ITRA Conference, "Toys and Material Culture : Hybridisation, Design and Consumption"

Session Toys in history

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Wheel carts for ancient Greek children

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Hoops and Coming of Age in Greek and Roman Antiquity

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Toys for the gods: clay and jewellery toys in Lavinium and Etruria

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When animals were toys. An insight into ancient Graeco-Roman attitudes to animals and toys

Four contributions will explore the changing function of toys in Greek and Roman culture according to their materiality and contexts. Children with different types of wheel carts are thus depicted on a large number of Classical Greek vases and funerary monuments. A typology will be attempted, addressing issues relating to gender (do girls and boys equally play with them?), children's agency (how does one play, alone or in group?) as well as a specific discourse relating to the construction of the citizen. Some toys are offered to the gods, such as balls or tops, at rites of passage associated with coming of age, in particular marriage. Very often, as in Etruria, it is not the real toy but a substitute made of clay that is found in the sanctuaries. The change of materiality is part of the new role of the object, no more functional as a toy. The identity of the toy also changes according to time and place. Hoops, for example, are regarded as a Greek game in Rome, and played only by boys. But is a toy proprerly, or a training device in the gymnasium? In funerary contexts, the toy assumes a new, symbolic function relating to the fate of its most famous player, Ganymedes. If toys are objects, could a living animal be regarded as a toy in antiquity? A detailed survey of Graeco-Roman literary and iconographic sources reveals a variety of situations where animals are toys for the gods as well as for the humans, children and adults.