In Classical Antiquity there already existed a strong association between civilization and the characteristics of urban life (surviving to this day in the etymologies of such words as “civilization” and “politics”). Cities played major roles in Hellenization and Romanization, processes perceived by the Greeks and Romans, respectively, as extending civilization into new lands. During the Orientalizing Period, natural and cultural pressures forced the Ancient Greeks to settle in newly founded cities in Sicily, Southern Italy, and along the shores of the Black Sea. During the fifth century BCE, Athens founded cities to further its imperialist agenda. In the wake of Alexander’s conquest of Egypt and the ancient Near East, cities were used to Hellenize the newly conquered lands. Similarly, the Romans used cities as instruments of conquest and colonization. These expansionist strategies, intended to lead to cultural appropriation, unintentionally resulted in cultural interaction. Not only new cities on the periphery but also major centers like Athens, Alexandria, and Rome were affected by phenomena of cultural exchange due to the influx of population groups who wanted their share of security and economic opportunity.

This session presents a range of papers exploring these processes of cultural exchange, by archeological means. They deal with the methodological challenges of defining culture, identity and acculturation with the material remains of antique cities, both at the respective cultures’ center and periphery, and on scales ranging from city planning and public building programs to the domestic realms of the elite and the non-elite, as well as funerary contexts.

Rather than following a chronological order, the session is structured from a methodological point of view. The first paper introduces and problematizes the issues of urbanity and acculturation that lie at the core of this session. The following two papers present specific case-studies of the role of cities in colonization, one within the Greek and one within the Roman cultural horizon; and the final paper looks at the effects of cultural exchange over time, especially from the point of view of the indigenous population. Together the papers show that material culture was not only a sign for the respective lifestyles of different groups, but also shaped the self-consciousness and cultural affiliation of its members. On a more fundamental level, the papers address the question of how definitions of center and periphery, of native and immigrant can be made by archeological means.