

One of the vital questions for the history of any empire is the matter of communication between its government, and its constituting parts (both in terms of territories, and subjects). How the loyalty links are created, and develop; how local problems are communicated, and solved; in what way the soft power of government is perpetuated. In the case of Roman empire the case is particularly interesting given the traditional Roman ideology of inclusiveness and the tendency to maintain the prior, traditional structures in the conquered territories (in their social, administrative, cultural, and, last but not least, legal dimensions).

The Corpus der Urkunden der römischen Herrschaft (CURH) – Corpus of the Documents of the Roman Rule, to which the present project contributes, provides a comprehensive collection of the documents connected to the Roman rule, making it an indispensable study tool for this research question.

The proposed study focuses on a complete edition of the imperial correspondence preserved as edicts and letters in documentary sources. Edicta (regulations with a claim to general validity, framed according to a specific formula) and epistulae (letters) of the emperors in Latin and Greek, transmitted on papyrus or reproduced on stone as inscriptions, are a central part of the sources for the Roman Empire. The transmission of these documents, preserved in often fragmentary Greek and Latin inscriptions and in the papyri makes them on the first look a fairly hermetic object of study, accessible primarily to experts (many of them lack modern editions). Our aim is to make them available to a much wider public than before: each document will be complemented with a translation, and a thorough historical, legal, and, when necessary, philological, commentary.

The entire body of documentation shows an increasing, for certain periods even exploding, level of communication. The texts newly published in the last decades prove that this correspondence was not only about exchanging courtesies, pleas for titles and privileges, or acknowledging in a formal and submissive way the rule of Rome or a specific emperor, as has often been maintained. Rather, a number of new discoveries show that the imperial responses often dealt with quite complex problems in surprising detail – ranging from questions of water supply and its improvement to specific problems of local taxation and the minutiae of local legal systems.

The result thus will not merely lead to a creation of the standard work of reference for the study of Roman government, but already offer a new view on the Roman government and its development.