

## **S1: Transformation, disruption, and reinterpretations of the past**

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In the previous funding periods, the findings of several project groups, which spanned the periods and cultural contexts investigated at the SFB, indicated that rapid social, political or religious transformation triggers change in the heroic. Long-known heroic figures are charged with new meaning, and the historical contexts in which they are thought to have acted are re-imagined. Heroes are integrative yet controversial figures in these situations: they may stabilize disrupted collectives but also crystalize resistance; in any case, they call for action. Heroic figures and their stories tend to reduce the complexity of situations, as well as simplify uncertain outcomes in times of upheaval and transformation. In their multiple functions and modes of operation through various media, they contribute to the resolution of conflicts. The research of the SFB has also shown that heroic figures unfold their power within a specific temporal structure, which makes their heroic configuration comprehensible through particular references to the past.

S1 aims to conceptualize and systematize these findings by looking at the heroic in particular scenarios of transformation: (1) political and religious transformation, (2) periods of war, and (3) times of fundamental spatial re-constellation. The project will also ask how and under what circumstances typically heroic characteristics come to be connected with new groups that are framed as exemplary in the process, such as scholars, traders, or workers. Heroic figures may be understood as indicators of transformation, since they function as catalysts of ideas and aspirations. In light of the temporal structure of the heroic, the focus of the investigations will be on the ways heroes are constructed or reactivated through references to the past, and the ways in which history is re-imagined and re-narrated in order to infuse the actions of a hero with new meaning in present circumstances. We are investigating the agents and driving forces behind the activation of heroic figures and their stories. This activation is – successfully or unsuccessfully – used to trigger the collective recognition and reimagination of what was once effective in a distant past.

The case studies in this project will build on the results of the previous funding periods and add additional comparative perspectives in order to better grasp the specific connections between heroization and social, political and religious transformation across different periods of time and global regions.