

Material Encounters in the Early Modern World, 1400–1800 (HIST31881)



Dr Stefan Hanß

Course: In 1587, customers could choose from 128,955 African, Asian, American, and European feathers in one single store in Venice. Shortly afterwards, English scientists studied similar feathers under the newly invented microscope. How did such globally traded things shape how people experienced the world? Bringing global history and material culture studies into a conversation with anthropology, (underwater) archaeology, art history, microscopy and museology opens new perspectives on writing decentered histories of the early modern past and the early modern 'discovery of things.' In this time of the first globalisation, people around the globe experienced an unprecedented diversity of material cultures through global trade and colonialism. This course follows the dynamics of circulating materials, offering fresh perspectives on the big stories that small things may tell: excavated cargo ships; the exploitation of Amazonian biodiversity; indigenous perspectives on colonial encounters; global trade of Indian textiles; the restitution of Polynesian artefacts from Cook's expeditions, and *much* more.

Aims: This course equips students with profound knowledge in early modern history, global history and material culture studies. Students will develop object-centred approaches to the past by studying how objects shaped history and how historians may examine objects. Students will debate connected histories, cultural crossings, materialized identities, and the agency of things. Such concepts challenge centre-periphery models of historical change and open up global approaches to the past. Students will learn methods of studying historical artefacts, e.g. digital microscopy, 3D object-scanning, narrative approaches, remaking experiments. This course will provide students also with a deep understanding of early modern zones of cultural contacts and material exchange, e.g. the Atlantic world of commodities, indigenous-European gift-giving, and the Eurasian textile trade. The course will show (i) how things constituted connections, exchanges and identities and (ii) how objects reveal the daily life experiences of a changing world. Students will explore and reflect on cross-disciplinary perspectives between history, material culture studies, anthropology, archaeology, museology, and visual studies.

Recommended reading

- J. H. Bentley et al., *The Construction of a Global World, 1400–1800 CE* (Cambridge, 2015).
- A. Gerritsen & G. Riello, *The Global Lives of Things: Material Culture of Connections in the Early Modern World* (London, 2016).
- S. Hanß, 'Material Encounters: Knotting Cultures in Early Modern Peru and Spain', *The Historical Journal* 62 (2019).
- B. Lemire, *Global Trade and the Transformation of Consumer Cultures: The Material World Remade, c. 1500–1820* (Cambridge, 2018).
- A. Peck, *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800* (New York, 2013).
- C. Richardson et al., *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2017).
- U. Rublack, 'Matter in the Material Renaissance', *Past & Present*, 219 (2013), 41–85.
- N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, 1991).

Teaching methods: 3h seminar unit comprising a balanced mix of synchronous & asynchronous elements (lecture units; seminar activities; group work; skill building exercises online) + office hour

Assessment

portfolio of 2 critical object narratives (2,000 words, 40%)
essay (3,000 words, 60%)