oyen (Cornell University)

Session 4. Material culture: Objects, Metrology and Technology

Keynote Andrew Riggsby (University of Texas at Austin)

Session 5: Landscape, Space and Scale

Keynote Miko Flohr (Leiden University)

Closing remarks: Nicholas Purcell (Brasenose college Oxford).

The proposals should be 400-500 words long and accompanied by a short CV of the author.

The deadline to send the proposals is the 19th of April, and all proposals should be sent to:

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