



CALL FOR PAPERS
CONFERENCE

People, Objects and Languages across the Empires
Interference and Circulations of Words and Images in Premodern Societies

Place: New Europe College, Bucharest

4, 5-6 June 2018

The conference revolves around People, Objects and Languages. The aim is to inquire what languages were used by the peoples of the European empires in their daily lives in building their social identities, but also in expressing their religious beliefs. Be they subjects of the Ottoman, Habsburg or Russian Empires, or of “European” countries, they were merchants, noblemen and women, artisans, missionaries, consuls, diplomats or physicians, carrying along their travel objects, lifestyles, behaviours, fashions, and vocabulary. We shall investigate/inquire in what ways languages and linguistic borrowings were shaped by people’s mobility and social interactions. Cultural transfers encompassed words and objects alike can we identify them? In the modern period, French and Italian were the languages of the political and cultural elite, spoken at the princely, royal or imperial courts and in salons of the well-to-do. What were the professional languages of the merchants, artisans, teachers or physicians who regularly travelled between the empires?

The conference shall revolve around three main topics:

I. Words of Common People and Words of the Elite

Is the language of trade and commercial exchange a purely “economic” one? Can we trace a specialized trade language in the archives? How are new fashions and manners reflected in language? Do translations alter the meanings of words and objects? How does the transfer into common language modify fashions, ideas or usage of objects? How did fashion, luxury and consumption influence language, as new terms were adopted and old words abandoned, along with the objects to which they referred?

II. Words of the „Self“

Words and objects shape/fashion a narrative of identity. Are there “European” models copied and followed by such narratives?

III. Words of Religions and Believers

The overlap between confessional and linguistic diversity a key theme of our conference. How was the religious discourse adapted when directed towards the common people?

IV. Words for Images

What is the relation between fashion, luxury self-fashioning and words in the context of the many images available from literary and artistic sources? South-Eastern Europe was not just a source of inspiration for Western artists, but also a market. Aristocrats and merchants commissioned portraits to hang up in their houses, and a number of Western painters arrived to meet the new demand. The Ottoman Empire also became a source of inspiration, and profit, for Orientalist painters who set out to discover the mysteries of the East. They spent time among the Christian and Muslim populations of these regions, obliged by history to live together, and painted the similarities and differences between them. What are the meanings of these portraits and images? What could they tell about people, objects and everyday life?

Words from the “Oriental” languages were adopted, whether they be Turkish or Greek, and then later words were taken over from Western languages, particularly from French, at or around the same time as the objects they define came into use; likewise, we propose to examine how older words were replaced, fell out of use entirely or changed their semantic content, especially in cases where it the semantic content] acquired a new pejorative meaning.

A comparative approach is crucial in understanding how words acquired their meanings in cultural transfers and the circulation of objects. The keywords of our conference are: luxury, consumption, fashion, social status, social identity, self-fashioning, material culture, Europeanization and modernization, secularization, ritual, confession and believers. This list is naturally open to new additions.

The submission deadline for proposals (300 words of an abstract and a title) is **30 October 2017**. For further questions and information, please write to Nicoleta Roman (luxfass@gmail.com).

Organizer: Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, PI – ERC-2014-CoG no. 646489

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