

Call for Papers

Connecting Constantinople: Objects, Empire, and Inter-Civic Relationality

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The Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul & The Netherlands Institute in Turkey

From Constantine's transfer of the *Palladium* from Rome to Constantinople, to Sultan Selim I's symbolic acquisition of the keys to the Ka'aba, objects, both tangible and symbolic, have played a pivotal role in shaping and symbolizing the connectivity between Constantinople and its urban counterparts. These objects can provide us with a unique lens through which to examine Constantinople's development, potentially revealing a kaleidoscope of inter-urban exchanges that contributed to the city's development and that of others. They enable us to conceptualize the convergence of real and imagined inter-urban connections on Constantinople, highlighting how the accumulation, curation, and distribution of objects intersected with the ambitions of the city's ruling elites, and the inter-civic networks fashioned by means of them. Through the complex history of objects, brought to the city from other cities, and distributed or forcibly taken from it, Constantinople emerges as a relational space, characterized by the movement of objects between cities and the inter-urban relationships maintained by them.

This workshop seeks to explore the profound impact of such objects on the inter-civic relationships between Constantinople and its counterparts, and to offer new insights into the intricate dynamics of urban connectivity from antiquity to the present day. We intend to explore how objects served as key mediators in shaping, imagining, and maintaining inter-urban relationships between Constantinople and other cities. By doing so, our aim is to develop new interdisciplinary perspectives on the dynamic relationship between objects and urban spaces, placing specific focus on the concepts of *relationality* and *mobility*. *Relationality* refers to the interconnectedness between cities, while *mobility* encompasses the movement, accumulation, curation, and distribution of objects. By investigating how and why objects moved from one city to another and the functions and meanings assigned to this mobility by historical actors, we hope to arrive at a better understanding of the complex network of inter-urban connections that shaped Constantinople's multifaceted urban development, from its foundation to its modern cityscape today. Furthermore, by focusing on the mobility of these objects and their distribution and acquisition by various historical actors, we aim to deepen our understanding of Constantinople's position within a broader network of cities and scrutinize changes that influenced the organization and maintenance of these networks. The ultimate goal of this workshop is to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of Constantinople as an imperial city that transcends traditional models, such as that between center and periphery, or purely comparative approaches between one city's development and another. Instead, through the prism of inter-civic mobility, we seek to comprehend how the accumulation and distribution of objects in Constantinople exposes a variety of different inter-civic networks, and to shed light on how historical actors perceived the influence of these movements on the city's development as a cosmopolitan and imperial space.

To assess these dynamics, we invite contributions addressing any aspect of the role of objects in the production of inter-civic connectivity between Constantinople and other cities. We encourage proposals on a wide range of topics, including (but not limited to) the following:

- **Objects and Diplomatic Exchanges:** how gifts, relics, and diplomatic exchanges have influenced alliances and rivalries between Constantinople and other urban centers.
- **Objects and Urban Identities:** how objects contribute to the construction and negotiation of urban identities, both within Constantinople and in its interactions with other cities.
- **Objects and Economic Exchange:** the economic exchange of objects and the formation of inter-civic trade networks
- **Religious Artifacts and Networks:** the significance of religious objects, relics and others sanctified materials in fostering spiritual connections between Constantinople and other religious centers and cities.
- **Architectural Influences:** Tracing the diffusion of architectural styles and motifs through objects, as well as the movement of (spoliated) building materials from one city to another.
- **Literary and Artistic Representations:** how historical actors have understood and imagined the mobility of objects between Constantinople and other urban centers, in literature, art, and visual culture.
- **Possible examples:** manuscripts and other textual media; relics, icons and human remains; coins; building materials (and spolia); art, sculpture and statues; (tourist) memorabilia; materials like silk and porcelain; city models; obelisks and other architectural objects; museum collections and discussions about the return of heritage; people as objects of exchange, etc.

Keywords: Objects, Relationality, Mobility, Connectivity, Distribution, Accumulation, Spoliation, Convergence, Networks, Gift-giving, Empire, Cosmopolis, Empire, Urban History

Submission Guidelines

Abstracts of no more than 400 words (excluding bibliography) and suitable for a 45 minute presentation should be sent as an email attachment to both workshop organizers, Kay Boers (k.boers@uu.nl) and Rolf Strootman (r.strootman@uu.nl) **before 16 March 2025**. Please also include a brief biography/cv (max. 100 words). Contributors will be notified about whether their abstract is accepted before 1 April 2025. We plan to publish the papers with Brill in the series [Cultural Interactions in the Mediterranean](#). This workshop is kindly supported by the [Netherlands Institute in Turkey](#) (NIT), the [Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul](#) (SRII), and Utrecht University.

For inquiries or additional information, please reach out to either Kay Boers or Rolf Strootman

Organizing Committee

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