Provenance Research (Paris/online, 9-10 Dec 27)

Online / Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA), Paris, Dec 9–10, 2027
Deadline: Mar 22, 2027

Vinca Michaelis

Provenance Research: Perspectives on Archaeology, Collections and Circulation of Antiquities from the West Asia and North Africa Region

Provenance research today occupies a major place in the study of antiquities from West Asia and North Africa (WANA), raising fundamental questions related to the biography of objects, the history of museum collections, and the international circulation of archaeological material. Information and research relating to provenance were long considered marginal, primarily employed as a seal of approval for an object's authenticity and prestige. Such an approach finds its roots in colonial history, whose imperialist and capitalist legacy emphasizes the notion of heritage as belonging to humanity. Post- and decolonial studies, renewed momentum within the field of archaeology, and growing interest from criminology have challenged this model, aligning with the spirit of the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property adopted in 1970.
Standing between a quest for truth and a principle of responsibility, provenance research has since highlighted historical and recent violent practices in the collecting of antiquities, such as looting, theft, and dispossession in contexts shaped by power asymmetries (formal and informal imperialism, foreign territorial occupation, and the exploitation of situations of instability and conflict).

This international and interdisciplinary symposium aims to foster dialogue and exchange around shared experiences, methodologies, and approaches. Proposals addressing one of the following three thematic areas are welcomed:

 Provenance and History of Museum Collections
In a context of ongoing debates surrounding the role and responsibility of so-called "universal" museums, provenance research raises new questions. These include the challenge of reconciling the historical missions of such institutions (conservation, research, and education) with the ethical and moral issues surrounding the history of their collections. Political, diplomatic, social, and cultural tensions also raise questions about the potential of provenance research to contribute to new narratives, reparations, and restitutions. This first thematic area seeks to shed light on the history of museums, as well as the actors and networks involved. It also aims to highlight the production of new knowledge about archaeological objects and collections more broadly, in relation to past legacies, present-day challenges, and future perspectives.

 Provenance and the Realities of the International Antiquities Market

Within the international antiquities market, provenance is an essential element in establishing the authenticity of an object and the legality of its circulation. However, it can be manipulated to increase an object's economic value, notably through the falsification or omission of information. Provenance research can play a key role in identifying objects derived from looting or illicit trafficking, by critically assessing and verifying the information provided. This second thematic area therefore invites reflection on the role of provenance research in tracing the trajectories of antiquities on the international market. It particularly encourages contributions examining the practices and strategies that have enabled, or continue to enable, the introduction of looted objects and the circulation of forgeries.

 Provenance between Methodological Challenges and Advances Provenance research requires attention not only to objects themselves, but also to the actors and networks involved in their circulation. This process nevertheless faces a number of challenges, including the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of sources, as well as their uneven accessibility. This third thematic area welcomes contributions exploring, among other aspects, methods for working with different sources and the opportunities offered by digital tools, such as AI-assisted image search. It also considers how the results of provenance research can be disseminated and made accessible through the development of databases and the use of various forms of data visualization.

This symposium is open to doctoral candidates, researchers, and professionals from diverse disciplines. Archaeologists, historians, art historians, legal scholars, criminologists, curators and restorers, museum and heritage professionals, as well as specialists in international relations or cultural and scientific policy are invited to present their work on one of the thematic areas listed above. Oral presentations should not exceed 20 minutes and will be followed by a 5-minute Q&A session. English will be the primary language of this international symposium. However, presentations may also be delivered in French, provided that they are accompanied by slides in English. Posters may also be submitted in one of these two languages as part of a dedicated session. The symposium will be held in a hybrid format.

Please download and complete the proposal submission form.
https://linktr.ee/provenance.conference.wana

Rename your file as PACCA-WANA2027_LastName and return it in Word format to the following address: provenance.conference.wana@gmail.com

The submission deadline is March 22, 2027 at 11:59 pm (CET).

Reference:

CFP: Provenance Research (Paris/online, 9-10 Dec 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 30, 2026 (accessed Oct 9, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54475>.