Anchoring Objects

Material culture and the dynamics of innovation in the ancient world

A workshop at Leiden University, 4-6th June

Organisers:
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Free registration required by 28th May,
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Anchoring objects. Material culture and the dynamics of innovation in the ancient world

For new ideas, objects and practices to be adopted, relevant social groups must somehow be able to effectively integrate and accommodate them in their conceptual categories, values and beliefs. This happens if they manage to connect what is perceived as new to what they consider familiar, known or already accepted in the 'common ground': a process or activity called anchoring. Thus, new objects (that is: newly invented, adapted or imported) are among the things that may need anchoring. However, objects can also (and simultaneously) represent existing conceptual categories, values or beliefs and thus play a role in the anchoring process themselves, as anchors for the new. This is not just a passive role: objects can be (perceived as) active, anchoring agents that somehow mediate between the familiar and the new. The role(s) played by objects (things) in relation to anchoring remains underexplored. Is there a (special) role for objects in dealing with 'the new', for instance in relation to the anchoring which is done by and through people or ideas? And if so, what is it?

This meeting brings together literary scholars and historians with material culture specialists to explore these questions. The workshop takes its inspiration from ideas of 'situated cognition' and the material turn, in different guises (thing studies, New Materialism, vibrant matter, Actor-Network-Theory, flat ontology, etc.).

One aim of the workshop is particular: to analyze specific case-studies of human-thing entanglement and investigate how they relate to issues of anchoring.

A second aim is more general, although inevitably case-studies may come to the fore here as well: to investigate questions of the impact of things on people on a more general level and ask how objects are entangled with the coming-into-being of people and culture (without prejudging causality). In other words: how the history of the ancient world evolves through and with changes in the relationship between objects and people. Often these concern a more subconscious human–thing entanglement and may therefore tend to go unnoticed in ancient texts. But not if you read these while conscious of recent development in cognition studies and / or through the lens of New Materialism, as exciting recent studies illustrate.

In our meeting we hope to make progress on these two questions based on a variety of case studies: how objects and anchoring are related in specific historical encounters and situations, and how, being anchored or as anchoring devices, (repertoires of) objects were able to shape innovation and change in the ancient world.

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Day 1, Thursday June 4th

Location: Kamerlingh Onnes Gebouw room A0.51

16.00 – 17.00	**Timothy LeCain (Montana State University)** Key-note lecture *On the nature of an anchor: environmental, materialist, and cognitive perspectives on the historical bonds between humans and objects*
17.00 – 18.00	Drinks and further debate at the Faculty Club (Rapenburg 73)

Day 2, Friday June 5th

Location: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leemanszaal (Rapenburg 28)

9.00 – 9.15	Arrival and welcome
9.15 – 10.00	**Lennart Kruijer (Universiteit Leiden)** Conference Introduction *Latour's relational paradox. 'Things Greek' and decorative innovation in Hellenistic-Roman West Asia*
10.00 – 10.20	Coffee Break

Experiencing objects – chair: Luuk Huitink (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

10.20 – 11.10	**Nicky Schreuder (Universiteit Leiden)** *Anchoring objects in paint: exploring a relational approach to second style wall painting of Late Republican Rome*
11.10 – 12.00	**Ruth Bielfeldt (Ludwig-Maximilians-Univerisität München)** *Anchoring innovation in the Roman house: painted walls, lamplight, and domestic viewing regimes*
12.00 – 13.20	Lunch

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Divine objects – chair: André Lardinois (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)

13.20 – 14.10	**Federica Scicolone (Scuola Superiore Meridionale)** *The language of the gods: Greek epigrams on divine statues as tools for anchoring religious beliefs*
14.10 – 15.00	**Basil Duffalo (University of Michigan)** *The anchoring altar: luxury goods and the Ara Maxima in Propertius 4.9*
15.00 – 15.20	Coffee Break

Making materials – chair: Caroline Waerzeggers (Universiteit Leiden)

15.20 – 16.10	**Shiyanthi Thavapalan (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)** *On craftsmanship and the social life of glass in ancient Mesopotamia*
16.10 – 17.00	**Bettina Reitz-Joosse (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)** *Materializing womanufacture. Human-thing entanglements in Ovid's Medicamina faciei femineae*
17.00 – 18.30	Drinks and further debate at Café Barrera (Rapenburg 56)

Day 3, Saturday June 6th

Location: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leemanszaal (Rapenburg 28)

9.00 – 9.20	Welcome

Oppositional objects – chair: Casper de Jonge (Universiteit Leiden)

9.20 – 10.10	**Irene de Jong (Universiteit van Amsterdam)** *Lethal gifts and spoils in Greek and Latin literature*
10.10 – 11.00	**Alex Purves (University of California, Los Angeles)** *Objects in the way: clutter in Herodotus' Histories*
11.00 – 11.20	Coffee Break
11.20 – 12.10	**Antje Wessels (Universiteit Leiden)** *Wandering objects* **-** *Wondering subjects. Disorientation in Catullus 67*
12.10 – 13.20	Lunch

Connecting objects – chair: Miguel John Versluys (Universiteit Leiden)

13.20 – 14.10	**Martin Pitts (Exeter University)** *Connectivity, contamination, and the birth of an imperial canon. The case of funerary object packages in the Thames-Rhine-Moselle corridor*
14.10 – 15.00	**Astrid van Oyen (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)** *Anchoring, use, and poverty: a case study from Roman Britain*
15.00 – 15.20	Coffee Break
15.20 – 15.40	**Maikel Kuijpers (Universiteit Leiden)** *Concluding Remarks*
15.40 – 16.30	Final Discussion
17.00 – 18.00	Drinks and further debate at restaurant Wielinga (Nieuwe Rijn 28)

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Timothy LeCain (Montana State University)

On the Nature of an Anchor: Environmental, Materialist, and Cognitive Perspectives on the Historical Bonds Between Humans and Objects

One of the most powerful insights to emerge from the field of Environmental History in the early 2000s was the concept of the "porous body." Challenging modernist epistemologies and medical theory that viewed the body as "bounded" or clearly separated from the environment, environmental historians embraced new humanistic and scientific theories that emphasized what Nancy Langston termed an "ecology of health." Much of this earlier work studied the ways that environmental toxins like heavy metals and endocrine disruptors entered and affected bodies physiologically. But in more recent years, new- or neo-materialist thinkers have broadened the porous body concept to also consider how the non-human material environment also affects our brains and cognitive processes.

These neo-materialist thinkers draw on a wide variety of theories and disciplines to investigate the interactions between humans and things. The work of historian Daniel Lord Smail, for example, points towards a more environmentally situated understanding of cognition and culture, suggesting how psychoactive stimulants, bodily hormones, and even seemingly abstract experiences like religious rituals, can shape a highly plastic brain both chemically and structurally. Others draw on the psychologist James Gibson's concept of "affordances," developed in the late 1970s as he pursued an ecological theory of human vision. As with an ecological system made up of interacting parts, both living and not, Gibson argues that properties of any part emerge from the interactions between diverse actors. The affordances of a material thing or object are thus not rigidly fixed and determined, but rather emergent and contingent. In sharp distinction to some post-modernist practice, however, Gibson does not argue that affordances are solely or even primarily human or social constructs. To be sure, human ideas (themselves rooted in things) often play an important role in a thing's evolving affordances. But Gibson also preserves a vital material independence: "The object offers what it does because it is what it is."

These intriguing connections between humans and external objects have also gained considerable scientific support in recent years. For example, the microbiome—the entirely non-human collection of bacteria that reside in our stomachs and elsewhere—is now understood to shape how humans feel, think, and act through what scientists term the "gut-brain axis." Even more usefully, in her 2018 book, *Well-Grounded*, the neuro-psychologist Kelly Lambert argues that humans have evolved to maximize our ability to engage with the world around us. More than any other animals, we are the masters of incorporating other things and organisms into our lives, thoughts, and cultures.

These approaches, among others, point us towards a nuanced theory and method for understanding how material objects, organisms, and practices have shaped humans, who in turn use, change, or create new objects in an evolving process of mutual creation. As

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the influential philosopher of cognition, Andy Clark, puts it, "environmental engineering is also self-engineering" as material changes reconfigure "our minds and our capacities of thought and reason." In this sense, objects can both anchor and thus sustain certain individual and societal patterns of culture and behavior, and act as powerful disruptors of existing patterns. Humans faced with these disruptive objects struggle to find novel ways of incorporating them into their cognitive and sociocultural activities—often by drawing on existing anchoring objects that provide at least some way of making sense of new things and organisms. However, this human tendency to place new objects in the context of older and more familiar objects, may also lead individuals and societies to misunderstand and underestimate the transformative power of new objects.

In this talk, I will examine these theoretical and methodological concepts in greater detail. But I will also draw on my current research to provide several novel case studies of "anchoring objects" that have played key roles in earlier (primarily American) socio-cultural systems, and their decline and replacement by disruptive new objects. For example, I will discuss the central role of the horse as a key anchoring object in both the rural and urban environments of the late 19th century, as well as its subsequent decline and replacement by an equally powerful but very different object, the automobile.

Based on these case studies, I seek to develop a sort of classificatory system for understanding the highly variable nature of different anchoring objects and their affordances to humans and societies. For example, as a fellow sentient animal with a will and desires of its own, the horse demanded a great deal from the human who wishes to use it for transport or work. By contrast, the automobile obviously had no will of its own, yet many humans engaged the machines at least partly through the lens of the familiar anchoring properties of the horse. The idea of a "horseless carriage" and "horsepower" suggest this attempt to use earlier objects as a means of understanding and anchoring a disruptive new object. Importantly, however, the automobile quickly became increasingly distant from this earlier organismal anchor, becoming an ever more abstract and thus materially amorphous object. In this, I conclude, the horse-to-car transition suggests the growing modern disconnect from objects and environments, a phenomenon I term the "Age of Immaterialism."

<u>Nicky Schreuder (Universiteit Leiden)</u>

Anchoring objects in paint: Exploring a relational approach to Second Style wall painting of Late Republican Rome

By the first century BCE, Roman militaristic expansions reached an unprecedented high point. Rome emerged as an empire spanning large swathes of the Mediterranean even before Augustus took on the mantle of princeps. The continuous military effort and exploits stood at its firm basis, most notably the Roman victories following the Punic (264–146 BCE) and Macedonian (214–148 BCE) Wars which paved the way for both west- and eastward expansions beyond the Italian mainland. One of the most elaborate

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and important rituals part and parcel of Rome's imperialism was the triumph celebrated from the early republican age through the imperial period by victorious generals and eventually emperors, which proved to be pivotal events for the city's physical environment due to the immense inrush of looted art. Not only art was looted. Spolia also included materials such as precious metals, vegetation, animals and human captives with awe-striking effect. Inside the boundaries of the city, the Roman people watched and encountered the world beyond. While the triumphs were ephemeral spectacles per definition, this initial and temporary experience was made 'permanent' in the urban landscape as the dearth of objects were distributed in the city or moved into personal collections. The third and second centuries BCE saw a rise in manubial monuments erected along the triumphal path, innovating Roman architecture in the process through the introduction and incorporation of new materials (e.g. marble) and eastern-Mediterranean architectural vocabularies, often decorated with the acquired plunder.

Foreign forms and objects were installed on a newfangled scale in the city of Rome (and beyond) – objects that needed to be anchored in local, Roman society to function, but, as this contribution discusses, also became vehicles of anchoring processes themselves as they were actively embroiled in processes of societal change and (self-)perception. Specifically, this paper focuses on viewer responses to an artistic phenomenon that emerged from the impact of these 'new' objects in Rome: The Second Style of wall painting surviving predominantly in the Vesuvian area. While this style of parietal decoration resembles (near) contemporaneous painting throughout the Mediterranean, it also includes locally associative characteristics evoking triumphal culture, especially from c. 50 BCE onwards when objects (realia) begin to take centre stage in the Second Style rooms of wealthy villas and houses.

Much scholarship on Pompeian frescoes has focused on semiotic approaches and interpretations leading to connections to the dominus' social status. As such, the frescoes are generally understood as representational manifestations of power; the embodiment of values, or they are assumed to have provided fitting backdrops for certain social actions in the space they adorn. The frescoes are read and deciphered on the basis of what the iconography shows. As a result, their matter is imbued with predefined meaning, rendering them passive. Yet the painted rooms of Pompeii and its environs were not picture galleries; they were affective spaces of daily life. To explore such experiences of daily life, this paper, adapted from my ongoing doctoral research, takes inspiration from the sensory turn and recent discussions in Posthumanism to foreground a relational and 'non-anthropocentric' approach by implicating the (material) world in the multi-sensoriality of embodied human experience. Such a re-orientation broaches the world as emergent, non-static, and made up of the relations between various components that include human beings but also things, materials, landscapes, etc. Together they function to make up the world through their properties and affects. To better understand (late) Republican Rome and its historical-cultural changes, then, we need to be attentive to the potent capacities of objects and the materialities that sustain them.

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Concretely, this means I zoom in on a small selection of wall paintings engaging in transformational intermediality by depicting tangible, exemplary (foreign) objects on painted surfaces and the perceptual impact of their inclusion, through the lens of entanglement between human and material object in the constructed, lived-in environment. This entanglement is tackled doubly and encompasses both the new relationships between humans and imported objects as traced in contemporaneous Latin literature, underpinning the emergence of the Second Style paintings, and the engagement of the viewer with said frescoes. Such an approach sheds light on the anchoring and mediation of objects in the development and enactment of Roman social practices in the domestic sphere while simultaneously exploring how these decorated environments, practices and resulting experiences emerged in parallel, inextricably together. In other words, how the paintings help create meaning rather than representing it.

Art, then, is seen to act in tandem with other bodies to create the perceived world. This attests to an interactive relationship with domestic art that can tell us more about the sensory, lived experience of the space and provide a more nuanced insight into emic viewer responses to Second Style murals and the objects they depict.

Ruth Bielfeldt (Ludwig-Maximilians-Univerisität München)

Anchoring Innovation in the Roman House: Painted Walls, Lamplight, and Domestic Viewing Regimes

Around 80 BCE, a fundamental innovation occurs in the wall décor of Roman houses. The focus of decoration shifts from floors to painted walls, which become projection surfaces for increasingly complex images. This development unfolds in Rome and in the smaller towns of Italy alike. With the introduction of the Second Pompeian Style, which replaces the earlier Masonry Style, wall painting develops over the following 150 years into one of the most dynamic genres of Roman art. This is all the more surprising because viewing conditions in and around the atrium, as well as in the peristyle, were often constrained and uneven, with limited direct or even indirect sunlight. Taking this problem of visibility as a starting point, the paper asks, from an anchoring perspective, how this pictorial innovation became visually and socially legible through artificial lighting practices - lamplight conceived as an enacted entanglement of lamps and candelabra, painted surfaces, and moving bodies. What viewing regimes become plausible under these conditions, and how might they illuminate the affordances of Second-Style architectural illusion and Third-Style schemes with central pictures? What follows from approaching wall painting through the reciprocity of light practice and painted surface: does this reframing invite a different concept of the Roman house as an environment organized around managed visibility and light-dependent experience?

Federica Scicolone (Scuola Superiore Meridionale)

The language of the gods: Greek epigrams on divine statues as tools for anchoring religious beliefs

In Greek culture, statues of the gods sit at the intersection of religion, ritual and art, making invisible, superhuman entities experienceable by viewers. They act as objectscapes of divine presence, anchoring a given space to a network of beliefs, mythical stories, traditions and memories of individual/collective encounters with the divine. Catherine Keesling, in her 2010 study on Archaic *kore* statues and on whether they represented humans, deities or generic votaries, advanced the possibility that contextual factors (e.g. placement, cult practices and local religious traditions), far more than iconography, helped viewers understand the identity of the statues and the occasion of their dedication, both aspects often omitted in the accompanying inscriptions. The scholar concludes by positing a scenario in which "Greek viewers … knew what the inscriptions were supposed to say and what the statues were supposed to represent without having to look at them very carefully" (2010, 103). Yet, in many instances the textual medium, in the form of poetic inscriptions accompanying a dedicated artefact or commenting upon a specific ritual gesture, decisively contributes to clarify that the cult image is "*the* place of meeting with the divinities" (Bremmer 2013, 15), shaping human actions and values through the fulfilment of certain types of ritual acts. Thus, inscriptions *can* shed light on the types of beliefs and meanings that the ancient Greeks attached to these objects across time and space.

The present contribution examines selected case studies of Greek epigrams on divine statues, broadly intended as religious statuary (object of veneration) and objects of aesthetic delight. These texts worked as material anchorage of meaning with reference to both 'old', i.e. conventional portrayals of deities, already accepted in a common ground of traditional accounts and myths, and 'new' characterisations of divine beings, not otherwise attested in literature and myth, grounded in poetic imagination and storytelling. As argued by Robert Parker (2017, 12-13), "in Greece … cult epithets did not normally refer to statues, nor were statues visual embodiments of cult epithets" and in a few cases only (e.g. Zeus *Meilichios*) a closer correspondence between a god-epithet combination and a distinctive statue type can be observed. Nevertheless, it will be shown that epigrams on statues of the gods, both from Greek and Roman religious and private settings, can use a language of reference (*deixis*) and divine epithets to mark the divinity's status in its context of display, clarifying the type of anchoring that these images perform in specific religious settings. I will focus on selected epigraphic texts (e.g. *CEG* 24, the epigram for the *kore* Phrasikleia; *SGO* 06/02/15 from Pergamon, on a marble basis for a golden statuette of Aphrodite; *SGO* 03/02/39 from Ephesos, on the dedication of a statue of Aphrodite *Anadyomene* by Gaius and Pericles; *SGO* 14/07/01, on a statue group built in Iconium following the oracle of Claros) and I will compare them with literary case studies from Callimachus' and Posidippus' epigrams on divine statues (Di Serio 2024). I will argue that, in some cases, the epigrammatic text accompanying the artefact may represent the

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anchoring agent mediating between the iconographic element and the devotional meanings attached to it by viewers over time (Keesling 2010, 88-89). Thus, in ancient viewers' encounters with sculpted evocations of the divine, I will consider the textual medium as a constitutive part of these human-thing entanglements, existing in a dynamic relationship with the genealogy of the object and with contextual aspects pertaining to its placement, material and occasion. As part of these entanglements, I will also consider the emotional background of such divine objects, intended as the sets of emotions that explain them, that are displayed by them and that are elicited by them (Chaniotis 2023, 185).

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Basil Dufallo (University of Michigan)

The Anchoring Altar: Luxury Goods and the Ara Maxima in Propertius 4.9

In Propertius's famous *Elegy* 4.9, on the coming of Hercules to Rome, Hercules attempts to persuade the priestesses of the Bona Dea to grant him access to their precinct by attributing a remarkable agency to a series of objects. Describing his servitude to the Lydian queen Omphale, Hercules first says that he "performed servile duties in a Sidonian mantle" (4.9.47–48, *Sidonia feci servilia palla / officia*) and adds that he "worked daily allotments of wool with a Lydian distaff" (48, *Lydo pensa diurna colo* [*feci*]). "A soft breast-band," he goes on, "encircled my hairy chest" (49, *mollis…hirsutum cinxit mihi fascia pectus*). Hercules then suggests that—to adopt the terms of Jane Bennett—this

assemblage including inanimate but vibrant things (*palla*, *colus*, and *fascia*) as well as an animate participant (Hercules himself) has effected nothing less than the hero's transformation in both age and gender. "And though with rough hands," he says, "I was a suitable girl" (50, *et manibus duris apta puella fui*).

In this paper, I posit that these agentic objects stand in part for luxury items that flowed into Rome in increased numbers under the emperor Augustus, where they were perceived to necessitate new kinds of state-sponsored control in the form of sumptuary legislation and other restrictions on their use. *Elegy* 4.9, I argue, takes part in a process of "anchoring" this new prevalence of such goods by identifying them as the types of things that, while disorienting in the sense of the term espoused by Sara Ahmed, nevertheless have a place within the broad discourse surrounding Hercules and his ideological connections to the Emperor. Hercules, that is, may have momentarily become a "girl" while serving Omphale, but in Propertius's narrative he once again asserts his masculine dominance by breaking into the women's precinct, draining the stream that lies within it, and specifying that his worship at the *Ara Maxima*, the massive altar to himself that he establishes in the future Forum Boarium, not include women. Further, the poem as a whole, by providing an etiology for the *Ara Maxima*, coopts the monument itself into the anchoring process, since the altar thereby becomes an ongoing visual reminder of the possibility of resisting the effeminizing force of luxury objects, a reminder also potentially effected by other, material productions outside this immediate context but nevertheless also associated with Hercules, as for example, wall paintings of Hercules and Omphale such as those preserved in Pompeii and Herculaneum.

While providing a fascinating case-study of cultural anchoring, Propertius 4.9 thus also offers a valuable perspective on this conference's broader ambition to examine "how the history of the ancient world evolves through and with changes in the relationship between objects and people." For the poem serves to foreground the fact that the historical phenomenon we describe as "Augustus's renewal of religion," insofar as it involves such changes, hardly fits comfortably within the conceptual strictures that we usually use to define it. That is, conventional accounts prioritizing the authority of the emperor and his ideological program as the driver of historical developments such as the renewal or refurbishment of neglected cults, temples, and priesthoods, etc., fail to encompass the ways in which the transportation, exchange, and consumption of material objects (in this case luxury goods) change religious attitudes and, indeed, the significance of ritual objects such as the *Ara Maxima.* Moreover, a more complex and nuanced understanding of the temporality involved in such changes also emerges from this analysis of Propertius 4.9. For the reading and performance of circulating texts of Propertius's poem are hardly one-time events. And in its last lines the poem itself seems to look forward to a shifting, ongoing relationship between its material text, Hercules, and Propertius both while he lives and after his death. The concluding prayer to Hercules, "Sacred Father, hail, whom harsh Juno now favors; Sancus, may you wish to be present propitiously in my book" (71–72, *sancte pater, salue, cui iam fauet aspera Iuno; / Sance,*

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uelis libro dexter inesse meo) imagines present and future copies of Propertius, book 4 perpetuating an anchoring agency that derives from their inclusion within the human/non-human assemblage of book, altar, deified hero, and poet.

Shiyanthi Thavapalan (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

On Craftsmanship and the Social Life of Glass in Ancient Mesopotamia

This contribution proposes a specific case study for object-human relationality and explores its implication for the concept of anchoring. It focuses on the craftmanship of glassmaking and glassworking in late Bronze Age Mesopotamia (1600-1155 BCE). While vitreous materials like faience and glaze had been in use for centuries by the mid-second millennium, opaque, colored glass was still a relatively novel artistic medium and technology. In precisely this period, we witness a remarkable surge in the development of new colors and ingenious ways of exploring and expanding the artistic and technical possibilities associated with this substance. This paper examines how the concept of anchoring can serve as a lens for understanding these shifts in material cultural traditions. The two main bodies of evidence I will draw on are: first, the glass objects themselves, primarily from Mesopotamia, with comparanda from New Kingdom Egypt and the broader Near East; second, a selection of Akkadian-language recipes for glassmaking, which can reasonably be dated to this same period and are thus integral to this history. I have been re-editing and reinterpreting a selection of these cuneiform texts (from the series known as bāb kūri "Door of the Kiln") based on experimental replications conducted at the Ateliergebouw Rijksmuseum, alongside new research in archaeoemetry and the history of science. Even at this early stage of my ongoing work, it is evident that these recipes are dense with representations of human-nonhuman entanglements, practices and agencies. I argue, indeed, that recipes serve as a powerful reminder that human beings have always lived with vibrant matter—materials that act, respond, and participate in the making of worlds. Within my own discipline of Assyriology, the glass recipes have mainly been studied as sets of instructions which may, may partly, or may not represent accurately the practical realities of glassmaking. Archaeologists have approached them with the aim of understanding the chemistry of glass during this early stage. But what if we were to analyze them as material-discursive assemblages? Such an approach reveals a distinctive emic perspective on making and craftsmanship. In contrast to literary or certain scholarly texts (e.g. the āšipūtu corpus), which depict craftsmanship and ingenuity as emerging from a cooperation between divine knowledge and human skill, the glassmaking recipes offer a view of practical knowledge rooted in embodied and sensory knowledge acquired through long-term observation, experimentation and practice. The recipes call upon the glassmaker to listen to and feel his materials. His tools are his co-workers. His mastery (leʾūtu) lies not in the acquisition of technique or even the accumulation of knowledge, but in cultivated perception: knowing when to cease firing, when to open and close the door of the kiln, how to correlate colors of the molten

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glass with time and temperature, and feeling the gather make threads and coils. I will further argue that the technological history of glassmaking in the late Bronze Age Near East provides a particularly good case for understanding innovation—not as sudden invention, but as transposition of established techniques and tested knowledge into new technological and craft domains

Bettina Reitz-Joosse (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)

Materializing womanufacture. Human-thing entanglements in Ovid's Medicamina faciei femineae

This contribution focuses on the *Medicamina faciei femineae*, a fragmentary Ovidian elegiac poem which presents recipes for female cosmetics (Rosati 1985, Johnson 2016). I argue that the *Medicamina* reflect on human-thing entanglement in ways that are relevant to the themes of this workshop, exploring how humans and objects act upon each other, how objects are implicated in innovation, societal change and connectivity, and how physical creation and authorial *poesis* intersect.

In a close-reading of the *Medicamina*, I will explore at least the following four themes:

Mutual making: the *Medicamina* are a didactic poem appears to offer its (female) readers recipes for face-creams. Those who follow them can combine various substances through a variety of techniques (such as juicing, grinding, or mixing) to produce cosmetics. But these cosmetics, in turn, are designed to 'make' or alter their makers. When applied, they (supposedly) remove wrinkles, spots, and change the women's facial colour and smoothness. The poem explores the intersecting agencies of the didactic speaker, the female makers, natural ingredients, the cosmetic products, and the process of human aging, depicting a highly physical form of human-thing entanglement.

Gender: Roman elegy has long been analysed for the way in which it constructs sometimes stereotypical and always highly artificial female characters. In the *Medicamina*, Ovid unpacks the processes of making desirable *puellae*, materializing and literalizing the 'womanufacture' (Sharrock 1991) of Roman love elegy (cf. Rimell 2006, 41-69). In doing so, the poem explores, and by turns questions and affirms, the 'object-ness' of the women in- and outside its text.

Madeness and magic: The poem reflects on how 'madeness', the sense of 'how an object was made', can affect the way it is valued and appreciated (cf. Reitz-Joosse 2021, 2024), exploring this idea both for cosmetics and for their users. The poem playfully undercuts an idea expressed frequently in Roman love elegy, namely that female beauty should be natural and spontaneous, and that the obvious employment of techniques for its enhancement (such as dyeing one's hair or painting one's face) spoils its effect for the (male) lover. In the *Medicamina*, instead, the poet takes pleasure in revealing the knitty-gritty of face cream production, from using female asses or brawny men for grinding materials, to the tactility and visuality of the craft process, and the technologies of

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application. The ultimate form of instantaneous, labour free-making, magic, is vigorously rejected in favour of the mundane mixing of face creams (l. 35-42).

Innovation and anchoring: the author foregrounds the relationship between cosmetics and societal change over time, turning anti-cosmetics tropes (or clichés) of Roman moralistic literature on their head. In the *Medicamina*, cosmetics are not a corrupting influence on women and a characteristic of a modern age obsessed with luxury (Heldmann 1981). Instead, the production of cosmetics is presented as a technology of civilisation. Ovid cleverly plays on the multiple meanings of the word *cultus* (l. 3, 5, 7, 12, 26, 30Mézière 2022), positioning cosmetics as an analogue to agriculture (Watson 2001) and as a technology which both signals and precipitates (positive) cultural change.

Objects and connected worlds: In the *Medicamina*, cosmetics appear as a poetic version of imperial composites (cf. Reitz-Joosse 2024): their recipes require the enmeshing of the local and the global, of mundane ingredients and near-mythical luxury. Everyday ingredients readily available locally, such as eggs, are combined with those that are traded across the empire in bulk (e.g. Libyan grain, l.53), and those that require complicated mechanisms of sourcing and transportation (flowers from Illyricum, l.74). The connectivity of the Roman empire certainly underpins these recipies (Rimell 2005, 199: 'Roman ladies have become imperialists on a domestic scale'), but some ingredients derive rather from the realm of the mythical (*alcyonea*, l.78) or the poetic (Attic honey, l. 82), stressing the highly constructed literary nature of these products.

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Irene J.F. de Jong (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

Lethal gifts and spoils in Greek and Latin literature

Gifts and spoils are supposed to benefit their new owners: they add to their glory and often are put to good use by them. Thus, Odysseus uses the bow he once got as a guest-gift to kill the suitors (*Od*. 21.13-41). There are, however, also instances where gifts or spoils are harmful and lead to their new owners' death.

I will discuss instances of such lethal gifts and spoils in Greek and Latin literature in three categories. The first category concerns *deceiving gifts*: gifts that are given with the express intention to kill their new owner, who of course is unaware of this. We may think here of Medea's gift of a poisoned robe to Jason's new bride (Eur. *Med*.), Deianira's gift of a 'prepared' robe to Heracles (Soph. *Trach*.), or the famous Wooden Horse, deviously framed by the Greeks as a gift to Minerva, but fatally interpreted as gift to themselves by the Trojans (Verg. *Aen.* 2).

The second category concerns *fatal spoils*: spoils that are proudly acquired by warriors but become their undoing. When Hector dons Achilles' armour after killing Patroclus (who, as Achilles' stand-in, wore it), this act elicits Zeus' criticism and fuels Achilles' anger at the moment he kills Hector (*Il.* 16 and 22). Aeneas renounces pity when he notes his defeated opponent Turnus wearing the baldric of Pallas, whom the Rutulian had killed earlier (Verg. *Aen.* 12). Nisus dies thanks to the glittering of the helmet which he acquired just before as a spoil (*Aen*. 9).

The third and most intriguing category concerns *'self-killing' gifts*: gifts that come to be used by their new owner to kill themselves. Ajax kills himself with the sword that had once been given to him by his opponent Hector after a duel (Soph. *Ajax*); a later epigram aptly describes the sword (and Ajax' counter-gift) as αὐτοκτόνα … δῶρα, 'self-killing gifts'. Dido kills herself with a sword which her former lover Aeneas gave her (Verg. *Aen*. 4).

In my analysis I will, with an eye on anchoring innovation, pay special attention to the relevance of the previous owner (the 'anchor'). Invariably, there is a sense of irony, pathos, or poetic justice in a person dying through a gift or spoil coming from a specific person.

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Alex Purves (University of California, Los Angeles)

Objects in the Way: Clutter in the Histories

This paper considers how the treasury at Delphi serves as an object anchor in the *Histories* for the practice of history-making and empire building, against which Herodotus innovates with the spilling out of an abundance of significant and insignificant objects through the landscape of his work. The problem comes with the last third of the *Histories*, where the accumulation of objects starts to overwhelm the narrative in the form of clutter or debris. What are we to do with the physical presence of so much stuff that refuses, over the span of the *Histories*, to disappear?

Antje Wessels (Universiteit Leiden)

Wandering Objects - Wondering Subjects. Disorientation in Catullus 67

The main character of Catullus' poem 67 is – a door. A door, moreover, that is able to speak. Catullus' door, however, doesn't aim to provide any useful information. Rather, it speaks in order to let its recipients realize that they are fully excluded from the knowledge it could possibly provide. Both the lyric I, who acts as the door's interlocutor within the poem's setting, and the actual reader of the poem are denied access to the house's internal affairs. No one will reveal the gossip the door alludes to, what it is actually about. And the secrets and obscure allusions are probably not even meant to be disclosed.

Catullus 67 clearly shows the features of a paraclausithyron. The person excluded, however, is not an amator but rather a lector exclusus. The lector exclusus is exposed to experiences of exclusion, disorientation, and the loss of power and control. The power of language (and obscurity), which the door employs, is stronger than any material obstacle and bolt could ever be. Yet where does this power come from? And how are the weird activities of the door to be experienced by the recipient of the poem?

As Craig Maynes pointed out in 2016, in his article on "Comic Callimacheanism in Catullus 67" (TAPA, 146.2, 281-323), the poem is not just a dialog between the door and its interlocutor but rather displays a dramatic setting and, more specifically, plenty of comedic elements. The door acts (and looks) like a clever slave, a stock character from comedy: the servus callidus. Analogous to the comedic servus callidus, the door enjoys superior knowledge and has more power and control than anyone expects within the scene. But this is only the first part of the story. As I shall argue in my paper, the door negotiates a multiplicity of identities. It is not simply presented as an object that turns out to be a subject (a thing that has changed into a human being). By addressing the door as a slave (dicunt servisse, 67.3), the interlocutor, at the beginning of the poem, perceives it

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as a res, an instrumentum vocale (cf. Varr. Res Rusticae 1.17): The door is expected to listen and to provide an answer, but it is neither supposed to act as a subject nor to have its own free will. Things change, however, when the door itself responds: In its response, the door shows that it is not willing to meet any of the previous expectations. Instead of acting like a 'real' slave, it changes into the character of a fictional setting: the alleged 'object' decides to be a part of the sphere of 'art'. By changing into a servus callidus and appropriating the perspective of a fictional character, the door starts to negotiate – and to reflect upon – existing values and expectations.

During the poem, the door wanders through a multiplicity of (possible) spaces and domains: servility and dominance, knowledge and exclusion, art and non-art. The door's interlocutor tries to join in this multifaceted journey. And the recipients who try to understand the door's activities? As I shall argue, readers of the poem are challenged to revise their alleged common ground throughout the whole reading process. While the object's identity wanders around, its recipients are repeatedly invited to wonder what a slave can do.

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Martin Pitts (Exeter University)

Connectivity, contamination, and the birth of an imperial canon. The case of funerary object packages in the Thames-Rhine-Moselle corridor.

This paper explores the birth of a new imperial canon in the selection of objects for funerary display in the northwest Roman provinces. It charts the transition of regionalised and 'discrepant' modes of display, object styles and configurations in the first century CE, to a more thoroughly integrated and deterritorialised imperial canon that held sway until major changes in the third century CE. In this way, the paper sheds new light on the role of objects as drivers (and evidence!) of bottom-up forms of network

power that served to foster and anchor shared cultural practices among geographically separated and diverse communities. Using Correspondence Analysis (CA) to discern patterning in the individual choices of thousands of objects in many hundreds of graves spanning the provincial interface of Britannia, Gallia Belgica and Germania Inferior, I draw attention to the existence of multiple simultaneously overlapping funerary object configurations: the so-called 'ostentatious banquet', 'urban-ritual ensemble', 'rustic banquet', and 'customary meal suite'. In an increasingly inter-connected imperial world, the logics or 'grammars' of each of these configurations existed across the wider region to varying degrees. Some configurations, such as the 'ostentatious banquet', featured consistently deterritorialised object 'vocabularies' wherever they were found, through their dependence on widely circulating standardised material culture such as terra sigillata services and glass vessels. In contrast, other configurations, such as the 'customary meal suite' relied more upon local object 'vocabularies', such as regional beaker styles, disposable pottery fabrics, or configurations rooted in later Iron Age and first century objectscapes, such as Gallo-Belgic wares and fibulae.

Of special interest is the globalising phenomenon of converging regional object vocabularies the first half of the second century CE, in which the previously distinct 'customary meal suites' from southeast Britain, the Netherlands, North Rhine-Westphalia and the Moselle regions begin to resemble one another in certain key respects. In part, this historical shift owed much to the inherent connectivity of the Thames-Rhine-Moselle river corridor, which witnessed immense contaminating traffic of people and things in the period in question, and most likely, elevated access to circulating types of objects that were increasingly popular in the funerary sphere, such as fine terra sigillata and colour-coated pottery vessels. But connectivity and consumption was only half of the story. Another essential factor is the swift contaminative rise to prominence of the Stuart 2 colour-coated beaker, which became the most common standardised object in graves in northwest Europe for most of the second century CE. The success of the St. 2 beaker is a remarkable story, being mass-produced at a range of centres including Cologne, Trier, Argonne, Colchester and the Nene Valley. Adherence to close replication of the type at so many disparately located production sites is astonishing for the pre-modern era, implying that close conformity in design was not only a major aim of the potters, but also desired by consumers. Another extraordinary feature of this vessel was its take up across a broad and truly imperial social spectrum, as a mainstay of more modest 'customary meal suites' in community cemeteries spanning multiple regions and provinces, funerary assemblages from the military and urban sphere, and even aristocratic 'ostentatious banquet' graves. In this way, the flourishing of the type was instrumental in the consolidation of the second century imperial canon, effectively erasing older discrepancies in the funerary images of local communities and those associated with Rome's military and colonial project.

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Astrid Van Oyen (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)

Anchoring, use, and poverty: a case study from Roman Britain

At the very edges of Roman Britain lies Gowanburn River Camp, a small, enclosed settlement with evidence of human activity from at least the late Iron Age onwards. After Roman conquest, the site fell just north of the empire's militarized frontier, but its material footprint did not change much: a couple of roundhouses occupied a rectangular ditched enclosure, the surviving evidence of their inhabitants' material lives constituted by stone, timber, and earth construction, ceramic cooking pots, grinding stones, and the odd glass bangle. Yet during the site's excavations in the late 1970s, a dark red shimmer would have appeared between two stone slabs of a fragmentary stretch of paving preserved within the enclosure, distinctly odd and unexpected within this world of grey and brown. The excavator would have picked up a small object, run her finger over it, and felt a pattern. She might have brought the tiny object up close to her eye and perceived wavy incisions.

The object is a carnelian intaglio with a carved animal hunt scene. Intaglios or sealstones are small, carved gems or molded glass objects, originally set in a ring of precious metal or iron. The site report labels it as "exotic", a term brimming with unspoken assumptions of cultural, social, and economic distance (Jobey and Jobey 1988: 26).

This paper foregrounds the intaglio found at Gowanburn – a site with a poor material footprint – in order to put a socioeconomic spin on anchoring. It argues that in supposedly "poor" contexts, anchoring tends to be glossed in functional terms, as a dictate to use whatever is on hand, regardless of its supposed cultural or semiotic fit. Think of the range of foreign goods dropped above war-torn zones – optimized for nutrition – or of the motley assortment of things distributed on charity drives. The poor are supposed to see things as sheer functionality, stripped of any meaning, and therefore to be able to fit anything into their practices and object worlds (and, ideally, to do so with gratitude). This dictate of use is rooted in our dominant frameworks for seeing and accounting for poverty, and it has spilled onto how we have approached material culture, as always "for" something.

With the help of object-oriented ontology, this paper explores a different reading of the Gowanburn intaglio, one in which (some) objects might have been truly Other and withdrew from use. Such an interpretive move is necessary in order to recoup a form of possession for possession's sake for the underprivileged in our past narratives, the possibility of an engagement with objects that was not primarily steered by the question of use and usefulness.

Image source p.1: View of the 2017 exhibition 'Finders Keepers' at the Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam (Foto Mathijs Labadie)

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