Migration and Religious Identity in Ancient Rome (and Present Day Europe)

The Roman empire is one of the largest and most stable empires in world history. By conquest and diplomacy, Rome connected and integrated widely diverse communities from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, and from the Rhine to the Nile. The new political constellation enabled large-scale mobility within the entire known world. Communities of Roman citizens were sent out to settle landscapes previously inhabited by foreign peoples and gods; large groups of migrants moved to Rome, by which new customs, rituals and gods migrated to the heart of the empire. How could the wildly diverse groups of migrants acquire a place, metaphorically as well as literally, in the Roman world? What was Rome’s position in the process? There is broad consensus that increased mobility of people and cults were a key feature in the heyday of Roman imperial expansion, but has at the same time been seen as the cause of its subsequent Decline and Fall.

In this course, we explore how both Rome and migrant communities managed and accommodated migration, and how the applied strategies of inclusion and exclusion relate to the stability of the empire. We approach the question of migration and imperial success by examining the relationship between mobility, religion and citizenship.