

PROPOSAL TO CONSTRUCT A REGISTER OF
GREEK AND ROMAN VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

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I. Abstract

In the cities of the ancient Mediterranean, popular collectives formed that rendered services and provided a sense of identity to its members. Referred to by contemporary scholarship as 'voluntary associations,' these collectives were the antecedents to the medieval guild, the early Church, and the modern labor union. In antiquity, such collectives often had a broad function: providing meals, offering burial insurance, holding religious rites, and bringing together professionals within a common trade. Hundreds of Greek and Latin inscriptions have survived in the material record that attest to the prevalence and dynamics of these groups, and to their private and public roles within ancient societies; however, there is currently no digital site that allows users to examine the evidence and literature for ancient voluntary associations exclusively. This project is intended as a remedy to this void, one that will provide the information and tools necessary for both specialists and non-specialists to investigate these integral social, political, and economic units within the Mediterranean world between 500 BCE and 500 CE.

II. Statement of Innovation

Due to the broad vocabulary for voluntary associations, searching for singular terms within the currently available corpora of inscriptions does not return all the evidence for the associations attached to, for instance, a certain deity, or even all those known within a certain city or province. A plethora of Greek and Latin terms referred to such groups, rather than a singular word. A register of ancient voluntary associations would further differ from current inscriptions databases by networking users to these corpora while integrating a mapping component that would supply geographic and cultural context.

III. Humanities Significance

This project is intended as a hub to explore early labor history, and an accessible tool for the study of Greek and Roman archaeology and history, early Christianity, and Judaism. These associations provide a context to understand commensality rituals, burial patterns, religious identities, and important socio-economic networks at play within the ancient world; however, the digital evidence for them is currently dispersed, incomplete, and often inaccessible to non-specialists with no topographical consideration of the evidence.

Sample Entry:

CP Number: CP.Coll.Dac.1

Province: Dacia

Modern Name: Romania

City: Tureni

Type: Altar

Type of Inscription: Votive

Language: Latin

Associative Unit: Collegium

Web Citation: [HD044509](https://hdscholarship.com/entry/HD044509)

Literature: ILD 533. (B); I. Piso, *Tyche* 6, 1991, 156, Anm. 125.

Date: 195-6 CE

Deity: Vulcanus

Imperial House:

L. Septimius Severus Pertinax

M. Aurelius Antoninus

Trade: Fabri (Builders)

