

The Early Roman Empire ((1st–3rd c. CE) represents a distinct cultural period. It is a transitional era in which ‘old’ Greco-Roman traditions coexist with a ‘new’ religious ferment, and is characterized by fluidity and a multitude of sects and creeds. It is defined by tensions between opposing trends: it is a period of revivalism and nostalgia for the past, but also of the dispersion of innovative and disruptive religious ideas which gave rise to new identities. This diversity of the Early Empire is reflected in the range of dialogue literature written in Greek and Latin, which encompasses alongside classicizing ‘pagan’ texts, also Hermetic, Christian, and so-called ‘Gnostic’ ones. The widespread use of the dialogue form testifies to its serviceability for authors from diverse backgrounds and with different agendas.

However, despite the growing interest in the literary form of dialogue in antiquity, our understanding of this diverse imperial landscape of dialogic literature remains limited as no comprehensive examination of the use of dialogue in the Early Empire has been undertaken since the end of the 19th century. This project aims to fill this gap by comprehensively exploring the uses and functions of Greek and Latin prose dialogue literature in this period.