

ROMANA aims to unveil the ubiquitous presence of Rome in Jewish, Greek-Pagan and Christian texts and to expose the strategies of cultural interaction between imperialist forces and a range of minority groups. It will explore how intellectual discourses that have defined the West, namely those of Greek elites, Christian groups, as well as Hellenistic and rabbinic Judaism, were constructed through a series of contested, hidden, and disavowed interactions with the dominant force of empire. The project will redraw the traditional map of the Roman Empire to challenge its sharp dichotomy between Rome and the provinces and demonstrate the deep entanglements of each group of “provincial” elites despite their claim to cultural purity.

The starting point is first-century Hellenistic Judaism, as its main representatives—Philo and Josephus—became active in Rome as prolific authors writing in Greek, who combined philosophical, literary and legal interests with a keen appeal to Roman audiences. Their modes of acculturation will serve as a compass to unlock similar cultural entanglements in the Second Sophistic, early Christianity and rabbinic literature.

The project objectives entail a focused study of three trajectories, philosophical, literary and legal, to be exposed as doubly entangled, namely with each other and with Roman discourses. The method will be a close, comparative and culturally aware reading of whole corpora of texts in Greek, Hebrew/Aramaic and Latin, based on the available manuscripts, moving through Greek-Christian writing into Rabbinic Judaism and the texts that contest the space between them. We will reach insights of a new order in fields which have thus far been overwhelmingly studied in double isolation or on the limited basis of digital searches of keywords.

