CENTENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE COMITE INTERNATIONAL DES SCIENCES HISTORIQUES

A Case for Objects: Material Culture and Innovative Directions for Historical Scholarship

Programme Event

International Committee of Historical Sciences | 26–30 August 2026 | Leipzig, Germany

DATE	LOCATION
28 Aug 2026, 11:00 - 13:30	House 5 SR134
THEME	CONFERENCE
G - Future Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities in the Historical Sciences	International Committee of Historical Sciences

Overview

This roundtable addresses the place of material culture in historical scholarship as practiced in the United States, with international perspectives, offering a state-of-the-field discussion. Physical artifacts and the material world have long informed our understanding of the past and are a central means by which the public encounters history. Vibrant historical scholarship incorporating material culture-based research explores diverse geographies and time periods from the ancient world to the present. Historians working at historic sites and museums regularly interpret history amid and through the physical presence of the past.

Historians on this roundtable work in academic and public history positions and are engaged in museum studies education. They work with a range of methodologies and approaches to the study of objects, offering a variety of perspectives on the place of material culture scholarship in the practice of history and its implications for public understandings of the past. Panelists and the audience will reflect on how historians are using material culture today, the possibilities and limitations of objects as evidence, what questions we are—or should—be asking of objects, and future directions for this dynamic and expanding field.

Participants

Convenor

- Sarah Weicksel (American Historical Association)

Chair

- Sarah Weicksel (American Historical Association)

Panelists

- Leora Auslander (University of Chicago)
- Zara Anishanslin (University of Delaware)
- Joanna Cohen (Queen Mary University of London)
- Sarah Weicksel (American Historical Association)

Papers

What do Things actually do? A historian's perspective

Leora Auslander (University of Chicago)

We Are All Material Culture Scholars Now: Reflections on the State of Material Culture Studies in Early American History

Zara Anishanslin (University of Delaware)

Lost and Found: Material Culture Studies and Law in Civil War Era America

Joanna Cohen (Queen Mary University of London)

The Material of History: Objects as Sources and Narratives (Weicksel)

Sarah Weicksel (American Historical Association)

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