

1 Session at SAH (Mexico City, 15–19 Apr 26)

SAH, Mexico City, Apr 15–19, 2026

Deadline: Jun 5, 2025

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[1] From Living Organism to Silent Structure: Material and Environmental Perspectives on Wood in Premodern Architecture.

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From: Costanza Beltrami and Saida Bondini

Following the fire at Notre Dame in 2019, approximately 1,000 oaks—ranging from 150 to 200 years of age—were felled to rebuild the cathedral’s spire and roof. At the intersection of natural and historical heritage, these majestic trees were sourced from carefully managed forests, developed since the seventeenth century to support military shipbuilding and regularly harvested to enhance their productivity. The transformation of living wood into prepared timber witnessed the collision of ecological consciousness and anthropocentric values. Essential yet often side-lined in histories of premodern architecture, wood challenges us to rethink the discipline from the perspective of the more-than-human, the cyclical, and the living. This panel seeks to bridge three discourses that have animated the humanities in recent years: an interest in the symbolic meanings of materials; an acknowledgment of the agency of objects; and ecological concerns. How has construction with wood been understood across different times and cultures? How do buildings acquire meaning when viewed as “vibrant” configurations of human and non-human agents? How can we write histories of architecture that are attuned to the environmental benefits and costs of wood construction?

We invite papers exploring these and related questions across all geographic areas during the premodern period (from antiquity to ca 1750). We are particularly interested in contributions that combine material microhistories with methodological and theoretical considerations. Topics may include:

- premodern understandings of wood as a living material and its symbolic role in architecture
- forest management and the production, preservation, and commercialization of timber
- the use, recycling, and repurposing of wooden elements, such as scaffolding
- premodern uses of wood as a resilient material, for instance in disaster-prone areas
- processes of circulation, import/export, and adaptive reuse of wood in a global context
- timber and its exploitation as a site of oppression and resistance in colonial contexts.

Abstracts must be under 300 words, and the title cannot exceed 65 characters, including spaces and punctuation. Abstracts and titles must follow the Chicago Manual of Style. The submission should also include

a two-page CV in PDF format.

Submissions and further info: <https://www.sah.org/2026/call-for-papers-mexico-city>

Reference:

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