

Session Title

Objects, Arts, Icons, and Ideas: Archaeological Pathways of Symbolic Expression Across Cultures

Main Convenor

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Session Abstract

This session explores the archaeological pathways through which symbols, artistic forms, and representational systems emerged, circulated, and transformed across cultures from prehistory to the early historic world. Emphasizing material evidence, including rock art, ritual artifacts, pottery, ornaments, seals, architectural forms, and inscriptive records, it investigates how symbolic expression is rooted in community practices yet becomes mobile across wider interaction spheres.

The session foregrounds processes such as adaptation, hybridization, convergence, and reinterpretation, highlighting how symbols acquire new meanings as they encounter diverse cultural environments. Bringing together perspectives from prehistoric archaeology, historical archaeology, cognitive archaeology, and interpretive theoretical frameworks, it examines how symbolic systems reflect social identities, belief structures, and collective memory.

Incorporating museum studies, heritage interpretation, and documentation practices, this session also considers how symbolic material culture is recorded, preserved, curated, and communicated to contemporary audiences. Through comparative global case studies, contributors will address the cognitive, social, ritual, and ideological dimensions of symbolism, emphasizing its role as a medium of cultural communication and a marker of identity, power, and worldview.

This session invites interdisciplinary contributions that illuminate shared patterns of meaning-making, cultural connectivity, and the deep-time evolution of symbolic behavior.

- Symbols as Cultural Expression and Identity
- Pathways of Symbolic Transmission Across Time and Space

- Archaeological Evidence: Materiality, Iconography, and Representation
- Religion, Ritual, and Ideological Systems as Forces of Symbolic Circulation
- Cross-Civilizational Comparative Approaches

Keywords

Symbolism, Material Culture, Theories, Prehistoric Art, Cognitive Archaeology, Museum Studies

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