



## NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

### **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and applicants are urged to prepare a proposal that reflects their unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/collaborative-research-grants> for instructions.

The attachment only contains the application narrative, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

**The application format has been changed since this application was submitted.** You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see the Notice posted on the Collaborative Research program page linked above).

Project Title: Empire of Correspondence

Institution: University of Colorado

Project Director: Zachary Herz

Grant Program: Collaborative Research

## Project Overview

We apply for an NEH Collaborative Research Convening Grant to host a major international conference on Roman imperial correspondence, entitled *Empire of Correspondence: Roman Imperial Letters as Literature and State Messaging, 31 B.C.E.–534 C.E.* Roman emperors used correspondence not only to administer one of the largest territorial empires in the history of the world, but also to generate a widely-distributed and -consumed chronicle of their affect and moral reasoning. At the same time, recipients deployed these letters as trump cards in smaller-scale local conflicts, building blocks of a nascent system of positive law, and relics commemorating brushes with a god. These letters performed several different roles simultaneously within Roman social and political life, but contemporary scholarship has generally considered them narrowly, as part of the histories of specific political and social institutions like ‘Roman law.’ *Empire of Correspondence* pushes back against this siloing. We seek to bring together humanists from different regions and disciplines to think about the role of imperial correspondence in constituting Roman society, and accordingly in developing ideas of sovereignty and fairness that would animate centuries of European political thought. We plan to invite speakers to a conference at Colorado University-Boulder in September of 2024, as part of a process culminating in an edited volume of the same title, published by Oxford University Press (UK)’s *Roman Society and Law* series in 2026.

## Significance and Impact

The Roman Empire was an empire of correspondence. From the beginning of Rome’s imperial period (conventionally 31 B.C.E.), emperors administered a territorial empire extending from Spain to Syria, and from northern France to Sudan. For obvious reasons this administration took place through writing, and largely through emperors writing letters (*epistulae, rescripta*) in response to petitions (Millar 1977, Hauken 1998, Sirks 2001, Wankel 2009). These imperial letters could take different physical shapes. They could look like a scrap of papyrus (e.g. a letter from the child ruler Gordian III at *P. Tebt.* 2.285; Czajkowski and Eckhardt 2018: 14-15), an enormous inscription inscribed in stone in a city center (like the Yotvata Inscription, found in southern Israel) or like the replies collected in later law-codes (e.g. the *Codex Justinianus*; Frier et al. 2016) and still cited as legal authority in countries all over the world (for example in the 1986 Supreme Court decision *Bowers v. Hardwick*). The recipients of those letters ranged from poor farmers in the rural Balkans begging for help from a living god, to bishops whose understandings of kingship would influence centuries of Christian theology, to provincial officials who used letters to situate themselves within a complex bureaucracy that spanned three continents.

We propose a conference and accompanying edited volume, both called *Empire of Correspondence*, organized around these critically important, often-misunderstood letters. Because imperial correspondence served so many different roles, scholars have rarely considered the enormous corpus of imperial letters that survives as a single entity; subsets appear in legal textbooks, microhistories of individual petitioners, or narratives of interurban competition but historians almost never consider imperial letters as a whole. *Empire of Correspondence* aims to fill that gap, by bringing together major scholars from across ancient history, literature, and archaeology to share knowledge and best practices. We aim to shine an interdisciplinary light

upon imperial letters, using them to better understand how people made sense of Roman power, how that understanding changed in different times and different places, and how archival practices both ancient and modern have given imperial correspondence its distinctive character in scholarly imaginaries.

While *Empire of Correspondence* will mainly feature scholars working on the Roman Mediterranean, the insights developed in this conference (and published in its subsequent edited volume) will be of use to humanists in a wider variety of fields. Most obviously, the administrative structures laid out in these letters influenced the governance structures of medieval Europe, North Africa, and Western Asia. Better understanding communications within the centralized Roman Empire will shed light on the newer worlds that emerged as those communications broke down. But Rome was more than a precursor to the Middle Ages. Imperial correspondence sheds light on ways of living that continue into the present day; for example the litigative strategies described by Connolly 2010 and Kelly 2011 help us understand and contextualize the insights of legal sociologists like Tom Tyler (1990) or psychologists like Roseanna Sommers (2019). Similarly, imperial correspondence both responded to and iteratively constructed norms of ideal rulership that influenced both precontemporary regimes like Machiavelli's Florence and modern political theorists like Jon Rawls and Lon L. Fuller.

We plan to begin advertising *Empire of Correspondence* in the fall of 2023, with a Call for Papers due in January of 2024. In September of 2024 our speakers will gather together in Boulder, CO for a two-day conference, with papers to be published afterwards. We project publication in 2026, likely in Oxford University Press (UK)'s *Roman Society and Law* series.

## **Substance and Context**

Imperial correspondence lies at the heart of several different subdisciplines within premodern history (classics, ancient history, epigraphy, papyrology, legal history), but each of these disciplines views imperial letters as a different kind of object and tends to focus on the aspect of these letters relevant to their specific subdiscipline. *Empire of Correspondence* will allow humanists from across disciplines and across the world to share insights on this rich archive of pomp, sentiment, and political finesse. It will do so by focusing on letters as sites of imperial performance during the Roman period (31 B.C.E.–534 C.E.), taking a holistic approach and paying attention to all aspects of imperial letters, e.g. to the materiality, content, and reception of the letters by different groups within Roman society. The participants of the conference, coming from different humanist disciplines, will apply the evidence of imperial letters to three major questions:

- How did imperial correspondence manage people's understanding and expectations of Roman power?
- How did subjects' experiences of the Roman Empire change depending on where and when they lived?
- Why were imperial letters collected, organized and read in different ways as the Empire grew and changed?

Thinking through the effects these letters had on different Roman subjects in a multidisciplinary setting will help scholars of classics, ancient history, and Roman law understand their evidence more fully and inspire new, more integrative approaches to this existing material.

Moreover, it will illuminate relationships between law, performance, and civic identity that remain objects of intense study in contemporary political theory and jurisprudence (e.g. Brooks & Gewirtz 1996, Stone Peters 2022). The conference will therefore produce results relevant to scholars of disciplines outside of ancient studies, such as sociologists, political scientists and legal theorists.

**Context: Relevant Research and Literature.** The correspondence of the Roman emperors has been a subject of interest in many different disciplines within ancient studies. On the one hand, imperial correspondence constitutes our best record of what the emperor did, and thus (following Millar 1977) who the emperor was. For decades, ancient historians have therefore used these letters to better understand the mechanics of imperial governance: how subjects got their requests before the imperial court (Williams 1974), how that court processed the material that came before it (Turpin 1991, Peachin 2015), and how this dialogue produced the imperial legislative enactments (generally called “constitutions”) that come down to us as ‘Roman law.’ Scholars of Roman law have studied these texts since the eleventh century as one of the main sources of the law of the Romans. As such, imperial letters have had their own enormous consequences for the development of later European law, legal culture and society (Koschaker 1947, Stein 1999, McSweeney 2019) and—through their effect on Europe’s self-conception—world history (Benton and Straumann 2010, Tuori 2020).

An entirely different branch of humanist scholarship treats imperial letters as a literary genre, and as a critical part of the emperor’s public image. Imperial communications were what made emperors emperors, and eventually what made Rome Rome. Our earliest evidence for imperial correspondence comes from literary sources; for example, Pliny the Elder (a scholar writing in the first century C.E.) describes letters in which the emperor Augustus (r. 31 B.C.E.-14 C.E.) publicly grieves the sexual indiscretions of his daughter (literally “letters of that god;” *Natural History* 21.9). These letters represented emperors’ inner lives and moral reasoning to millions of subjects, undergirding the symbolic system (Noreña 2011) within which the emperor was presented as a benevolent caretaker and moral exemplar. Imperial letters were the medium through which people saw how their emperor thought, both about his own life and dynastic position (Herz 2020) and about the problems faced by his subjects (Daalder 2018). An enormous strain of recent historiography (e.g., Ando 2000, Naiden and Talbert 2017, Hekster 2015) analyzes imperial correspondence through this lens, as ideologically charged messaging on par with coins, praise-speech, and other tools Romans used to make sense of imperial power. That legitimating paradigm itself lies at the base of many modern understandings of power; from the divine right of kings, which built upon the sacralizing tendencies of the third-century Roman constitutions (Dillon 2012), to Mark Zuckerberg’s insistence on modeling himself after the emperor Augustus (Harasymiw 2019), we inhabit a world built on the one portrayed in imperial letters.

Still other Romanists analyze imperial correspondence to better understand the lived reality of imperial correspondents. Imperial replies (often called rescripts) are often our best evidence of petitions that have since been lost (Bryen 2013: 207), and can shed light on the conditions and subjectivity of petitioners of varying means. Historians of the ancient Mediterranean necessarily confront scattered archives which incline strongly towards a history of the elite; microhistoricizing petitioners, who were often of lower socioeconomic status than the local aristocrats who appear in literary sources or who commemorated their achievements in stone (Connolly 2010: 21) can help us better understand how ordinary Roman sought justice and sought help in managing their affairs. These lines of enquiry give historical texture to questions which lie at the heart of legal sociology today (Ewing and Silbey 1998, Merry 1990).

The trouble is that none of these people talk to each other. Each of the strands of scholarship I have discussed takes imperial letters as ontologically distinct: as rules, monuments, or archives. In fact, they were all three. Putting these different kinds of scholars in the same space will allow for new, productive conversations about these peculiar, polysemic texts.

## Methods and Execution

Because imperial letters served so many different purposes, research on their form and function has been counterproductively siloed. For example, the stone inscriptions found on temples in the Turkish city of Ephesus (described in Friesen 1993) might appear in a history of Roman religion with other correspondence addressing the imperial cult, e.g. Madsen 2016; in a history of a particular ruler's administrative strategy with other letters from the same author, like in Lenski 2016; or as part of a broader history of interurban politics in a given region, juxtaposed with other documents from that same place. Reality was messier. The writers and (ancient) readers of imperial letters applied all of these frames to the documents whose meaning they collaborated to produce. Ephesians knew what these letters meant because they understood how emperors had historically engaged with subject religious practice, but also how they had engaged with other cities in Asia Minor and how any particular author liked to be represented. The separation of these three interpretive frames is a modern one, driven by modern disciplinary and publication norms rather than ancient reading or interpretive practice.

Addressing this separation, then, requires getting out of the monographic rut. These documents exist within multiple discourses at once, which savvy inhabitants of the Roman empire could juggle fairly easily (as we might, for example, compare a State of the Union address both to contemporary government communications and to historical examples of the form) but which modern scholars spend years trying to master. No one modern reader can fully recontextualize imperial correspondence, but bringing together several different readers can help.

*Empire of Correspondence* is thus, by necessity, a collaborative project. Collaboration is central to how *Empire of Correspondence* is organized and also to how its scholarly contribution will be produced. To the first point, *Empire of Correspondence* is organized by four scholars (Serena Connolly, Elsemieke Daalder, Zachary Herz, and Matthijs Wibier) working in three countries (America, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands). All four of us study the history of the Roman empire, and do so primarily by engaging with its texts; beyond that, however, we employ radically different methodologies and bring different expertise to the project. Some of us are trained as Classicists, and read imperial letters in dialogue with other forms of epistolography that populate the Latin literary canon (most famously the letters of the orator Cicero and the prose stylist Pliny the Younger; Ceccarelli et al. 2018, Elder & Mullen 2019, Morello and Morrison 2007). Others of us read imperial letters as part of broader histories of imperial self-representation (as described by Noreña 2001, 2011) along with imperial portraits that survive in other textual and visual media. Still others of us approach these documents as lawyers, within a distinctly Continental tradition of reading imperial correspondence for the doctrines and rules that comprise the normative framework called 'Roman law,' and thus for an enlightening comparand to the statutes and court-rulings of later regimes. These very different scholarly orientations help us better approximate the complex contexts in which imperial letters operated, and accordingly to design a conference that will produce meaningful sharing of knowledge between disparate scholarly subfields.

As such, we intend for the speakers at our conference to exhibit a similar diversity of method. We contemplate a mix of quantitative/statistical analysis and traditional ancient-historical methodologies of close reading and juxtaposition. For example, Serena Connolly (2010) and Zachary Herz (2020) have both published quantitative analyses of imperial correspondence, of vastly different forms; Herz employs regression analysis to show how one particular emperor (the child ruler Severus Alexander, r. 222-235 C.E.) represented his moral reasoning in correspondence, while Connolly analyzes numerical disparities within a particular subcorpus of imperial writing (the *Codex Hermogenianus*, a collection of replies issued in the late third century by the emperor Diocletian and his court) to better understand the demographic and social characteristics of imperial petitioners. We similarly expect to host a number a speakers engaged in quantitative analysis of large corpora of imperial letters. As directors of *The Roman Epistulae Project*, an open-access database of imperial correspondence (discussed further in History of the Project and Its Productivity, below) we are particularly interested in talks on the archival structures within which imperial correspondence is and was collected. However, quantitative study of existing corpora can shed light on any number of pressing questions within Roman imperial history: how did imperial writing change in different regions of the Empire, or at different phases of the empire’s history? How did imperial writing use the conventions of epistolography to acknowledge, and thus constitute, gradations of social esteem? Can differences in genre (like that between *epistulae*, formal administrative memoranda, and *libelli* addressing subjects outside of the imperial bureaucracy) help us delineate the boundaries of Rome’s administrative state? These are kinds of questions that only large archives and statistically sophisticated work can answer, and *Empire of Correspondence* looks forward to providing a venue for this interdisciplinary scholarship.

That work, however, shares space with more traditional humanistic scholarship in both our group of collaborators and in our conference design. To give two examples, Matthijs Wibier is an expert in *Quellenforschung*, or source analysis—a branch of philological scholarship that reconstructs lost histories of textual and epistemological transmission in order to better understand individual primary documents. *Quellenforschung* has historically lain at the core of classics and ancient history as disciplines, and remains particularly central to studying imperial letters that survive in post-Classical compilations like the *Comparison of the Mosaic and Roman Laws* (a Christian apologetic which preserves certain imperial replies; see Frakes 2011), the *Fragmenta Vaticana* (a compilation of legal material dating from the fourth century C.E.; Wieacker 1960), or the sixth-century *Codex Justinianus*. Similarly, studying imperial letters often requires juxtaposition, or combining different documents to construct a coherent small-scale history. Daalder 2018 shows how several different instances of imperial communication commemorated in the Decrees of Paul (a scholarly treatise dating from the mid-third century C.E.) can be combined to shed light on the practice of imperial self-fashioning through correspondence. These qualitative, humanistic scholarly practices are critical to the study of imperial letters and will be heavily featured in *Empire of Correspondence*. We anticipate contributors using the tools of microhistoriography and close reading—for example, in tracking the rhetorical effects of individual letters or how individual letter-writers interacted with imperial power—along with the fine-grained technical analysis traditionally associated with medium-specific disciplines like epigraphy (the study of texts inscribed on stone or metal) and papyrology (the study of ink-based writing preserved on papyrus). *Empire of Correspondence* blends several different approaches to

the study of imperial letters, in order to produce knowledge that has historically been unavailable to specialists working alone.

### **History of the Project and Its Productivity**

*Empire of Correspondence* is one specific part of a larger collaborative research project, called *The Roman Epistulae Project*; I here discuss the *Project's* history to date and how *Empire of Correspondence* fits with its broader goals. *The Roman Epistulae Project* will be an open-access, searchable online database of imperial correspondence. Currently, imperial letters are siloed into different databases based on medium of preservation (with, for example, [www.papyri.info](http://www.papyri.info) collecting imperial letters preserved on papyrus) or on the region in which they were found (such as the self-explanatory *Ancient Inscriptions of the Northern Black Sea*). This archival practice obscures important generic features of imperial writing; keeping separate databases of papyri and inscriptions, for example, makes it harder to see what sorts of letters were inscribed on stone and which stayed on paper. Similarly these databases are organized around the concerns of specialists in given materials or areas, not the broader histories of imperial representation and perception that could benefit from a broad corpus of imperial writing. *The Roman Epistulae Project* will offer researchers free access to a wide corpus of imperial letters, from which they can isolate subgroups using modern methods of database filtering; our encoding follows field-standard XML-based TEI and EpiDoc encoding practices. Furthermore, teachers at all levels will be able to use *The Roman Epistulae Project* for easy access to primary sources, described in plain language and accompanied by images and translations that can easily be fit into history or literature courses.

*The Roman Epistulae Project* is fairly recent, and discussions about the project began in February of 2020. The *Project* was first proposed by the late Fergus Millar of Oxford University, and the four members of its board are Serena Connolly of Rutgers University-New Brunswick, Elsemieke Daalder of Leiden University, Zachary Herz of the University of Colorado-Boulder, and Matthijs Wibier of the University of Kent. All of us have individually published monographs or major articles based on the study of imperial correspondence in recent years (Connolly 2010, 2016 [as editor]; Daalder 2018; Herz 2020; Wibier 2019, 2020), and the *Project* itself has already received a Global International Collaborative Research Grant from Rutgers University. With that funding, we have been able to bring collaborators together for a methods workshop in New Brunswick in March of 2022, and also to hire graduate researchers with experience in digitizing ancient texts. The process of digitization is underway; at our March meeting we established a set of best practices around XML coding and have begun generating database entries on GitHub that our graduate researchers can use as templates. We expect to have a usable database of materials within our subspecialties (such as imperial correspondence preserved in legal compendia) by 2025, and of published imperial letters more generally by 2028, hosted on the servers of one of our home universities.

*Empire of Correspondence* will further our goals by advertising the *Project* to the broader scholarly community, and by demonstrating to that community what kinds of work the study of imperial letters can do. Right now, outside of the *Project* board most humanists think of imperial letters, *tout court*, rarely if at all. *Empire of Correspondence* will be the first published study of imperial writing as a genre, and its breadth—a useful consequence of its multiauthor format—will expose readers to connections between different forms and histories of imperial writing that are still implicit in the historiography of Imperial Roman culture and political theory.

## Collaboration

Serena Connolly is an Associate Professor of Classics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her first book, *Lives Behind the Laws: The World of the Codex Hermogenianus* (Indiana University Press, 2010) considers Roman emperors' letters to ordinary subjects through the lens of social history. She examines the lives and experiences of the people who sent and answered petitions to the Roman imperial court and the significance of that process as the most common point of contact between non-elite Romans and their emperors. She uses as her evidence over 900 responses written at the court of the third-century emperor Diocletian and preserved in the *Codex Justinianus*; In addition to this monograph and adjacent articles and book chapters, she is also a contributing editor to *The Code of Justinian: A New Annotated Translation, with Parallel Latin and Greek Text* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Professor Connolly's other research interests are in ancient Mediterranean wisdom texts, the history of science and technology, and the reception of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Elsemieke Daalder is an Associate Professor of Legal History at Leiden Law School (Leiden University). Her award-winning first book is a detailed study of the imperial judgments of the emperor Septimius Severus (193-211 C.E.) compiled by the Roman jurist Paul. On the basis of an extensive legal, philological and historical analysis of the surviving fragments (38 in total), she proposes a radically new interpretation of these documents, arguing that they served a political purpose and were a part of the imperial propaganda of its protagonist, the emperor Septimius Severus. In a recently published article on the same subject, she elaborates on this theory and demonstrates that the collections of Paul are in addition also a self-fashioning project of the jurist himself. In addition to this monograph and related articles and book chapters, she has also contributed to ERC-funded project at the University of Pavia on the circulation of legal texts in Late Antiquity. Professor Daalder is currently working on a study of the legislation of Caracalla (211-217 C.E.), based on 300 of his responses to legal questions. Other research interests include Roman administrative law (especially the Roman *fiscus*), the imperial administration of justice and legal writing.

Zachary Herz, an Assistant Professor of Classics at the University of Colorado, works at the intersection of multiple disciplines and employs statistical techniques in order to better understand how Roman institutions produced authoritative forms of knowledge. He has training as both a Roman historian (receiving his Ph.D. in the subject from Columbia University in 2018) and as a lawyer (receiving his J.D. from Yale Law School in 2014) and has published frequently on large-scale analyses of Roman imperial correspondence. For example, Professor Herz has published work applying a law-and-economics model to predict the effect of imperial bankruptcy regulation on credit availability using Pompeiian archives of financial records as evidence. He has also applied regression analysis to the *Codex Justinianus*' collection of imperial legal decisions in order to isolate how legal reasoning in these documents changed over time in response to broader trends in imperial representation over the course of the third century C.E. His current monograph (under contract with Oxford University Press (UK)) considers how changes in imperial self-fashioning over the course of the imperial period both reflected and instigated a bottom-up shift in popular expectations of imperial justice.

Matthijs Wibier is a Lecturer (equivalent to an Assistant Professor) in Ancient History at the University of Kent. Professor Wibier has published extensively on Roman legal culture and



literature against the backdrop of the rise and evolution of the Roman imperial state. His research has focused in particular on the production and continued circulation of legal texts in antiquity and late antiquity. This includes work on the technical problems that arise from texts being preserved in various media: for example how imperial letters may have been edited prior to their inclusion in legal compendia, or the distinct circumstances of preservation of imperial orders on papyri in Roman Egypt. Professor Wibier is co-editor (with Dario Mantovani) of the major handbook *Roman Juristic Literature in Late Antiquity: Transmission and Reception* (forthcoming with Cambridge University Press), and is contributing 10 chapters to the final product. He is also finishing a monograph on legal scholarship and literature in the Early Roman Empire (under contract with Oxford University Press (UK)).

The four of us serve as the Advisory Board for *The Roman Epistulae Project*, and will also collaborate in selecting abstracts and editing contributions to *Empire of Correspondence*. Professors Herz and Connolly will take the lead on the planning for *Empire*, for practical reasons; both are native English speakers who work in United States time zones, and Professor Herz has pre-existing relationships with the vendors and support staff on whom *Correspondence* will rely. That said each editor will participate in selecting successful abstracts, and after the conference itself each editor will work one-on-one with three of our contributing authors while also contributing to an introduction summarizing the historiography of imperial correspondence to date.

This approach to collaboration helps us share expertise, and benefit from our substantially different training. Imperial correspondence raises a variety of different questions, from their accordance with formal legal doctrine (the subject of Professor Daalder's specific expertise) to their imbrication within broader intellectual milieux (a topic on which Wibier has published extensively) or nonelite social dynamics (the subject of Connolly's monograph). By working together we can help authors sharpen their contributions to diverse subfields, and more effectively position ourselves within the different historiographies that could benefit from sustained engagement with imperial letters.

## Work Plan

Because imperial letters served so many different purposes—as pieces of diplomatic history, statements of law, or civic grants within a history of interurban politics—research on their form and function has been counterproductively siloed. We believe an in-person conference is best suited to address this siloing. Accordingly, we propose hosting an in-person conference in Boulder, CO, in September of 2024.

**Call for Papers and Conference Rostering.** We plan to publish our call for papers (CFP) in November of 2023, requesting abstracts of 500 words by January 1. We aim to invite seven speakers in addition to ourselves and Mx. Parr, for a program of twelve 30-minute talks over two days. While programming will depend on the abstracts we receive, we will apply the following criteria to proposed submissions:

- 1) *Quality.* We seek papers that are grounded in relevant scholarly literature, employ cutting-edge humanistic research methods, and arrive at genuinely novel conclusions about the functioning of imperial correspondence within Roman politics and culture. While we do not contemplate simply accepting the seven 'best' abstracts—for reasons explained below—we do not expect to invite speakers whose

work is not of the highest quality or able to clear the peer review process to which we plan to submit our proceedings.

- 2) *Diversity of Method.* Our conference aims to expose scholars to different ways of reading and thinking about imperial letters. Accordingly, we are looking to host speakers who employ different approaches. The most salient methodological divide in the study of imperial correspondence is that between quantitative and qualitative research: that is to say between histories that aim to isolate trends and correlations in large datasets of imperial letters, and histories that analyze individual documents using traditional humanistic methods of close reading and juxtaposition. For example, we contemplate some presenters focusing on broad temporal shifts (like changes in the length of letters over time, and whether these changes responded to broader shifts in the imperial bureaucracy) or regional differences (like different formality in letters to Greek- or Latin-speaking petitioners) that are visible only through quantitative work. Other presenters may focus on the particular social context within which a given letter was received and track its impact using tools of microhistoriography. These approaches must coexist. We want to expose data scientists to the work of microhistorians, and vice versa; we will strongly prefer abstracts which contribute to the overall methodological diversity of our conference.
- 3) *Diversity of Subject.* Imperial letters derived their power and meaning from broader cultural frameworks which were neither stable or universal. The emperor's opinion did different work in 100 and in 400 C.E., for example, or in wealthy civilian communities versus military towns on an active frontier. Recent work on the Roman empire has emphasized this pluralism (i.e., Dench 2018), and it is important that our conference reflect the different ways in which Roman subjects made sense of imperial letters. Accordingly, we will prefer abstracts that permit us to put together a program that discusses imperial correspondence in different localities (e.g., Gaul vs. Syria), media (e.g., letters preserved on papyrus vs. stone), and social contexts (e.g., letters to lower officials vs. responses to civic or individual petitions).

We will advertise our CFP on all major listservs relied upon by scholars of the ancient Mediterranean, with a particular focus on listservs that are commonly used by members of underrepresented groups. We envision advertising on the Liverpool Listserv (the main professional listserv for Classics); newsletters of the Association of Ancient Historians, the American Historical Association, and the Society for Classical Studies; dedicated listservs such as the Lambda Classical Caucus or the Multiculturalism, Race and Ethnicity in Classics Consortium; and also reaching out individually to potential keynote speakers and promising early-career researchers working on imperial correspondence. Once abstracts are submitted, Profs. Herz and Connolly will make an initial read before forwarding all promising abstracts to Profs. Wibier and Daalder in mid-January. In February of 2024, all four of us will meet via Zoom to develop a conference roster and will notify selected speakers immediately after.

**Conference.** We envision a fall conference in Boulder, in September of 2024. We have chosen Boulder, Colorado as the location for this conference because of its proximity to a major international flight hub (DIA); two of our four collaborators will be travelling from Europe, and DIA offers direct flights to both Heathrow and Amsterdam-Schiphol International Airports. Similarly, Boulder’s fall climate will allow us to adapt to potential pandemic considerations; with very little rain or extreme weather, we anticipate having a great deal of control over the ventilation of spaces should need arise.

The format of the conference will be plenary, with twelve speakers (the four of us, our graduate assistant (Lucianna Parr) who will discuss *The Roman Epistulae Project*, and seven authors of accepted abstracts) presenting 30-minute talks over the course of two days. Each talk will be followed by 20 minutes of discussion. We believe this conference structure is best suited for fostering collaboration and exposing attendees to different methodologies in the study of imperial correspondence. While a simultaneous-panel approach (like that taken by large conferences in our subfields) could accommodate more speakers, it would also make it easy for attendees to sort themselves by method and thus recreate the siloes that *Empire of Correspondence* seeks to address. We also expect the plenary format to encourage informal conversation and connection among the participants; we hope to foster collaborations that will go beyond the publication of the proceedings. Furthermore, *Empire of Correspondence* will be fully open to the public. The topic of the conference is of interest to several academic departments, and we expect CU Boulder affiliates working in History, Classics, and Law to attend. Based on attendance at other interdisciplinary conferences hosted by the CU Boulder Classics Department, we forecast an attendance of between 50 and 100 in addition to the 12 speakers. We have already reached out to CU Boulder’s conference services about the price for staffing such an event, and for reserving the room (Boulder’s Center for British and Irish Studies, where the Department of Classics generally holds large events) we think is best suited for the conference.

**Publication.** In September of 2024, the four sponsors of *Empire of Correspondence* will meet to determine next steps. We expect to ask all participants to submit a chapter to an edited volume on the subject; in addition, the four of us will collaborate on an Introduction to the volume focused on situating its contribution within existing historiography on imperial letters (on which see the Substance and Context section of this narrative). Two of the four collaborators (Zachary Herz and Matthijs Wibier) are in the process of publishing monographs with Oxford University Press (UK)’s *Roman Society and Law* series, and its editors have informally expressed interest in publishing this project (discussed further in Final Product and Dissemination)

We would ask each of our twelve contributors to submit chapters of 7,000 words by April 1 of 2025. Each chapter would be edited by one of the four of us, with the aim of submitting a completed manuscript for peer review by the end of 2025. At that point publication schedule would obviously be out of our hands, but we contemplate *Empire of Correspondence* appearing in print before the end of 2026.

## **Final Product and Dissemination**

We intend *Empire of Correspondence* as a primarily in-person conference, but will livestream the talks from the conference itself and will publish papers based on those talks in an edited volume. We have chosen to hold *Empire of Correspondence* in person for several reasons. First of all, we explicitly mean the conference to provide networking opportunities for scholars of

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different subdisciplines. That kind of informal sharing of knowledge remains vastly easier at an in-person conference, rather than an online or hybrid event. Secondly, the location of *Empire of Correspondence* (Boulder, CO) is well adapted to in-person conferencing. Because Denver International Airport is a national hub flights to and from Boulder are unusually cheap and convenient; furthermore, Boulder's fall climate (low precipitation, mild temperatures) makes ventilation and outdoor socializing relatively painless. With that said, we plan to disseminate the conference to wider scholarly communities in several different ways.

The talks given at *Empire of Correspondence* will be livestreamed via Zoom. Zachary Herz—the organizer based in Boulder, and thus logistics lead—has managed multiple Zoom broadcasts in his work with the Association of Ancient Historians, and is familiar with evolving best practices in the field. We intend to advertise the conference program on major listservs in the discipline (listed in Work Plan) with an accompanying Google Form for those interested in attending. The morning of the first day of the conference a Zoom link will be sent to everyone who has filled out the form; this way we can share our research with scholars around the world, while minimizing the risk of disruption or Zoombombing. In addition, we will advertise *Empire of Correspondence* heavily within the broader academic community of CU Boulder. As discussed above, Roman imperial correspondence is important for several different strands of humanistic inquiry: from classics and history, to medieval studies, political science, or law. CU Boulder is a large research institution, and conferences regularly draw audiences of scholars from all over campus, as well as interested members of the local community. The room in which *Empire of Correspondence* will be held can comfortably seat 100, and we expect attendance around that range. Boulder Accessibility Services will happily provide CART captioning free of charge, making our conference more accessible for attendees with a variety of hearing needs.

That said, our most important mechanism for sharing the research presented at *Empire of Correspondence* will be publishing the proceedings. The edited-volume form is a good fit for our research goals; we hope that interested scholars will encounter work from a variety of subdisciplines that would never share space in a more traditional monograph. While any publication is of course contingent at this stage, we have identified Oxford University Press (UK)'s *Roman Society and Law* series as an optimal home for the published proceedings. That series is distinctly interdisciplinary in its approach; it is co-edited by a law professor (Paul du Plessis of the University of Edinburgh) and an ancient historian (Tom McGinn at Vanderbilt University), while regularly publishing work by traditional Classicists. Similarly, *Roman Society and Law* has recently published interdisciplinary conference proceedings (Czajkowski et al.'s *Roman Law in the Provinces*) and has a good sense of the distinctive logistical challenges involved with coordinating authors from different disciplinary homes. Two of the four organizers for *Empire of Correspondence* are currently publishing with *Roman Society and Law* (Professors Herz and Wibier) and accordingly have personal relationships with Professors du Plessis and McGinn. While any editorial decision would of course depend on the contributions themselves, the editors are interested in the project and think it could fit within the series' publication roster; please find attached a statement of interest from Paul du Plessis to that effect. We anticipate publication in 2026.