

**Blaszczyk, Arkadiusz; Born, Robert and Riedler, Florian (eds.).**  
*Transottoman Matters: Objects Moving through Time, Space, and Meaning.*  
Göttingen: V&R unipress. 2022. 330 pages. ISBN: 9783737011686.

Reviewed by **Zeynep Ceren Henriques Correia**  
Kırıkkale University  
zeynepcerenakyuz@gmail.com

This delicate book is an outcome of a collaborative research initiative of “Object Mobility” working group members in relation to priority program “Transottomanica” (2017–2020). Given that its introductory and closing sections feature the main framework of the study in an elaborate way, this review will try to highlight a few aspects that are not given as much attention. Exploring the crossroads of geographical, symbolic, and temporal mobilities, the book eloquently depicts what Transottoman stands for. In my words, this is an amorphous geographical reference (as opposed to the “clear” boundaries often depicted in maps) outlined by a drawing compass with multiplexing arms that extend from or retract to one end. Through this ever expanding or withering socio-relational end (Ottoman Empire), the material entanglements around Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and beyond open where these entanglements are transvalued and transformed. The collection of articles in this volume illustrate how human’s greater dependence on things, even if it’s solely for their symbolic value as in the Russian enchantment with the sphinx, generate mobilities and how chasing these dependencies and associated mobilities ‘might pull complexity into a certain direction’<sup>1</sup>.

Each chapter then unfolds the elements defining the natural conditions (climatic, topographic, etc.), the role of intermediaries (merchants, harbours, etc.), the features of traded, gifted or exchanged objects, and their producers and designers when applicable, that compose this perspective. Moreover, the transformative and transvaluing power of mobilities are also mapped along the chapters. For instance, Rohdewald’s chapter depicts how the rise of oil as a commodity, and its mobility, transformed the space by forcing the process of reterritorialization and the construction of harbours, coal stations, pipelines, and railroads. Another less familiar example is provided in Blaszczyk’s chapter by outlining how the fur trade affected Russia’s expansion to Siberia and the role of this symbolic mobilities in shaping contemporary Russia. Another worthy example emerges from the mention to Odessa as a modern port city in comparison with the ‘still medieval ways of life in the contemporary countryside’ (p. 47), which clearly illustrates the transformative capacity of mobilities.

Along the chapters, not only the role of materials and routes in securing or sustaining mobilities, but also that of communities and even individuals is highlighted, especially in relation to unique or luxury objects and unaccustomed commodities. For instance, in relation to the Ottoman-Muscovite fur trade, Greek Orthodox merchants

1 Hodder, Ian. 2018. *Where Are We Heading? The Evolution of Humans and Things*. New Haven, PA: Yale University Press, 26.

emerged as an important intermediary. The mobility of carpets to Poland-Lithuania was mainly in the hands of Armenian merchants and the mobility of coffee rested on the Maghribi community with their family networks, who were actively moving goods beyond the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire into North Africa. In the case of the two Amenhoteps, sphinxes being moved from Egypt to Russia, an individual – Muravev – played a significant role in the acquiring of these statues. This historical insight provides a framework to comprehend today's mobilities of unique luxury or unaccustomed materials, and to comprehend the role of other intermediaries.

The inclusion in multiple chapters of temporal mobility, of objects that move through time, allows the reader to pull the Transottoman perspective to today. While chasing different objects along chapters, it is noticeable that many routes were taken over from their predecessors, including the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Seljuks in Anatolia. This long *durée* approach to these routes would give a clearer comprehension on issues that remain contested today. For example, the Uludere incident that resulted in the death of several civilians smuggling materials with packed on mules and issues related to illegal wildlife trade are examples that come to my mind.

In relation to symbolic mobility, the transvaluing potential of mobilities is particularly traceable in luxury goods. In this case, the meaning attached to mobility is derived from the meaning attached to objects for self-representation. The Ottomans associated furs with civilization, hunting and royal power. Rugs remained an important expression of Transylvanian Saxon identity as a reminder of their former prosperity, far-reaching trade links, and local traditions of the Lutheran church. For Russians, the acquisition of the sphinxes was a matter of prestige, a glorious act in the name of Russia. Looking back in time and noticing the 'diachronic change in the attributions of meaning shows that mobility extends beyond geographical dimensions' (p. 267), it's true not only in relation to depletion, but also in relation to changing social practices of consumption, appropriation and reinterpretation mediated by political, economic, and technological conditions.

The chapters do not only draw from vast archival research, but many also explore material representations from fiction (e.g., Jules Verne's books), paintings, and miniatures. The mentioned mobilities were not framed only in relation to empires; vassal and tributary entities were also given attention, and the mobilities extend beyond trade to include gifts and exchanges into Transottoman inquiry. The book's theoretical background was in touch with Actor Network Theory and Arjun Appadurai's enlightening conceptualizations. However, in my view, how the 'materials become commodity only when they are on the move' (p. 63) might have been better theoretically grounded across the book, for example by drawing from Marx's *Grundrisse*, as the fascinating case studies presented allow the reader to comprehend their respective "metamorphosis". Only in part on Safavid Persian's potential but unexploited mines, this dimension crystallized. (p.67–77) Looking into the future, recognition is needed for the overspilling effects of materials and their mobilities in a planetary and extra-terrestrial span and the historical outlook of this inspirational book is of interest to any scholar working towards this end.