

Things on the Move.

Materiality of Objects in Global and Imperial Trajectories, 1700–1900

An International Conference organized by the German Historical Institute London in Collaboration with the Prize Papers Project

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Host/Venue: German Historical Institute London, 17 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2NJ

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The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were defined by increased globalization, the growth of empires outside Europe, the emergence of global markets, and the establishment of colonial rule in many parts of the world. As recent scholarship has shown, an amplified movement of people - both voluntary and involuntary - and of objects in space and time was at the very core of these processes. This conference will focus on the movement of material objects and analyse the significance of their mobility in this period of great transformation.

Studying objects and their trajectories in space and time allows us to analyse how objects produce, carry, and change their meanings over time and in different situations. How did – and do - objects shape everyday practices and impact on events and structures in wider geographical and cultural contexts? Focusing on both structures and everyday practices, newer approaches like global microhistory create an awareness of how developments are interlinked on both a macro and a micro scale, especially with regard to the interconnected histories of material practices.

While perspectives on global materiality have become increasingly important, the conference aims to bring together perspectives from global history and the history of European imperialism and colonialism. Research on the structures of colonialism has typically produced microstudies, for example, of the production and circulation of commodities and objects. Similarly, debates about the restitution of art objects acquired as loot in the wake of European imperialism in Asia and Africa and now held by European museums have focused on the movement of objects across large parts of the globe under conditions of force and imperial control. However, the many complex overlaps between the production and movement of things at the intersection of the global, the imperial, and the colonial merit greater scrutiny. By focusing on the global, imperial, and colonial materiality of objects on the move within a common analytical framework, the conference will bring these partly distinct research fields into closer conversation with each other. It aims to bring together scholars to discuss the potential of a material history with global scope for investigating connections and exclusions, and for exploring the plurality of cultures, cross-cultural encounters, life processes, and exchange processes in contact zones in different parts of the world. Such a conversation,

developing out of an analysis of material culture, has the potential to challenge grand narratives of globalization or European expansion and perhaps even to break down rigid epochal barriers and allow for a new periodization of world history.

The conference will analyse the significance of a global material mobility at a time of great transformation between the early modern and the modern period. It will focus on objects and their trajectories a) from a global history and from a global microhistory perspective, b) from the perspective of colonial history, and (c) particularly on their intersection.

Key questions

- What everyday practices shaped the material global worlds of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?
- How does a focus on objects and the study of global materiality alter ways of narrating the past?
- How do we define the role and agency of objects in global/imperial/colonial contexts?
- How did objects produce, carry, and change meanings and functions in colonial and global trajectories?
- Can a typology—or multiple typologies—of objects and their uses in a global context be identified?
- How did the meaning of objects change between the phase of globalization in the eighteenth century and the globalization processes of nineteenth-century imperialism and colonialism?
- How did the materiality of objects and the values and meaning attributed to them shape the processes and conditions of exchange in contact zones?

We invite papers that address these questions in a global or colonial–global framework from the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth, with special emphasis on the social contexts at sites of origin. We also welcome contributions with a focus on Digital Humanities that are related to the main theme of the conference.

Please send an abstract of around 300 words and a short CV (max. 1 page) to i.sengupta@ghil.ac.uk by 28 February 2022.