

PRESS BRIEFING

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2 million euros for research into historical trade conflicts

A researcher at Trier University is using modern methods to trace the history of the ancient maritime economy and has received an ERC Consolidator Grant, prestigious European funding for excellent research projects.

Pascal Warnking, Junior Professor of Maritime Antiquity at Trier University and affiliated Senior Researcher at the Leibniz Centre for Archaeology (LEIZA), will receive two million euros in funding from the European Research Council (ERC) over the next five years for his large-scale and complex project ‘Maritime Dependencies in Antiquity’. This is a great honour for the researcher and Trier University. After all, only less than 15 per cent of all projects that applied for the ERC Consolidator Grant were approved.

The ERC project aims to rethink the ancient economy: the existential dependence on supply routes via the sea characterised the economy of antiquity and was also a frequent cause of conflict. Using state-of-the-art methods, including statistical analyses from the financial sciences and geoinformatic simulations, Pascal Warnking and his team not only want to deepen our understanding of the maritime economy of antiquity, but also provide insights into today's trade conflicts.

**When was blood shed for grain?**

‘Our project is about trade conflicts over critical resources in antiquity. How was the supply of grain secured across the sea? To put it more luridly: When was blood shed for grain?’ says Pascal Warnking, summarising his research project. ‘When we look into the Red Sea or the Black Sea, we are still dealing with similar questions today.’

While comparatively much research has been done on the ancient superpowers Athens, Sparta and Rome, the project is investigating the role of Syracuse in Sicily in the 5th to 3rd centuries BC in a case study. ‘The role of Syracuse is particularly interesting in today's multipolar, conflict-ridden world,’ says Warnking. The city owed its power to a combination of natural resources, especially grain, and its strategic location at the most important trading crossroads of the Mediterranean. For centuries, Syracuse pursued consistent strategies in trade and warfare, which were closely interwoven. Pascal Warnking and his team will focus in particular on this connection between trade, geography and war.

**Cutting-edge research in Classical Studies at Trier University**

‘With the successful acquisition of the ERC Consolidator Grant, Classical Studies at Trier University has once again been able to demonstrate that it plays in the top international league of research,’ says Prof Dr Eva Martha Eckkrammer. At the same time, the University’s President emphasises that the close cooperation with the Leibniz Centre for Archaeology (LEIZA) also contributed to the success of the project.

‘This funding shows how important and fruitful the collaboration between Trier University and LEIZA as a Leibniz Research Museum is,’ emphasises the Director General of LEIZA, Univ-Prof Dr Alexandra W. Busch. ‘The research results of the ERC project will not only enrich the academic world, but will also flow directly into the exhibition of our Museum of Ancient Shipping and other transfer formats. This will make the factors and consequences of trade conflicts understandable and tangible for a wide audience.’

**Experiments with antique ship models**

Pascal Warnking wants to reconstruct nothing less than the complete budget and balance of trade of Syracuse for this period. To this end, he is working together with the Trier economist Prof Dr Ludwig von Auer. The researchers are using the latest statistical methods and economic models to obtain as complete a picture as possible of the economy of the ancient world. ‘The unusual thing about our project is that it combines very different scientific disciplines and, for example, links Classical Studies with Economics,’ emphasises Warnking.

However, the project not only draws on modern economic theory, but also on climate and marine research, for example. Together with the Italian Istituto di Scienze Marine (CNR-ISMAR), the project will recreate wind, waves and currents in the Mediterranean for the 5th to 3rd centuries BC. This is because the weather had an influence on selected sea routes and crop yields. Once again, the scientists from Trier will also incorporate experimental research findings into the project. Just last year, a team from the Ancient History Department at Trier University sailed the Mediterranean in a replica Roman merchant ship to collect data. Measurements in the current channel with ship models also help the scientists to find out more about the performance of individual ship types.

The research results are also visible in a freely accessible digital interactive atlas that is currently being developed at Trier University. Anyone interested will be able to retrace the ancient trade routes of Syracuse.

**Photo**

Portrait photo of JProf Dr Pascal Warnking  
[Download](https://www.uni-trier.de/fileadmin/organisation/Presse/Bilder_2024/Pressefotos/Warnking.jpg)

**The ERC Consolidator Grant**

The ERC Consolidator Grants are awarded to excellent scientists who are setting up their own promising research group. Funding of a maximum of two million euros per research project is provided over a period of up to five years. The funds are primarily used to finance scientists and other personnel within the scope of the project.

**Biography**

Pascal Warnking studied Business Administration and Ancient History in a double degree programme at Saarland University, the Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi in Milan and Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. After many years of professional experience in management, he began researching Roman maritime trade at Trier University in 2012 and received his doctorate in 2015. After his doctorate, he returned to management for a certain period of time. As of March 2022, he has held the Junior Professorship for Maritime Antiquity at Trier University, which was filled jointly with the Leibniz Centre for Archaeology (LEIZA) in Mainz. Pascal Warnking will begin his research activities at LEIZA in March 2028.