

Workshop

Transforming the Past: the concept of object biographies

Bern, 24th October 2019



Cultural artefacts never stand still. By studying their shifting contexts and by tracking objects' itineraries through time, we can reconstruct their life-histories, or at least parts of them. Influenced by the material turn, the concept of object biographies was first used in socio-anthropological research, but is now widespread and widely applied in ancient studies. The concept has helped to overcome a merely antiquarian interest in artefacts, which previously neglected any temporal and contextual changes. Instead of dating artefacts to one specific period and ascribing a single function to them, recent studies have stressed the different functions, meanings and values of objects in different contexts and time periods. Especially when studying the material culture of the late antique and early medieval world, where older artefacts are constantly reused, translocated and transformed, the notion of object biographies can help us draw new perspectives on broader social and cultural transformations.

The workshop will take place over the course of one day (24th October): the morning session will focus on theoretical frameworks and will be followed by an afternoon session, in which case studies based on late antique and early medieval material culture will be presented. The aim of the afternoon presentations will be to demonstrate the relevance of the concept of object biographies in order to better understand social and historical transformations.

The one-day workshop presents an opportunity to discuss the theoretical background of object biographies and to explore their possible applications within the field. As such, all participants will be provided with a reader of selected theoretical literature beforehand in order to guide presentations and discussions throughout the workshop.

Program

Session I: Theoretical Input

08.30 Welcome: Prof. Dr. S. Rebenich (Alte Geschichte und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Antike, Bern)

08.45 Introduction: Dr. C. Murer (Alte Geschichte und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Antike, Bern)

09.15 Dr. K. P. Hofmann (Römisch-Germanische Kommission, Frankfurt am Main)
«Objects in Flux. Human, things and practices entangled in stories»

10.00 Coffee Break

10.30 Prof. Dr. B. Fricke (Kunsthistorisches Institut, Bern)
«Object Histories. Early Modern Flotsam»

11.15 Dr. des. Caroline Heitz (Institut für Archäologische Wissenschaften, Bern) &
Dr. Stefan Schreiber (Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz)
«Things as Processes – Things as intertwined (Hi)stories»

12.00 Lunch

Session II: Case Studies

13.30 Jun. Prof. Dr. S. Krmnicek (Institut für Klassische Archäologie, Tübingen)
«Cats (and coins) have nine lives»

14.00 Dr. des. A. Flückiger (Ur- und Frühgeschichtliche und Provinzialrömische Archäologie, Basel)
«Transforming values and meanings: Copper alloy small finds in the first millennium AD»

14.30 G. Wheeler, M. A. (Alte Geschichte und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Antike, Bern)
«Divergent lives: piecing together the object biographies of a recycled funerary inscription»

15.00 Coffee Break

15.30 Dr. S. Lenk (Kunsthistorisches Institut, Bern)
«A relief of the 5th century B.C. and its Christian re-use - A Crusader spolia in Bari?»

16.00 Jun. Prof. F. Stroth (Byzantinische Archäologie, Freiburg)
«Sailing Stones. Object Itineraries of Hagios Polyeyktos»

16.30 S. Joray, M. A. (Ur- und Frühgeschichtliche und Provinzialrömische Archäologie, Basel)
«Does that make sense? Looking for cultural biographies of things in a Bronze Age settlement»

17.00 General Discussion

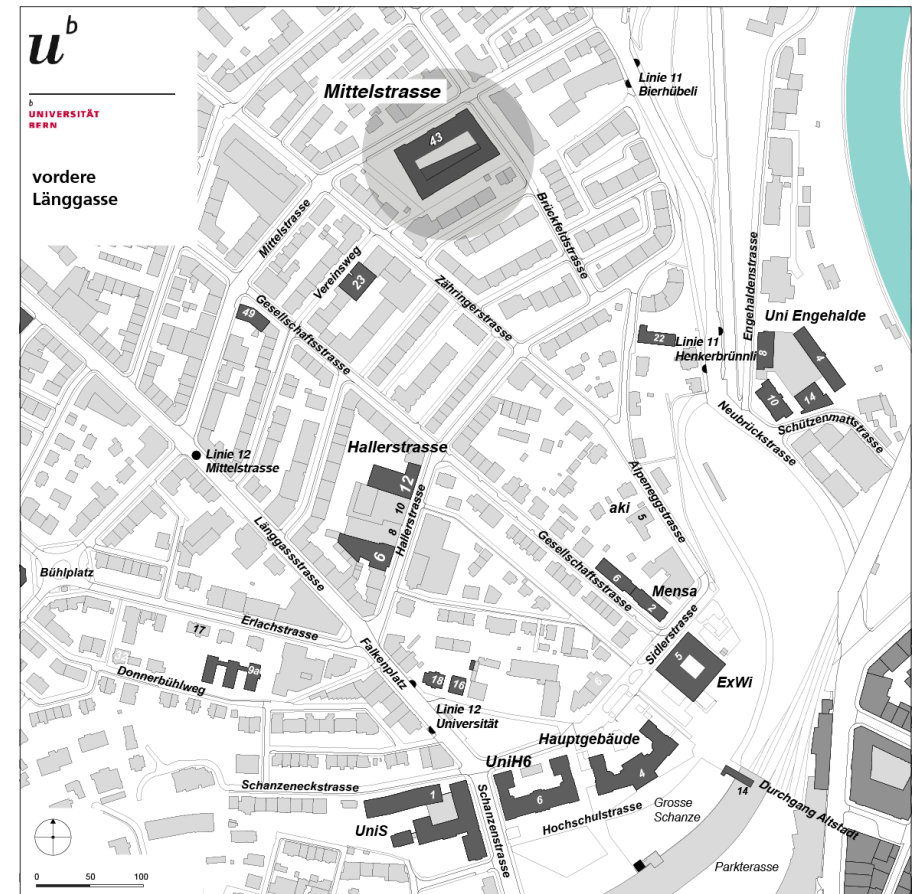
18.15 Evening Lecture

Prof. Dr. I. Jacobs (University College, Oxford)
«The many lives of statues»

20.15 Workshop Dinner

Location

Universität Bern, Uni Mittelstrasse (room 224), Mittelstrasse 43, 3012



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