

Woodworking in the Roman Imagination (Groningen, 18–19 Jun 26)

Groningen, Netherlands, Jun 18–19, 2026

Deadline: Jan 15, 2026

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Wood was an omnipresent resource in the Roman world, ingrained in every human's life, from those living in the most precarious circumstances to the richest and most powerful in the empire. Wood has been extensively studied in terms of its economic and logistical importance, contributing major advances in our understanding of the technology and organisation of Roman woodworking (Meiggs 1982, Ulrich 2007, Scherrer 2011, Absmeier 2015, Visser 2025). This workshop aims to bring such insights into dialogue with Roman discourses surrounding woodworking in literature, epigraphy and visual culture from the Roman Republic to Late Antiquity. In light of recent reconsiderations of trees beyond strict resources (Hunt 2016, Armstrong 2019, Hallett 2021, Fox 2023, Nichols 2024) and a rising interest in the narration of craft processes in Greco-Roman antiquity (Fanfani/Harlow/Nosch 2016, Webb 2018, Geue 2024, Reitz-Joosse 2024, Rogers 2024), we aim to explore Roman conceptions of living and laboring with wood, relying on, yet transcending, technical questions of how wood was worked in Roman antiquity.

Individual papers will approach depictions of woodworking and human-wood interaction in artistic, literary and epigraphic media. Together, we seek to trace Roman ideas about human-wood entanglements from arboriculture and tree-felling to the production of ships, buildings, tools and other wooden artifacts. This workshop will contribute to a multi-faceted understanding of the many meanings of woodworking in ancient Rome. It forms part of the ERC-FACERE project (<https://facere.site>) which investigates discourses of making in the Roman world.

Topics to be addressed might include, but are not limited to, the following:

- How did ideas about woodworking as transmitted through art and literature influence Romans' experience of wooden artifacts?
- How were different types of wood depicted and valued, in terms of their practical application, aesthetic appeal and symbolic potential?
- How does woodworking relate to the religious sphere in the Roman world? What interactions with trees might be considered transgressive or sacrilegious?
- How and where are mythical woodworkers depicted and how do such depictions open up questions about artisans' position and moral boundaries?
- To what extent was woodworking considered a distinct practice in the Roman world, and in what ways did it relate to, and interact with, other types of making and craft?
- How can we investigate Roman woodworkers' experiences, drawing e.g. on experimental archaeology and modern artisans' perspectives?
- What are the narrative and literary functions of depictions of woodworking (e.g. the making of a

plough, shipbuilding or construction processes), and what can they reveal of Roman notions about woodworking?

- Which woodworking metaphors are prominent in Roman texts, what domains do they occur in, and how can they help us to understand the meaning of woodworking in ancient Rome?

- (Self-)Representations of Roman woodworkers: what are the characteristics of woodworkers in literature and art? Where do they appear? What do they make and how does their crafting influence the experience of the spectator?

- How did woodworking relate to Roman notions about the environment? What can depictions of woodworking tell us about Roman perspectives on deforestation, sustainable materials, and human-nature entanglement?

Practicalities

The workshop will take place in Groningen, the Netherlands on June 18 and 19, 2026. Abstracts (ca. 300 words) must be submitted no later than January 15, 2026 via FACERE.ERC@gmail.com and should be accompanied by a short bio (max. 150 words). FACERE will be able to make a contribution to travel and accommodation costs. We look forward to welcoming Roger B. Ulrich and Carole Newlands as our keynote speakers.

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