

Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean World in the Early Modern Period: Pathways of Art between East and West

From Riverbed to Seashore. Art on the Move in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean in the Early Modern Period

Harvard Seminar 2014–2015, Directed by Alina Payne

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In Zadar, a city that from the early Middle Ages right until the beginning of the twentieth century had the role of Dalmatia's capital, the month of May witnessed the start of the first phase of the Harvard University research seminar *From Riverbed to Seashore. Art on the Move in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean in the Early Modern Period*. The original creator of the research topic and project itinerary is Alina Payne, Alexander P. Misheff Professor of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, under the aegis of Getty Foundation *Connecting Art Histories* initiative.

The project is based on artistic ties that developed in the early modern period along the complex network of waterways that connect Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean Dalmatian Coast and the Black Sea. It rests on a rethinking of the territorial contours of the Mediterranean Renaissance, expanding it into the area of Southeastern Europe. The area of research is constituted by a peripheral but dynamic territory that throughout history has been exposed to shifting cultural and artistic impacts. This is a space marked by conflicts and unstable borders, and by a particular and strong linkage between human beings and the earth; a place with a constant need for the ascertainment of regional identity and yet at the same time with a dialogue among the different cultures, where relationships of centre and periphery and the influences of East and West alternate and intertwine.

A fundamental strand in this research consists of looking at the maritime routes and communications along the rivers as the cultural infrastructure of the Mediterranean world. This network linked the traditional Mediterranean cultures: the Italian, the Ottoman, the Greek/Byzantine, the French and the Spanish, with the world between the Adriatic and the Black Sea. As Professor Payne says in the description of the seminar: "Starting from this perspective, this seminar seeks to develop a framework for understanding how the Balkans and its northern neighbours mediated between East and West, as well as the region's contribution to the larger Mediterranean cultural melting pot in the early modern period."

At the end of a long-lasting process of selection, based on a written application package, which included a research project zeroing in on one aspect within the general topic of the seminar, and an online interview with the finalists, Professor Payne ventured into bringing together a group of fourteen emerging scholars coming from very diverse intellectual backgrounds. Art historians, historians and architects from Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine and Turkey thus started a year-long research seminar, with a two-week mobile workshop – from Zadar to Corfu – that journeyed along the Croatian, Montenegrin, Albanian and Greek coasts of the Adriatic, visiting Bosnia and Herzegovina along the way. In view of the theme of the seminar, this route was ideal for the familiarisation with the necessary historiography and for a joint development of a research methodology.

With this new knowledge, the researchers have gone back to their own projects, by which they plan to respond to the issue of the transfer of ideas, materials and form in a large range of scales:

from building types and infrastructure to luxury items that allowed ornamental forms and formal ideas to circulate and created a taste for a hybrid aesthetic that stems from the portability of art. Thus Mirko Sardelić (Croatia) has directed his research towards *Shipwrecks and Cargoes Between Venice and Istanbul*, Anna-Maria Nyaradi (Hungary) deals with *The Network of Trade Routes Connecting East with West in the Early Modern Period*, while Ivan Szanto (Hungary) analyses the mobility of Islamic art in the context of the Early Modern Islamic world, or, more precisely, its North-Western periphery between *Hungary and Bosnia (Artistic Transfer in the Ottoman West)*. Alexandr Osipian (Ukraine) researches the *Armenian Merchant Network and the Making of Orientalized Sarmatian culture in the Early Modern East-Central Europe*, Jacek Bielak (Poland) follows *Martin Gruneweg's travels from Prussia to the Mediterranean*, Vladimir Simić's (Serbia) topic is the transfer *From Kiev to the Adriatic (artistic transfer and religious imagery among the Orthodox Serbs around 1700)*, and Nicole N. Kançal-Ferrari (Turkey) devotes herself to the research of *Architecture and Artistic Environment of the Golden Horde and Early Crimean Khanate Period in Crimea*. Tatiana Sizonenko (Russia) explores the development of the Sea of Azov region in *The Myth of Roman Imperium Outside of Italy: Constructing Rulership in the Eastern Mediterranean-Muscovy and the Crimean Khanate, 1450-1550*, and Darka Bilić's (Croatia) work is about *Influence of Border Exchange on the Architecture and Infrastructure of 18th Century Dalmatian Hinterland*. Diana Belci (Romania) follows the relationship between the city of Timișoara and the territory of Banat, under successive Austrian and Ottoman influences: *Saint Paraschiva, Crivina de Sus – The Oldest Wooden Church in Banat (Transfers of Crafts Knowledge Over the Carpathians)*, while Ana Šverko (Croatia) pursues the centre - periphery relationship through the fortification designs of *Michele Sanmichele (Architect and Urban Planner, between Two Shores of Adriatic)*. Daniel Premerl (Croatia) considers luxury objects in a regional and cross-cultural context, taking the *Zagreb Cathedral Treasury in the Early Modern Period* as an example, while Daniela Calciu (Romania) explores how *Sociability Seeps Coffee on the Lower Danube (Moldavia and Walachia) in the 17th and early 18th centuries*. Michał Wardzyński (Poland) took as his topic *Antonio Corradini's Monument to Johann Matthias Graf von der Schulenburg, Marshall of the Venetian Forces for the island of Corfu, and the Myth of Carrara Marble in Vienna and the Habsburg Monarchy*.

All the participants gained much more from the actual experience of the mobile workshop than they could have imagined. The workshop was organised in such a way that during the journey along the Adriatic coast, the scholars presented their topics at places that were connected with their research, either directly or indirectly. Everyone had a chance to enrich his or her research with new considerations and issues that without the interaction with the places would never have come up, and a chance to establish new links between the research topic and the spatial context. But as the journey progressed, it became obvious that all the themes, at first sight so diverse, were becoming part of a much more complex open system, and were interlinked by connections that went beyond the earlier established boundaries of the individual research projects. Although the choice of candidates was clearly very carefully made, and the project was planned out in details with ambitious objectives, there were some completely unpredictable elements, such as commonality and group interaction. Each learned from the others, tested out and compared; every presentation additionally confirmed the region's contribution to the larger Mediterranean cultural melting pot of the early modern period.

During the mobile workshop, the group visited over twenty cities and towns along the Adriatic, always welcomed by local colleagues who provided uncommon insights into the particular artistic heritage of one site or another. In order to illustrate the incredible diversity that the participants encountered within very small distances, I shall pick out just one day, in which the group moved from the island of Korčula to Počitelj and Blagaj, then to Mostar and in the evening to Dubrovnik, moving without gradual transitions in settings of the highly developed Italian Renaissance and Islamic architecture; from a dervish house to the villas of Dubrovnik. All the cities visited tell of the temporal period of the research (from 1400 to 1700) for, as Lewis Mumford says, they are in a real sense "a product of time. They are the moulds in which men's lifetimes have cooled and congealed, giving lasting shape, by way of art, to moments that would otherwise vanish with the living and leave no means of renewal or wider participation behind

them.” (Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (London, 1938), 4). The participants were able to experience the territories they were travelling through as a complex historic urban landscape plotted with numerous local specific features and with cultural and historical connections, the achievements of which went beyond the spatial borders of the workshop’s route; and to feel from this point of view part of a community that went beyond the regional framework.

As the journey unfolded, the participants were able to look into subtle relations among the varying source areas, namely the points where a certain idea, material or form originated and was transmitted, and the receiver areas, in which the artistic message was accepted and transformed within the local spatial context or idiom. Starting from their personal research projects, and profiting to a maximum of each other’s company, the participants studied art as an expression of “multiple affiliations”, that is, through the local assimilation of the influences from East and West, attempting on the way to reconstruct the channels through which they were absorbed.

By the manner in which it was crafted, the seminar proposes a sojourn back to the roots of modernity, where the mechanisms of “absorbing modernity” also originated. Coincidentally, the mobile seminar opened up some leads of inquiry around the topic of this year’s Venetian Architecture Biennale, *Absorbing Modernity: 1914-2014*. By looking at certain architects’ or artists’ travels and works, “indigenous aliens” of early modernity, the participants will put together an outline of how art and architecture travelled and settled in the centuries preceding the emergence of Modernism.

Besides Professor Alina Payne, the seminar is backed by a carefully selected team of mentors, who with their widely recognised expertise in different domains provided an ideal assistance for the development of the project. Three professors from Harvard: Gülru Necipoğlu, who specializes in the medieval and early modern periods, with a particular focus on the Mediterranean basin and Eastern Islamic lands; Ioli Kalavrezou, who specializes in Byzantine art history; and Cemal Kafadar, who is interested in social and cultural history of the Middle East and Southeastern Europe in the early modern era, together with professors devoted to the art of the early modern period in the Adriatic, Stanko Kokole from University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Joško Belamarić from the Croatian Institute of Art History (who was alongside Alina Payne much to be credited with a brilliantly conceived programme since most of the mobile workshop was organised on the Croatian coastline), complemented each other and kept up a sustained high level of concentration. Throughout the entire journey, the mentors led discussions at the sites and gave lectures in which they presented their own scholarly research pertain in the theme of the seminar. They also helped the participants’ individual projects to develop, through individual conversations on the boat, on the bus, or during dinners, and currently via email.

It is worth mentioning also the excellent reading list that was given to the participants as they prepared for the seminar. One of the key books was *Dalmatia and the Mediterranean. Portable Archaeology and the Poetics of Influence* (Brill, 2014), edited by Alina Payne. This book rose out of the two-stage seminar that Professor Payne conducted in October 2008 and January 2009 in Croatia and Florence. That seminar in turn stemmed from a five-year project entitled *The Object as Event* (conducted thanks to the Max Planck and Alexander von Humboldt Prize that Professor Payne won in 2006) and served as one of the points of departure for the current project. The work of Project Coordinator Elizabeth Kessler-Taub should also be highlighted, for she kept the technical part of the organisation of the seminar under control, yet with a great deal of kindness and cheerfulness.

After this first phase of the project, the participants will have a two and a half week stay at Harvard University in January/February 2015, where they will present the work in progress and conduct library research. The project will end in May/June 2015, with a final conference with the presentation of developed individual projects and a short trip to key sites on the Black Sea shores. While waiting for their departure for Harvard, the participants continue vigorously to maintain contacts with each other. This confirms that the trans-regional approach that was set up as the foundation of the seminar, territorially determined as a space between East and West linked by a cultural infrastructure, is analogically enacted in the relations among the researchers and their research projects.