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Center for Comparative Empire  
and Transcultural Studies

# Hybrid Workshop

## Anthropology of the Object



Bowl with Griffin, Egypt, 11th century CE  
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## ABSTRACTS & PROGRAMM

**December 7-8, 2023**

“RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and  
Transcultural Studies” (Early Islam)

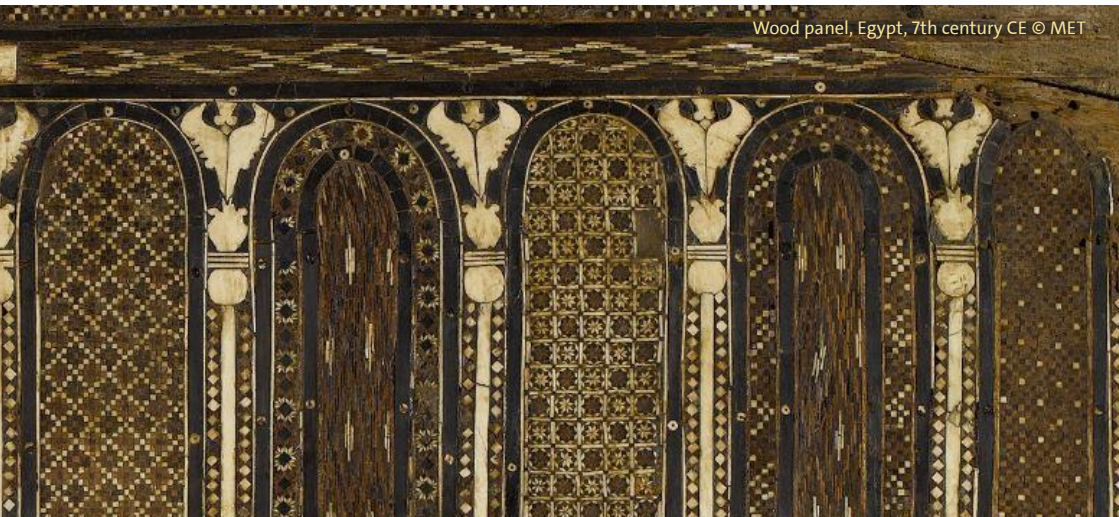


## Introduction

How can objects reveal processes of cultural and social change in the Early Islamic period? Any 'object', in the broadest possible meaning, is the material result of complex entangled social, economic, and even transcultural processes that lead to its creation, use, and disposal. Disentangling these, or in a way retro-engineering these processes, can shed light on the agency of craftsmen, consumers, patrons, and users, and thus also on its larger social embeddedness. The 'object' would not exist without a culture of professional training, a legal system, labour laws, monetary exchanges, transport infrastructure, or simply the prevailing taste. In order to unravel the 'object' as a historical source, it needs contextualization with a wide assortment of literary sources, and scholarly methods.

The workshop is organized along two axes. The first centres on 'object biographies', tracing the life story of objects from their inception on. The second axis stresses the social embeddedness of objects, of what they reveal to us regarding the individual agents in these processes, and how their life cycles are influenced by religious, legal, and economic patterns.

Wood panel, Egypt, 7th century CE © MET





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Bowl, 10th century CE © MET



## Program

### Thursday, December 7, 2023

AS-Saal, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

10:00 Registration

10:15 **Stefan Heidemann, Kurt Franz**  
(RomanIslam Center, Universität Hamburg)  
Introduction and Welcome

10:30 **Wendy Shaw**  
(Freie Universität Berlin)  
For the Birds? Seeds for an Islamic Museum

11:15 **Stefan Heidemann**  
(RomanIslam Center, Universität Hamburg)  
Anthropology of Objects – Case Study: Coins as Objects in  
Circulation and their Social Embeddedness

12:00 Coffee Break

12:15 **José C. Carvajal López**  
(Instituto de Ciencias del Patrimonio, Santiago)  
Islamization in Flows: From Object Biographies to Non-Object  
Flows

13:00 Lunch Break

14:00 **Jorge Elices Ocón**  
(Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

## Agents of Spoliation: Transcultural Circulation and Meanings of Ancient Spolia in Medieval Mediterranean Societies

14:45 **Georg Leube**

(Universität Bayreuth)

The Spatiality of a *lieu de mémoire*: The Ruins of the Achaemenid *tachara* at Persepolis/Takht-i Jamshīd and Their Appropriation in Pre-Industrial Islamicate Cultural History

15:30 Coffee Break

15:45 **Hagit Nol**

(Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main)

Dipinto Jars from the Southern Mediterranean, 6th–8th Centuries: Archaeological Thoughts about Object Lifecycles and Innovations

16:30 **Ramzi Rouighi** · *online*

(University of Southern California, Los Angeles)

A Bundle of Clothes in a Sufi Pickle

17:15 **Stefan Heidemann, Kurt Franz**

(RomanIslam Center, Universität Hamburg)

Conclusions, Day One

19:00 Dinner



Casting model for Jewelry, c. 10th century CE  
© Stefan Heidemann



## Friday, December 8, 2023

AS-Saal, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Hamburg

10:00 **Nicolas Mias**

(Universidad del País Vasco – EHU, Álava)

Power and Construction: Large Ashlar Masonry in Early Medieval Architecture in the Ebro Basin

10:45 **Amira Bennison** · *online*

(University of Cambridge)

Jewels, Silks and Artefacts: The Provenance and Meaning of Medieval Maghribi Procession Pieces

11:30 Coffee Break

11:45 **Abigail Balbale**

(New York University)

The Lead Seal of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mu‘āwiya al-Dākhil and the Beginnings of Umayyad al-Andalus

12:30 **Stefan Heidemann, Kurt Franz**

(RomanIslam Center, Universität Hamburg)

Roundtable: Object Biographies and Social Embeddedness

13:15 End of the Workshop

14:00 Lunch





## Abstracts and short profiles

### Wendy Shaw

(Freie Universität Berlin)



### For the Birds? Seeds for an Islamic Museum

Since the end of the nineteenth century, collections dedicated to what has come to be called Islamic art have proliferated, first in conjunction with para-colonial and imperial Euro-American interests in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, then as part of discourses of modernizing nationalism within the Middle East, and most recently as part of a reassessment of heritage, ownership, and narrative by new exhibitionary institutions in the Arab gulf region. Yet built on concepts of representation, ownership, and display closely linked with legacies of European Christianity, capitalism, and colonialism, such institutions display "the Islamic" through a European paradigm. At a historic moment when the nineteenth-century museum paradigm faces challenges including enhanced technologies of reproduction and distribution, this paper considers the figure of the "Simurgh" as articulated by Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi (1154-1191) and Farid al-Din Attar (1136-1221) as a means of imagining deterritorialized, multimodal paradigms of display rooted in the Islamic discursive tradition.





## Profile:

Professor Wendy M. K. Shaw (Ph.D. UCLA, 1999) publishes on the impact of coloniality and Eurocentrism on art-related institutions, heritage and preservation, modern art and pre- modern discourses of perception, and religious thought under secular modernism.

Her work focuses on the Ottoman Empire, modern Turkey and regions of Islamic hegemony. She is author of *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (University of California Press, 2003), *Osmanlı Müzeleri* (İletişim Yayınları, 2006), *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (IB Tauris, 2011). *What is "Islamic" Art: Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge University Press, 2019, Honorable Mention for the 2020 Albert Hourani Book Award of the Middle East Studies Association and the 2021 Iran Book Award), and *Loving Writing: Techniques for the University and Beyond* (Routledge, 2021).

Illustrated folio from a manuscript of the Shahnama by Firdawsi © President and Fellows of Harvard College





## Stefan Heidemann

RomanIslam Center, Universität Hamburg)



### **Anthropology of Objects – Case Study: Coins as Objects in Circulation and their Social Embeddedness**

How can objects reveal processes of cultural and social change in the Early Islamic period? Any 'object' is the material result of complex entangled social, economic, and even transcultural processes that lead to its creation, use, and disposal.

The two conceptual axes of the workshop between creation and use, and agent and pattern will be exemplified on one of the most 'telling' objects. Coins in their materiality reveal information on mining, and minting technology, even workshop organization, its dispersal and circulation, and eventual its secondary lifecycle with countermarks in a different or evolved monetary system, or as writing surface for additional notes as graffiti or dipinti, or pierced as jewelry, and finally as collectable as a witness of its own 'biography'. It also tells about the agents involved, the engravers and supervisors involved, its legal quality, and the distance it travelled to its find spot, the accepted design and much more. As groups, archaeological finds, and hoards, provide even more information. While coins offer more often than not writing as a means to its understanding, other objects can be interrogated in a similar way.



## Profile

Prof. Dr. Stefan Heidemann (Islamic Studies) supervised, until 2019, the ERC-Advanced Grant Project, The Early Islamic Empire at Work – The View from the Regions Toward the Center. The project explains the development of the early Islamic Empire through the transformation of regions and their interaction with the caliphal center, as well as the center’s links with transregional elites. Through topics of administrative geography, regional and transregional elites, and regional economic resources, the ERC Project has developed new understandings of the distinction between regional and transregional developments and has provided a conceptual apparatus essential for transcending tendencies of contemporary “national” history writing in the Maghreb and Spain. The study of trade is essential to its research. The exchange of precious metals and slaves were of primary importance to North Africa and Spain. Stefan Heidemann has published on the trade of silver from the Atlas with the Middle East, and on coin circulation in al-Andalus. He also initiated and directs the “Webinar Initiative in Islamic Material Culture” in which colleagues of LMU München, Universität Bonn, and New York University participate in the field of material culture through research-based teaching; he is also a co-PI in the Hamburger Cluster of Excellence “Understanding the Written Artifact,” where he is active in the area of “Inscribing Spaces” (epigraphy).



Coin of Diocletian (r. 293-305) overstruck in the Umayyad period

© Orientalisches Münzkabinett Jena



## José C. Carvajal López

(Instituto de Ciencias del Patrimonio, Santiago)



### Islamization in Flows: From Object Biographies to Non-Object Flows

In this paper I would like to introduce the idea of non-objects as an experiment extended from Augé's concept of non-places (rather as its meaning in cognitive science), but referred to archaeological constructs. In short, the non-objects I am focusing on here are those elements in archaeology that are insignificant as objects in themselves, but which acquire meaning when analysed as part of an "assemblage of interpretation". The clearest examples are those materials which are themselves at the base of archaeological analysis (e.g. ceramic sherds, ecofacts, building materials, etc.), but I will focus also on the less material concepts use to connect these materials in their "assemblages of interpretation" (e.g. processes, causal links, *chaînes opératoires*, etc). These "assemblages of interpretation", constructed by archaeologists over the years, have crystallised and become black boxes that channel the narratives about non-objects. But what happens if we free the non-objects (material and less material) from these chains and test new forms of relations between them and with other assemblages, following flows that break traditional boundaries? What I am describing here will be familiar those familiar with New Materialism. My concept of non-object, indeed, has more of Deleuzian metaphysics than of Augean anthropology, but achieves the same effect of destabilizing categories when it is needed.



I will argue in this paper that the analysis of Islamization will require precisely the consideration of non-object flows, as a way to follow flows of change and permanence that explain what Islamization means in a particular context (rather than trying to explain that context from the perspective of Islamization). The aim of this analysis of flow is to describe and to map Islamization as a molecular reality (in its Deleuzean sense), that is, as something that needs to be understood in scale and in intensity.

I will offer two examples from my own work and two more from two former PhD students:

I will depart from two examples about ceramic technology. In my own work, I have analysed the Islamisation of the area of the Vega of Granada, in South East Spain, by tracing the development and application of particular technological segments of the *chaînes opératoires* used to produce cooking pots. The pattern shows that Islamisation was related to a pattern of technological dispersion first and coalescence afterwards that changed ceramic production forever. The second example of this section is Jelena Živković's study of Belgrade ceramic production before and after the Ottoman Conquest of 1521, that similarly shows patterns of dispersion and coalescence, but under a much more determined sponsorship by the state. I will focus on how flows of non-objects (in this case, technological procedures), can be used to scale and compare processes of Islamization that are very distant and different in time.

The next two examples take the idea of on-objects flow a bit further. One example is based on an assemblage of a set of fishing net weights found in the site of Yughbī, in Qatar, and dating from the Umayyad period. The undoing a 'given' assemblage (the set of net weights, and then the weights themselves) and the creation of new ones with the non-objects (the weights as ceramic and stone sherds) results in a set of flows that we can consider obtaining a rich insight on the connectivity and networks of Yughbī first and of the whole Arabian-Persian Gulf at another scale.

Doing something similar in a very different context, my former PhD student (and now colleague) Mikel Herrán Subiñas has contributed to redefine the concept of house and its correlated concept of 'household' in the period of





Islamisation of al-Andalus, showing different patterns of development of Islamisation depending on a number of factors. Mikel basically took apart the concept of house by breaking up its constitutive elements and considering them in themselves across a number of different archaeological context, exemplified mainly in the cities of Zaragoza and Cordoba. He was able to compare very different processes of Islamization in the domestic sphere by comparing different flows that were present in all of the, but manifested in different ways.

## Profile

José C. Carvajal López did his undergraduate degree and his PhD at the University of Granada (Spain). He then held a Marie Curie Intra European Fellowship in the University of Sheffield (UK), became lecturer of Islamic Archaeology in UCL Qatar (2013-2017) and a lecturer of Historical Archaeology at the University of Leicester (UK) (2018-2023). Since 2023 is a Scientific researcher



José C. Carvajal López and an Iconic Object © Carvajal López

(equivalent to Associate Professor) at the Institute of Heritage Sciences (Incipit) in the Superior Council of Scientific Research (CSIC) of Spain. His specialist field as an archaeologist is pottery and material culture in general, primarily in Iberia and Qatar, but he also has experience in landscape and architectural archaeology. He focuses on archaeological study of the Islamic culture, mainly in the process of Islamization and in interactions of Islam with other cultures. He searches for approaches that combine anthropological theory on material culture and analyses with scientific techniques.



## Jorge Elices Ocón

(Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)



### **Agents of Spoliation: Transcultural Circulation and Meanings of Ancient Spolia in Medieval Mediterranean Societies**

My paper focuses on the agents of spoliation: the individuals who mediate and transform Antiquity and it remains in a new context, establishing how artefacts were perceived, managed or engaged. They were intermediaries and designated (or erased) value, function and meaning to spolia, (re)drawing the boundaries between spaces, societies, and cultures. They linked the context of origin of spolia and the context of reception. They also bring together medieval patron(s) or promoter(s), and an audience to whom the intention and meaning of spolia will be apprehensible. The paper considers literary and archaeological evidence from Late Antiquity to Late Middle Ages and from Christian, Islamic and Jewish contexts. By attending to a diachronic, comparative and transregional approach, this paper points out that the process of spoliation is more complex and connected than what previously considered. This line of investigation was addressed in a research project funded by the Humboldt Foundation, carried out at the Roman-Islam centre within the University of Hamburg between September and December 2022. The paper revolves around two ideas. Firstly, agents shaped spoliation as a transcultural phenomenon. They attended to the increasing demand of the courts and were also well-connected among them and between regions,





sharing interest in the same artefacts and employing sometimes the same strategies of appropriation and engagement with Antiquity that were operative across communities. Medieval Mediterranean entities traded and contended over the very same *spolia*, relics and ancient literary works, suggesting the existence of a Mediterranean *koiné*. Practices of spoliation shared common features from East to West, whether in Christian or Islamic realms, in churches or mosques. Meanings were also shared and travelled across the Mediterranean. For example, two porphyry columns brought from a church to build the new mosque in Kairouan had a clear economic and symbolic value. The Byzantine emperor wanted to buy them paying their weight in gold since the two columns were of great importance to him. The Iranian scholar and polymath al-Bīrūnī (d.c. 1052) also knew that purple colour was specific to the Caesars and was prohibited for the common people in ancient times. Agents were part of these interconnections. They were also part of a tradition of knowledge and shared skills. Thus, they facilitated and settled the process of reception, the portability of an object and its reception in a new context by selecting, identifying, changing, adding or adopting a key element (a scientific language, a figurative prompt, an inscription, an association with a place or character) that can be recognized, be familiar to an audience or resonate in new ways with its new setting. Agents also performed rituals that grant the way *spolia* have to be interpreted and engaged by people.

Secondly, agents not only contributed to blur cultural or religious frontiers, but also shaped major differences among them within the practices of spoliation and the *spolia*. They not only facilitate the interaction with antiquity and its remains, but also shape these interactions as well as the artefacts, practices, and cultures around them. They limited the process of reception, the transfer and appropriation of *spolia*, by selecting, pointing or linking them with a particular context of origin or display, by putting them in connection with other artefacts or characters (real or invented), by adding or replacing (erasing) a particular prompt or element. They also pointed to non-tolerated practices of engagement with *spolia*, sometimes showing the way an “other” engage with them in an unrightfully or unorthodoxy way. A literary account may provide a case of study. Ibn Khurdādhbih reports the looting of a tomb in Egypt, near Gizeh. Two secretaries of the court of Aḥmad



ibn Ṭūlūn participated in the enterprise and led the works carried out. They found a sarcophagus and an alabaster stele, broken in two pieces. It had three figures depicted. The stele was taken to Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn, who ordered a craftsman to repair it. He is a key figure in the process of spoliation, as well as, the two secretaries mentioned. They were responsible for reinterpreting the three figures depicted in the stele as Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. The identification was done by consensus and might have taken place in a ceremony held at the palace, where the stele was probably set and displayed, conveying a narrative that stressed monotheism, orthodoxy and leadership.

## Profile

Jorge Elices Ocón is Ramón y Cajal researcher at the CSIC-CCHS, Institute of History (Madrid). He holds an MA and PhD in Ancient Studies and was as postdoctoral researcher at Universidade Federal de Sao Paulo (Brazil), where he conducted a project on the afterlife of classical statuary in Islamic societies, supported by the FAPESP (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo). 2022 – 2023 he has been awarded with a Humboldt - Fellowship and conducted his research project at the Center for Advanced Study “RomanIslam – Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies” where he will develop a new research project focusing on the interpreters of antiquities.

Sarcophagus of Meleager © Jorge Elices Ocón





**Georg Leube**

(Universität Bayreuth)



**The Spatiality of a *lieu de mémoire*: The Ruins of the Achaemenid *tachara* at Persepolis / Takht-i Jamshīd and Their Appropriation in Pre-Industrial Islamicate Cultural History**

In my approach to the pre-industrial Islamicate reception history of the Achaemenid ruins of the so-called *tachara* at Persepolis / Takht-i Jamshīd, I deploy two theoretical concepts of material culture studies to understand these architectural remains as material objects. The first of these theoretical lenses follows the work of A. Gell to ask about the agency of material objects. While not as clearly attributable to one salient work of theoretical and anthropologically informed inquiry, the second concept of 'appropriation' enables the question of how specific human actors aimed to establish their dominance and interpretative hegemony over these awe-inspiring material remains of pre-Islamic palaces. In deploying these theoretical concepts to my study of Islamicate epigraphy at Persepolis / Takht-i Jamshīd, I highlight the spatiality of the ruins to ask how extant stones shaped human agency and how human agency in turn attempted to spatially establish interpretative hegemony over the site.

The rich epigraphic programme at the *tachara* has been edited in several Persian and Western studies coming from a very diverse theoretical



background. While some of the inscriptions were already transcribed and edited in the 18th century CE travelogue of Carsten Niebuhr, the subsequent archaeological focus on the glory of the Achaemenid period has tended to marginalize Islamicate testimonies at the site. Nonetheless, scholars like Muşţafawī, Sāmī, Melikian-Chirvani, Blair, and in particular Mukhlişī in his recent monograph on the Islamic inscriptions at Persepolis / Takht-i Jamshīd have offered critical editions of the text of these important testimonies to post-Achaemenid interactions with the material remains of the palace. However, none of these studies has offered a sustained investigation of the inscriptions grounded in the materiality and spatiality of the ruins. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, no attempt has been made to investigate the visual axes that accentuate and structure the evident textual linkages between the various inscriptions.

In two earlier articles, I have offered a critical edition of the 15th century Aqqyunlu inscriptions at the *tachara* together with their reception history, as well as a focussed discussion of the intertextuality linking the Aqqyunlu inscriptions to those calligraphies inscribed into the Achaemenid ruins during earlier courtly sessions of Timurid and other rulers over Fārs. In my contribution to this fascinating conference, I explore the spatiality of the Islamicate reception history of Persepolis / Takht-i Jamshīd along three dimensions. Firstly, I give an overview over the specific contexts in which narratives of the pre-Islamic ruins have been composed and negotiated in the pre-industrial Islamicate world. Subsequently, I discuss the narratively constructed spatiality of three salient pre-industrial accounts interpreting the history and significance of the ruins. Finally, I establish and interpret some of the significant visual axes and discontinuities structuring the distribution of some of the most prominent extant inscriptions that commemorate courtly sessions among the Achaemenid ruins.

Within the proposed framework of this conference, my investigation of the pre-industrial Islamicate reception history of the architectural remains at Persepolis / Takht-i Jamshīd as an object makes three significant interventions that are also applicable to anthropologically informed research on Islamicate al-Andalus and the Maghrib. The first intervention highlights the importance of including immobile objects such as Takht-i Jamshīd or



arguably the urban topography of pre-Islamically founded towns like Córdoba in our conceptualizations of the anthropology of specific objects. The second aspect immediately applicable to the regions investigated by the RomanIslam Center concerns the entanglement of materiality with the worlding of specific cultural memories, as manifest for instance in the description of *mirabilia* (*'ajā'ib*) in the geographical works of al-Bakrī and others. Finally, I underline the importance of specific spatial and material nexus in the negotiation of tradition, which motivated the repeated and / or sustained attempts of specific human actors acting from specific social and epistemic configurations to appropriate the material vestiges in which specific traditions were held to reside.

## Profile

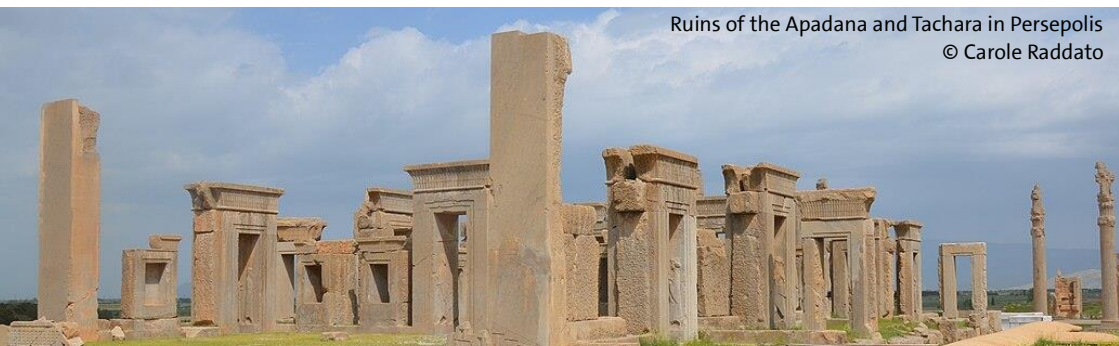
PD. Dr. habil. Georg Leube is Akademischer Oberrat (untenured associate professor / senior lecturer), at the University of Bayreuth, where he received his PhD in 2014.

He has published several monographs and articles on Islamic and Islamicate cultural history, including *Relational Iconography, Representational Culture at the Qaraqyunlu and Aqqyunlu Courts (853 / 1449 CE to 907 / 1501 CE)* and *Kinda in der frühislamischen Geschichte: Eine prosopographische Studie auf Basis der frühen und klassischen arabisch-islamischen Geschichtsschreibung*. In 2023 he was a member at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, supplemented by a Feodor Lynen Research Fellowship of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

His research focuses on Islamic cultural history with a special interest in the iconographies of authority in Persianate and Islamicate cultures, Islamic historiography and historical memory, prosopographical approaches to Islamic history, as well as the interaction and exchange in Islamic and Mediterranean written and material culture.

Ruins of the Apadana and Tachara in Persepolis

© Carole Raddato





## Hagit Nol

(Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main)



### **Dipinto Jars from the Southern Mediterranean, 6th–8th Centuries: Archaeological Thoughts about Object Lifecycles and Innovations**

Amphorae are a known object from all over the Mediterranean during Late Antiquity and later. Archaeologists have classified them into ‘types’ based on their shape as well as their possible date and place of production. Direct analogies with the textual evidence led scholars to interpret them as containers mainly for the trade of wine and olive oil. Residue analyses of found jars are often not exclusive but generally support the common interpretation. In Israel/Palestine, archaeological sites which consist of kilns adjacent to winepresses provided another support for that interpretation. The use of this objects, however, does not necessarily relate to the archaeological classification or to the provenance. Complete assemblages from the region, such as from shipwrecks, present the use of various ‘types’ of jars in parallel. The first purpose of this talk is to examine the gap between the ‘etic’ perspective, in this case the archaeological classification, and the ‘emic’ perspective, the use of jars. In that regard I will discuss the ‘Pompeii premise’, which means the interpretation of archaeological contexts as frozen realities. In other words, it ignores the complex lifecycle of objects – from their production to their multiple occurrences of use, reuse and deposition.





The paper will then present one case study of dipinto jars (inscribed with paint) from Egypt and the Levant during the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries. The archaeological record shows a common use of these jars, many of which are marked by Greek signs or texts using red pigments. According to Dominique Pieri, the only scholar I'm aware of to study these data, the texts relate to economic activity and mainly represent weight units and owners. The study of the jars, however, might benefit from broadening their context and comparing them to additional inscriptions from the period. Academically, dipinti texts 'fall between the cracks' of several disciplines (history, epigraphy, papyrology, archaeology) due, possibly, to their scarcity and textual simplicity. My primary examination of the published data suggests that these inscriptions stand in contrast to most other types of dipinti objects in the period which only use black ink. The amphorae also differ from the 'Nabi Samwil jars' which are often marked by a round stamp on their handle – with or without Arabic inscriptions. On the other hand, the amphora dipinti resemble writings on church walls in Israel/Palestine which also use red pigments (and the Greek language). The second purpose of the paper is to explain these patterns within our context. A first explanation could be temporal – that the Greek/red dipinti is earlier than the later common use of black ink. This could be tested on well-stratified contexts. Another interpretation I would like to explore relate to 'innovations' – the adoption of technological or ideological novelties. Innovation theory in archaeology follows several directions, chiefly questions about the evolution of technological solutions, the diffusion of ideas, phases and agents in the process, and the resistance to inventions. Consulting both the archaeological contexts and ink analyses of the period, I will inquire whether the contemporary recipe of black ink could be interpreted as a 7<sup>th</sup>-century innovation. If it is, then the use of red pigments could perhaps represent a specific community, such as local Christians. The use of red pigments could be further explained as an identity marker, or as a signifier for different networks – of raw materials or 'know how'. The question of innovation is mostly relevant to archaeologists of the Iberian Peninsula, where various changes in the material culture between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries are explained through another paradigm: of migration.





## Profile

Prof. Dr. Hagit Nol studied Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. 2019 she finished her PhD at the Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg (Germany), under the supervision of Prof. Stefan Heidemann and Prof. Donat Wehner. Her PhD thesis was “Landscaping Early Islam: The History of Settlement in Central Israel during the 7th-11th Centuries through Archaeology, Terminology and Narratives”. 2020-2022 she was a Post-Doctorate Marie-Curie fellow at the Centre de Recherches en Archéologie et Patrimoine, Université libre de Bruxelles). Since 2023 she is Junior Professor for Islamic Archaeology and Art History, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main.



Fatimid jar from Egypt, late 10th–early 11th century CE © Discover Islamic Art (MWNF)



## Ramzi Rouighi

(University of Southern California, Los Angeles)



### A Bundle of Clothes in a Sufi Pickle

This examination of clothing in thirteenth-century Ifriqiyā shows that economic, political, and cultural processes are at play simultaneously and that they generated meaning across entangled levels of social interaction, thus challenging historians to espouse multiple analytical frames. Paying close attention to the production, circulation, and symbolic value attached to this “superficial” marker of social status, the presentation analyzes written sources across genres in order to make plain the operations of both medieval and modern sense-making.

### Profile

Prof. Dr. Ramzi Rouighi is a historian whose research has focused on the medieval Maghrib and Mediterranean. He is the author of *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate: Ifriqiyā and Its Andalusis* (2011) and *Inventing the Berbers: History and Ideology in the Maghrib* (2019).





## Nicolas Mias

(Universidad del País Vasco – EHU, Álava)



### **Power and Construction: Large Ashlar Masonry in Early Medieval Architecture in the Ebro Basin**

This abstract introduces my doctoral research, which aligns with the RomanIslam Centre's 2023-2024 theme on "Architecture and Prestige Materials" and corresponds to the workshop's second axis by focused on the social embeddedness of objects.

**Aims and hypotheses:** My doctoral thesis aims to explore the social history of power by investigating early medieval architecture and building techniques using the Ebro basin in the early Middle Ages (7th-10th centuries) as a case study. Specifically, I examine the use of *opus quadratum* on the border with al-Andalus to identify the types of power employing this technique, their strategies, and the social changes it engendered. The starting hypothesis posits a correlation between monumentalisation, the degrees of sophistication of building techniques, and the different forms of local and central powers. Indeed, we assume that the driving force behind technological development is political, temporal and sacred power. In the Ebro basin, considered as a permeable but continuous technical milieu, change can come from borrowing and invention. The *opus quadratum* is a construction method that relates to specific technological knowledge and



requires a high degree of planning and investment in manpower. Technology, as a total social fact, is an integral part of social and economic change. As a social practice, its use tends to reproduce the social structures that produced it, except in the conjuncture of a radical transformation. This use can be seen as an integrated instrument in an economy designed for the accumulation of capital, both material and symbolic, where dominant social groups reinforce social inequality by exercising varying degrees of control over the systems for producing goods that provide social advantage, notably through specific technological choices focused on the most sophisticated and specialised knowledge, skills, tools and processes. In a complex context of relations between different powers and social groups, we can assume that practices depend on the general structure of the relationship between the groups, and that their interaction tends to modify their respective practices.

**Specific aims and methodology:** This work proposes to analyse the ashlar architecture in certain urban and rural contexts from a perspective that values the forms of social display, the systems of production and the social value attributed to the different buildings. Specific objectives include (1) the identification of buildings relevant to the study of early medieval ashlar building techniques; (2) the execution of a comprehensive and analytical archaeological study using advanced dating techniques such as OSL and chronological modelling; (3) the assessment of architectural phenomenon through the lens of operational chains; and (4) the examination of manifestations of central and local power from a social history perspective.

**Relevance of the subject:** The interest of this study lies in the fact that, during these centuries, the Ebro basin was a frontier territory between the centralized Umayyad tax-based state and feudal political formations, in which conditions were created for political experimentation and the use of a language of domination that found its maximum expression in architecture. The social entanglement of the dimensions of monumentalisation, such as the levels of technical sophistication involved in the hypertrophy of the modules or the regularity of the building, can have generated dimensions of power, such as the respect for the rules of hierarchy and domination. In the



context of the extension of a state social formation producing dynamics of rivalry between local powers to establish their power within or outside state structures, and the development of a prestige economy, the heterogeneity of the remains of the Ebro may be explained by a model of multiple invention, within the framework of a normalisation of the use of this general technique as an instrument of legitimisation based on the model of central authority.

**Keywords:** Opus quadratum, Early Middle Ages, Ebro basin, Power, Social change

## Profile

Nicolas Mias studied Archaeology at the Université Paris IV Sorbonne (2017) and Medieval Studies at the Université Toulouse 2 (2010). He is currently PhD student at the department of Geography, Prehistory and Archaeology at the Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/EHU) and the Université Bordeaux-Montaigne (UMR Archéosciences). He participated in numerous archaeological excavation and heritage masonry projects. His research interests focus on the archaeology of Islamic buildings in the north of the Iberian Peninsula.



Ashlar Masonry in the Foundations  
of the Castle of Soliedra (Soria)  
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## Amira Bennison

(University of Cambridge)



### **Jewels, Silks and Artefacts: The Provenance and Meaning of Medieval Maghribi Procession Pieces**

This talk will explore some objects that formed part of medieval Maghribi royal processions. I shall focus on the relatively well-known Almohad caliphal processions into and out of their capital, Marrakesh, and other important cities. The focus of much research on these processions has been the Almohad display of two scriptural relics, the Qur'ān of 'Uthmān and the Qur'ān of the Mahdī Ibn Tūmart. However, these processions involved a considerable amount of preparation, the sourcing of a range of materials, objects and animate beings and their careful arrangement in the procession to project a multi-faceted image of Almohad religio-political status. The objects whose provenance, use and socio-cultural meaning I will explore will be drawn from the silk cloth and brocade, jewels and other high value materials used in the Qur'ān boxes, clothing, armour, weaponry, the horse, camel and mule carrying the caliph and the Qur'āns respectively. While full 'biographies' are hard to come by, sources provide some hints about the trajectories of these objects. Some of these stand out as travelling objects – such as the 'ḥafīr' ruby – some were manufactured specially – Qur'ān boxes and tabernacles – and others – silk and brocade - were drawn from the pool of luxury items made or imported for courtly use.



## Profile

Amira K. Bennison is Professor in the History and Culture of the Maghrib at the University of Cambridge and a Professorial Fellow of Magdalene College. She has published extensively on the pre-modern Maghrib, Maghribi modes of legitimation, cultures of power and their relationship with urbanism. Her publications include *Jihad and its Interpretations* (2002), *The Great Caliphs* (2009) and *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires* (2016). She has introduced her research to a wider audience by leading cultural tours in Spain, North Africa and Syria and contributing regularly to television and radio programmes on Islamic history.







## Abigail Balbale

(New York University)



### The Lead Seal of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mu‘āwiya al-Dākhil and the Beginnings of Umayyad al-Andalus

This talk explores the early history of al-Andalus through the evidence of a singular lead seal imprinted with the name of the first Umayyad ruler of Cordoba. This is, in fact, the only object from the period that carries the name of the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, and its initial purpose and usage as well as its broader life history are largely obscure. But the inscription on one side of the seal as well as the material evidence that it was at some point embedded on chain mail suggest that this object was used to authorize a military man fighting for ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. Through close examination of the object, alongside consideration of other lead seals from late antique and Islamic contexts and written sources, this talk will illuminate the state-building practices of the first Umayyad ruler of al-Andalus and the unique role material objects could play in representing power.

#### Profile

Prof. Dr. Abigail Krasner Balbale is Assistant Professor of Islamic History in the Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University. Balbale teaches and researches at the intersection of history, art history and Islamic studies, bringing together written, visual and material sources



alongside theoretical frameworks to explore the history of the Islamic Middle Period. She received her PhD in History and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard in 2012, and previously taught at Bard Graduate Center and the University of Massachusetts Boston. She has published articles on jihad and holy war ideology, the art and architecture of the Almohad dynasty, the historiography of al-Andalus, and Arabic amulets and coinage, as well as co-edited two books, *Justice and Leadership in Early Islamic Courts* (Harvard, 2017) and *Spanning the Strait: Studies in Unity in the Western Mediterranean* (Brill, 2013). With Jerrilynn Dodds and María Rosa Menocal she co-authored the prize-winning book *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture* (Yale, 2008). She is the recipient of a 2018 National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship, and has previously been awarded grants from the Medieval Academy of America, ACLS and the Mellon Foundation.



The Lead Seal of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mu'āwiya al-Dākhil



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