

European literature starts with polemic. Agamemnon and Achilles get into quarrel ripe with invectives. The first poets, like Archilochus, indulge themselves in what we would define as hate-speech. Invectives are thrown around in the Athenian theatre of Dionysos in the tragedies and comedies of the classical period. It is no different for the real-life polemics conveyed through speeches in courts, on agoras and forums, through letters, polemical treatises, even poems. The ancients, whether they liked it or not (and probably they did) kept on squabbling. And while they did they quite frequently enter edinto this peculiar mode of persuasion called invective in which the author attacks, denigrates or ridicules personal traits of the opponent or a group that the adversary represents. Hate and haters, fake news and trolling were not brought to live with the dawn of the digital era. What is more the techniques of the hate-speech were taught in the school all around the Mediterranean. The most accomplished and most popular writers of classical and Christian antiquity were the ones who left tons of polemical works in which invective abounds, the intensity of which sometimes forces us to blush even today.

This project aims at identifying, collecting and analysing the rhetoric of all the instances of invectives used in real-life polemics staring in 7th century BC Greece finishing in the Christian Roman Empire of 5th century AD. In a word it promises to present a full panorama of the ancient and early Christian history of personal attacks, insults, abusive language embedded in the polemic between real people, not literary characters. On finishing the project we will receive the first comprehensive history of ancient invective and a digital, online Database of Ancient Invective. Through our open-access publications in journals of international range and the final monograph, through our online open-access database the audience will be able to see how each and every author constructed his invectives, what were the created or imagined personas of the victims of these attacks, how they differed and to what degree were they similar. We would be able to confront various common opinions, like for instance the one that the Fathers of Church were less inclined to use invective in polemic than Cicero or Demosthenes.

We hope that the significance of this project goes beyond the interest of a narrow academic discipline. We will bring to the table new sources, data and analyses concerning the complex phenomenon of the ancient invective. They can be later used fruitfully by social scholars to form conclusions from more epoch-spanning and cross-cultural angles. These materials might also be of interest to general readers as they will furnish them with food for thought in the time of intensification of the use of insinuations, innuendos and invective in the public sphere.