

**The LEGIO VIII experience (Challenge-programme)  
at the European School Karlsruhe (2022-2023)**



Newly appointed to the European School in Karlsruhe at the start of the 2022 school year, I quickly decided to carry out a major operation to reopen the Latin option in S2 in the French section. My initial aim was to create a 'Challenge programme'<sup>1</sup> type workshop within the school timetable (8am-3.40pm), bringing together S1 pupils from all sections as well as the P5s from the Grundschule. The aim was to make the pupils aware of Latin culture from S1 onwards so as to encourage them to choose the Latin option in S2. My German Latin colleague Markus Scheer has a group of German and English Latinists in S2 and S3.

So I came up with the idea of having the Legio VIII historical re-enactment association, based in Autun and accredited by UNESCO, come to the European School in Karlsruhe. My directors, Mr Daniel Gassner and Ms Anabela Santos, agreed

immediately. In order to reach a wider audience, we decided to schedule the Roman legionnaires' show during the Sommerfest (school festival) organised by the parents' association on Sunday 25 June. As the JRC (Joint Research Centre) traditionally organises its festival the day before, we contacted them and they agreed to let the legionnaires put on their show on Saturday 24 June.

The Challenge-programme must therefore prepare for this visit by offering students a lesson on the daily life of legionnaires. For scheduling reasons, only 8 pupils from the French section were able to take part, despite my presentations to the S1 classes in the French and English sections. It should be noted that the French section has only 11 students and that two students interested in the LEGIO VIII Challenge-programme had to follow support sessions in French during the Challenge-programme slot: every Friday from 9.45am to 10.30am. Over the course of the year, two students dropped out of the Programme Challenge, which continued every week until 30 June 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> The Challenge Programme is an operation designed to offer in-depth activities to motivated pupils and/or those at a good level. Pupils can be of different levels and the activity can take place after school. Supervised by one or more teachers, the Programme Challenge can take the form of a drama club, a rock group, etc. and cover several disciplines.

## Why LEGIO VIII?

We chose LEGIO VIII not only because of the spectacular and interactive nature of their work, but also because of their geographical origin. Karlsruhe is an hour from Strasbourg, and in the late 80s or early 90s AD, the legio Octava Augusta moved to Strasbourg/Argentorate. "The VIIIth was seen as Rome's armed wing, its civil engineering, an indispensable part of its administration and a tool for Latinisation and Romanisation. Further north, in Mainz, the XXII Primigenia took on the same tasks and produced the same model<sup>2</sup> ».



The screenshot shows the website for Legio VIII Augusta. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the URL <https://leg8.fr> and various browser icons. Below the navigation bar is a large image of a Roman reenactment parade with soldiers in full armor and shields. To the right of the main image is a sidebar with event information for "LES JOURNÉES ROMAINES 2023" on August 5th and 6th. Below the main image, the text reads "AUTUN : JOURNÉES ROMAINES 2019" and "Par Légion VIII Augusta". The main content area describes the Legion VIII Augusta as a specialized group of Roman army reenactors. It includes a quote: "« Vous aimez l'histoire romaine et la reconstitution historique, rejoignez nous ! »" and a link to download a PDF presentation. Below this is an "AGENDA 2023" table with three columns of events. To the right of the main content area, there is a section titled "SIGNER LE MANIFESTE" with a small image of a map and text, and another section titled "LE CORPUS DE LA LEG8" with a small image of a statue.

Par Légion VIII Augusta

La **Légion VIII Augusta** est un groupe de reconstitution de l'armée romaine spécialisée sur la période flavienne (fin 1<sup>er</sup> siècle après J.-C.).

« Vous aimez l'histoire romaine et la reconstitution historique, rejoignez nous ! »

[Télécharger la plaquette de présentation de la Legio VIII Augusta au format PDF](#)

AGENDA 2023		
3 – 7 avril, Autun (71), 1 <sup>re</sup> Semaine scolaire « Civilisation romaine » à la Domus	22 – 26 mai, Autun (71), 2 <sup>e</sup> Semaine scolaire « Civilisation romaine » à la Domus	23-25/26 juin, Karlsruhe (Allemagne), École Européenne
14-16 juillet, /Château de Gonsans	5- 6 août, Autun (71), <a href="#">Les Journées</a>	10 – 12 août, Saintes (17),

LES JOURNÉES ROMAINES 2023  
SAM. 5  
DIM. 6  
AOÛT  
10h - 18h30  
Promenade des Marbres

SIGNER LE MANIFESTE

Manifeste pour l'inscription au Patrimoine Culturel Immatériel de l'Unesco des langues antiques

LE CORPUS DE LA LEG8

Les hommes de la VIII<sup>e</sup> légion Auguste  
René Cubaynes

## Interdisciplinary

What's more, Legio VIII is made up of volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds (academic, scientific, artistic, craft), which is perfectly in line with the interdisciplinary scope I wanted to give the challenge-programme<sup>3</sup>. Sophie Chabanis, professor of biology at the European School, was the key figure in this interdisciplinary approach. She gave a presentation on Roman medicine and, at the end of her lecture, the students prepared questions to ask the medical biologist from Legio VIII.

<sup>2</sup> [www.legio8.fr](http://www.legio8.fr)

<sup>3</sup> Several members of Legio VIII, founded by teacher René Cubaynes, are in favour of a lively approach to teaching Latin. Pierre Gorski-Mièze teaches Latin and Ancient Greek at Oxford Latinitas, where he teaches students from all over the world to speak and sing in Greek and Latin. Lucas Ego, agrégé d'Histoire, alumnus of the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, and currently a doctoral student in Ancient History at Aix-Marseille University, is the co-author of the textbook Gradatim. Le latin Pas à pas (Les Belles Lettres, 2023), which uses a method similar to that used in modern language teaching. The Legio VIII also includes the technical director of a theatre, a biologist and a cabinetmaker.

## Practical work

With the pupils, I also wanted to introduce concepts related to surveying and geodesy.



Unfortunately, building a groma and a chorobate didn't fit in with the S1 maths or geography syllabus. The pupils completed the construction of a groma, but the construction of the chorobate was entrusted to a parent. It will be up to the pupils to understand how the chorobate works so that they can explain it to the public at their Sommerfest stand. The pupils made a cardboard model of a domus, a segmenta lorica (a breastplate with metal strips), board games used by the

legionaries (latronculus, mola rotunda), wax tablets and laurel wreaths. They also sampled Roman dishes: patina, apothermum, galettes, dates with walnuts and moretum.



Construction of the artefacts based on plans from the book *Vivre comme les Romains*, Ph. Steele, De la Martinière Jeunesse, 1997.



Having learnt the orders in Latin, the pupils reproduced the scenes of attacks and killings (in two stages), as seen in a report on the life of the legionaries (performed by René Cubaynes and his Legio VIII legionaries). Our students wore legionnaires' costumes, as well as those of goddesses and orators. We also asked the students to don a 7-metre long laticlave toga so that they could understand the relationship between the weight of the garment and the sobriety of the orator's gestures.

## True / False

To pique the students' interest and stimulate their critical thinking, we offered them several film extracts featuring legionnaires: Kevin MacDonald's *The Eagle of the 9th Legion* (2011),

and Uli Edel's *Julius Caesar* (2002), before giving them a quiz on the realities and inventions of the two films. One pupil also brought us the DVD *Asterix and Cleopatra*, and we studied the battle scenes featuring the scorpions presented by LEGIO VIII at the Sommerfest.

### **Pupils as cultural mediators**

The students' first cultural mediation took place in March 2023. The pupils presented their work to the new students at the open days of the European School in Karlsruhe. Disguised as legionnaires or goddesses, wearing a toga or brandishing a Spartan helmet worthy of the hero of the video game *Assassins Creeds Odyssey*, the pupils roamed the corridors of the school handing out flyers about the legionnaires' visit to the Sommerfest and attracting parents to the Legio VIII Challenge-programme room. My German colleague and I were keen to explain the importance of choosing the Latin option in S2. The laurel wreaths we handed out to visitors helped attract others.



Programme Challenge pupils in the class of P5 pupils discovering the game of mola rotunda

The Challenge-programme students then went on to present the life of the legionnaires to the P5 students of Julien Beaupoil, a teacher at the Grundschule in Karlsruhe. The P5 students drew lots to draw papers with orders/commands in Latin to make the Challenge-programme legionnaires obey them. We also brought along some molae rotundae to finish. We asked Julien Beaupoil to work with his pupils to build an aqueduct, but due to time constraints this was not possible. Finally, we had planned to run a stand alongside the legionnaires at the Sommerfest. However, our Challenge-programme pupils were busy with their concert or

other activities, so when they were available, they carried out the manoeuvres with the Legio VIII legionnaires, which attracted a good number of younger children. The legionnaires also offered to taste the moretum they used to enjoy in ancient times.

*Sarcinae and legionnaires' meal*



*Small and large chorobates used as levels for the construction of aqueducts.*





*Turtle training*

## **Review**

At the start of the 2023 academic year, a Latin class of 6 French Latinists will open, and it will not be made up entirely of Challenge-programme students (as several members will continue to play the instrument). So we've achieved our objective, even if the numbers are still very small. The Sommerfest was well attended by parents and children alike: pupils from the Kindergarden and Grundschule were able to discover the life of the Roman legionaries. The members of Legio VIII spoke to the public in French, English and German in a friendly atmosphere. They took care not to interfere with the shows and concerts.

## **Outlook**

Although Legio VIII volunteers are usually available at weekends, we can also ask ourselves whether it would have been more appropriate to carry out this operation during Project Week, the last week of school. However, we would then have had to involve more teachers in our

project. In fact, only three teachers took part in our project: my German Latin colleague Markus Scheer, whose pupils were invited to manoeuvre alongside the legionnaires, biology teacher Sophie Chabanis and P5 teacher Julien Beaupoil. On the other hand, several teachers (French, German, Italian, Belgian and English) enjoyed informal and relaxed discussions with the legionnaires at the Sommerfest on Sunday 25 June. We also invited our Latin colleagues from Strasbourg, Frankfurt and Munich to come and watch the manoeuvres; we also wanted to tell them about our plans to create a festival of ancient culture open to all European schools in 2025. In the meantime, we will be opening a new challenge programme in September 2023, and we intend to call on at least one expert from Legio VIII. In the year of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, we plan to focus on the role of sport in Greco-Latin civilisation.

June 2023.

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