The Project
This project will provide the first comprehensive analysis of the role played by tokens in the ancient Mediterranean. Tokens played a central role in cultural, religious, political and economic life in antiquity; closer study of these objects is thus imperative in gaining a fuller picture of the ancient world and its cultural legacy. The research will examine tokens and their contexts within the ancient world, focussing on the periods when they are in highest use: the Hellenistic period and the Roman world.

The project will enable researchers to better define what tokens were in antiquity, and what roles they played. Moreover, the research will also explore how these objects actively contributed to the generation of different types of community. The exploration of how tokens and token-communities within antiquity existed alongside official currencies and groups will also provide an important historical parallel for the contemporary development of alternative currencies, their associated values, and communities.

Dr Clare Rowan’s Views on the Importance of EU Funding
“The project is looking to examine, for the first time, ancient tokens across a broad geographical area, essentially building a new sub-discipline within ancient world studies. It will examine the previously unpublished museum collections within the UK and EU, which house thousands of ancient tokens. We are thus working in conjunction with numerous museums and collections.

The project could not have been done without EU funding for several reasons. Its scope and size meant that it needed a team of researchers and will take five years. The UK currently does not offer funding for these types of team projects to researchers of my status – the EU generously defines ‘early career’ as up to seven years after the PhD whereas UK funding bodies often define ‘early career’ as up to three years. The UK definition is quite unrealistic in the current academic market; at the time the award was made, I did not have a permanent position at a university and I am non-European/non-British in nationality. In fact, the EU funding has achieved one of its stated aims in funding this project and myself as a researcher, which is to keep academic talent within the EU – I would have otherwise taken up a position I had been offered in Australia.

The EU also funds ‘high risk/high gain’ questions – I don’t know whether UK funding bodies would have looked as kindly on a topic/sub-discipline which is essentially new and unknown. By enabling young researchers to lead their own research teams in order to tackle big high risk/high gain questions the EU funding also provides training for researchers in building and leading a research team, support not available in current UK research funding. Importantly too, EU funding awards its money to the researcher, not the institution, which empowers early career academics and enables them to build their careers.”