

MESA Conference
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New Orleans, Louisiana

Call for Papers

Panel “Beyond Islamic Art: New Approaches to the Material Culture of the Middle East”

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In recent years, the disciplines of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies have witnessed a growing interest in material culture. The aim of this panel is to foster exchange between scholars working in this research field and to reflect upon methodological challenges.

Scholarly engagement with Middle Eastern material culture is not entirely new. The disciplines of Islamic Art History and Archaeology have been practiced and taught for over 100 years, following a positivist tradition that gives priority to phenomenology and what is considered to be Islamic Art. The recent trend towards material culture studies, in contrast, is characterised, first, by an interest in socio-cultural and socio-historical questions, and second, by taking into account all sorts of artefacts, not just artistic production. The underlying assumption is that material objects – from the buildings we live in to the waste we produce – constitute integral elements of every society. People use things to produce food, facilitate their work, connect with one another, fight each other, worship their gods, mark their sexual or group identity, distinguish themselves from others, exert power over others, stimulate desires, cure bodily, mental and social ills and do away with their deaths. Material objects are thus indispensable in almost all social practices. As Foucault has famously shown using Jeremy Bentham’s prison architecture, the panopticon, as an example, social structures depend heavily on physical structures, which therefore deserve to be considered appropriately.

The new trend in material culture studies is accompanied by an expansion of the analytical perspectives in several directions. Social practices, structures and discourses connected with certain types of objects as well as the sensory perception of, or affects and atmospheres evoked by, material arrangements have increasingly become the focus of attention.

Scholars of all relevant disciplines – Middle East Studies, Islamic Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, Architecture, Archaeology, Art History etc. – are invited to submit abstracts for papers dealing with the material culture of the Middle East (submissions dealing with other parts of the

Islamicate World are also welcome) from the seventh century to the present. Contributions addressing at least one of the following topics are particularly welcome:

- socio-cultural and socio-historical perspectives on aesthetics and materialities
- social and bodily practices involving the interaction of human beings and objects
- sensual perception of, and affects produced by, physical structures and material arrangements
- discourse pertaining to artefacts, objects and specific materials

Paper abstract should relate to the theme of the panel and have a strong, focused statement of thesis or significance. Abstracts presenting clear goals, theoretical approach and methodology, specified sources, and convincing, coherent arguments will be given preference.

Please submit paper abstracts (300 to 400 words) to stefan.maneval@orientphil.uni-halle.de by **February 8, 2019**.

Please note that you must be a member of the Middle East Studies Association for 2019 to present a paper at the MESA conference. Unfortunately, no funding is available to offer financial assistance to participants. For details concerning the registration process, please visit the MESA website: <https://mesana.org/annual-meeting/call-for-papers>

