



## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS

International conference

**October 22-24<sup>th</sup> 2025**

Marseille – Centre de la vieille Charité, salle du miroir

As part of the working group

*Collections and Collectors of Non-Western Objects in the Mediterranean*



2025 winning project of the INHA *Carte Blanche* program: *histoire de l'art en région*

### **Mediterranean ports and territories: circulation of cultural goods, constitution of extra-European collections (17th-21st centuries)**

This colloquium aims to analyze the constitution of public and private collections of extra-European cultural goods around the Mediterranean basin. From Antiquity to the contemporary world, the Mediterranean remains a strategic crossroads for the circulation of goods, people and ideas, a "space of movement" as Fernand Braudel defined it. Port cities (Marseille, Toulon, Genoa, Barcelona, etc.) are the hubs for the arrival of objects and their distribution to merchants, before they are "collected" or even, their patrimonialisation in institutions.

Communications will be structured around three axes:

1. Mediterranean ports and territories: at the crossroads of commercial, economic and cultural movements
2. Typology of cultural goods: materiality and immateriality
3. Constitution of public and private collections

## **The Mediterranean as a historical hub**

Geographically privileged, the Mediterranean has always been a place where cultures have exchanged uninterruptedly, which continues to the contemporary era. This inland sea, *Mare Nostrum*, allowed the meeting between Europe, Africa and Asia, making it possible to introduce artifacts from distant cultures into European collections. Ports served as privileged entry points for objects from distant territories, hosting commercial infrastructures and networks of specialised merchants. This circulation has enabled the development of specific expertise in the identification and evaluation of cultural goods, and the dissemination of these objects to the hinterland and the rest of Europe. The evolution of coastal occupation methods from the 18th century onwards makes it possible to broaden the subject to the context of holiday-ing, and later of tourism.

Thus, it is appropriate to analyse the commercial network of cultural goods which reveals an organization including:

- Specialist traders established in port cities
- Intermediaries linking supply sources to European markets
- Private collectors and public institutions as clients
- Circuits for the valuation and authentication of objects

## **The cultural and political dimension of collections**

The creation of these collections does not only respond to commercial logic, but is also part of cultural and political dynamics:

- Affirmation of prestige and power through the possession of rare and exotic objects
- Construction of knowledge on distant cultures
- Establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations with the territories of origin
- Expression of an intellectual curiosity for cultural alterity

Understanding these circulation and acquisition mechanisms sheds light not only on the history of the collections themselves, but also on the complex relationships between Europe and the rest of the world over the centuries. Relationships for which, the Mediterranean has been the privileged theatre.

## **Typology of cultural goods: materiality and immateriality**

Non-European cultural goods can be categorised according to several distinct criteria: their original functions for ritual and religious objects (African masks, Buddhist statues), utilitarian objects (Native American pottery, Asian textiles), or even prestige objects (Oceanian finery, Chinese imperial furniture). Archival gaps pose a major challenge in the study of these goods - many objects lack precise provenance or documentation, particularly for acquisitions in a colonial context. This will enable us to address objects collected during scientific expeditions, commercial acquisitions, war booty or colonial appropriations - the latter category now raising important questions of restitution.

Moreover, the evolution of Western taste has profoundly influenced their valorization with processes of "artification" (Nathalie Heinich): considered as simple "curiosities", then as "primitive" objects at the beginning of the 20th century, they acquired the status of works of art. The specific materiality of certain goods, such as Persian illuminated manuscripts or Mesoamerican codices as well as weapons, requires particular approaches. Finally, the immaterial dimension must also be taken into account: traditional pigments, botanical samples used in rituals, or artisanal techniques and know-how, constituting a cultural heritage whose study requires innovative approaches going beyond simple material conservation.

## **The constitution of collections of extra-European objects**

Public and private collections of non-European objects grew considerably at the beginning of the 20th century - a pivotal period that saw the emergence of a veritable art market dedicated to these objects, which had long been marginalized in Western historiography.

The beginning of the 20th century marked a decisive turning point in the perception of non-European objects. The artistic influence of the avant-gardes, notably Cubism and Fauvism, transformed the Western view of these objects, moving from the status of ethnographic artifacts to works of art. Visionary art dealers, such as Paul Guillaume and Charles Ratton in Paris, played a fundamental role in creating this new market, organizing the first specialised sales and commercial exhibitions of African, Native American, and Oceanic art.

Collectors from this period present varied profiles. These include artists such as Pablo Picasso, André Derain, and Henri Matisse, all seeking aesthetic inspiration in these objects. Then come intellectuals and writers like Guillaume Apollinaire or André Breton, attracted by their spiritual dimension and their expressive power. Finally, wealthy Western industrialists and financiers, such as Jacques Doucet and Albert Barnes, began to incorporate these pieces into their eclectic collections.

These collectors' motivations oscillate between aesthetic fascination, speculative investment, social prestige and sometimes, real anthropological empathy. This diversity of profiles has helped to shape collections with distinct characteristics, some favoring aesthetic quality, others cultural representativeness or authenticity.

## **The processes of patrimonialisation**

The status transformation of these objects took place through several stages of heritage creation. Initially collected as exotic curiosities or material evidence of "primitive cultures," these objects gradually acquired artistic and cultural legitimacy. As a result, specialized museums institutions

were created, such as the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (1937) or, more recently, the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac (2006). This institutional heritage was accompanied by scientific work of inventory, documentation and conservation, transforming collections often constituted opportunistically into coherent and representative sets.

### **Evolution of exhibition strategies**

It would also be appropriate to analyse the evolution of the methods of displaying these objects. The initial presentations were inspired by cabinets of curiosities, or were organised according to evolutionary taxonomies. These presentations then gave way to more contextualized approaches in ethnographic museums, and then to aestheticized presentations favoring formal contemplation in art museums.

### **Bibliographical guidance :**

Yaëlle Biro, *Fabriquer le regard. Marchands, réseaux et objets d'art africains à l'aube du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Dijon, Les Presses du réel, 2018.

Léa Saint-Raymond, *À la conquête du marché de l'art. Le Pari(s) des enchères (1830-1839)*, Paris, Classique Garnier, 2021.

Elodie Vaudry, *Les arts précolombiens. Transferts et métamorphoses de l'Amérique latine à la France, 1875-1945*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019.

Albera D., Crivello M. et Tozy M. (dirs), *Dictionnaire de la Méditerranée*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2016.

Carlos B. A. et Kinoshita Sh. (dirs), *Can We Talk Mediterranean ? Conversations on an Emerging Field in Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Londres, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Horden P. et Purcell N., *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000.

Philippe Dagen, Maureen Murphy (dir.), *Charles Ratton. L'invention des arts « primitifs »*, cat. d'exp, (Paris, musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, 2013), Paris, Skira, 2013.

Nathalie Heinich, « Les arts premiers » dans *De l'artification. Enquêtes sur le passage de l'art*, dir. Nathalie Heinich, Roberta Shapiro, Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2012.

Pierre Singaravelou, Sylvain Venayre (dir.), *Le magasin du monde : la mondialisation par les objets du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours*, Paris, 2020

## Proposals :

Proposals for communications should be sent to [exocmed@gmail.com](mailto:exocmed@gmail.com) before May 30, 2025.

They should present the topic of the presentation in a maximum of 500 words and should be accompanied by a brief biographical and bibliographical note (maximum 300 words).

The call is open to students who have completed a Master's or doctoral thesis, as well as to established researchers.

Presentations will be 20 minutes long. Responses will be communicated in early June.

## Scientific committee :

- Nathalie Bertrand, TELEMMe AMU
- Claire Bosc-Tiessé, EHESS, IMAF
- Lucie Chopard, chercheuse associée au laboratoire SAprat (EPHE-PSL)
- Théano Jaillet, Musées de Cannes
- Sarah Lestruhaut, musée Calvet, Avignon
- Benoit Martin, MAAOA, Marseille
- Philippe Peltier, conservateur honoraire, musée du quai-Branly-Jacques Chirac

## Steering committee :

- Agnès Rabion, TELEMMe
- Caroline Chagniot, TELEMMe
- Delphine Cavallo, TELEMMe
- Sophie Deshayes, Musées de Marseille
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