

CALL FOR PAPERS



Universität Hamburg

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The Anthropology of Objects: How can Objects Reveal Processes of Cultural and Social Change?

Dec. 7 – Dec. 8, 2023

RomanIslam Center (Early Islam) - Universität Hamburg

organizers: Stefan Heidemann & Kurt Franz (RomanIslam Center), Abigail Balbale (NYU) and Ramzi Rouighi (USC)

How can objects reveal processes of cultural and social change? This workshop, organized under the aegis of the [RomanIslam Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies](#) at Universität Hamburg, will explore how both surviving objects and discussions of objects in written sources reveal the vast political, religious and cultural changes that accompanied the transition from late antiquity to early Islam.

The RomanIslam Center focuses on the processes of empire building on the Iberian Peninsula and in North Africa during the Roman and Islamic periods, considered from a transcultural perspective. As part of the Center's theme for 2023-24, "Architecture and Materials of Prestige," this workshop examines how objects can shed light on cultural and political transformation, from both a theoretical level of analysis and the practical level of case studies. Although the case studies will mainly focus on al-Andalus and the Maghreb and on the long Late Antiquity (5th-11th centuries), broader papers that appraise the state of material culture studies or present examples from other regions that can offer a comparative perspective are most welcome.

The workshop will be organized over the course of two days, and along two axes. The first centers on "object biographies," tracing the life story of objects from their moment of production through their movement across time and space, and considers what objects can tell us about the contexts, in which they were produced and circulated. This axis centers physical evidence, using materials, techniques, patterns of wear and evidence of modification to illuminate the people who interacted with the objects. The second axis analyzes the social embeddedness of objects from a broader cultural perspective, considering how objects (including descriptions of objects in texts) reveal broader political, religious and economic patterns and asks about agents and the groups involved.

The workshop invites abstracts from scholars at all levels, from graduate student to full professor, working in the fields including history, art history, archaeology, and anthropology. Apart from more conceptual papers, we encourage contributions that specifically respond to the conference's axes. The RomanIslam Center plans to collect papers from the workshop into a peer-reviewed conference volume. Travel and hotel expenses will be covered by the Center.



Center for Comparative Empire
and Transcultural Studies

Abstracts should be 500-700 words in length. Please send them to katharina.mewes@uni-hamburg.de before **Sept. 27, 2023**.

Papers will be pre-circulated; presentations at the conference should summarize the speaker's major points without exceeding 25 minutes. There will be 25 minutes presentation followed by 20 minutes of discussion. Please submit your abstract along with a CV.