Of all the archaeology topics addressed by European historiography of the 20th century, the period following the 15th century is the most neglected. And currently it still is. In the 21st century, it thrives more dynamically even if not in a cohesive way but rather through a scattered and sometimes confusing process. Furthermore, currently there is such a range of semantics to address this period that it is almost impossible to provide a concise overview that comprise all existing perspectives. Additionally, the most interesting works developed in Europe are coincidentally those that present a clear and progressive approach towards the interpretative models of historical archaeology.

The first years of the 21st century seem to point to a more dynamic framework. The archaeological studies were reshaped and their instrumental and describing intentions were joined by a strong hermeneutical ambition. Simultaneously, the studied topics are now broader attempting for a more complete and multifaceted historical reconstruction.

The archaeological approach to the topic of colonisation has brought significant contributions to the history of empires and their overseas domains. The study of colonial archaeological sites has enabled a factual perception of the occupation and contributed to a better understanding of the effective impact and further consequences of the colonisation process. This study is empowered by the works in other scientific fields, such as history, geography, geology, paleobotany, zooarchaeology and chemistry. Within this process, compared perspective also strikes us as a key aspect by analysing side-by-side several historic-archaeological case studies from both the colonised and the coloniser’s territories. Combining these two dimensions, we highlight the contribution of “archaeology of contact”, focused on the fundamental understanding of the material, social and cultural dynamics and transferences between the different agents. Thus, we emphasize the dialectic which opposes the strategies of resistance and domination, responsible for the emergence of new identities that reframe ancient symbols.
For the purpose of this session, we want to gather some of the transdisciplinary work being made within the scope of the history and archaeology of the colonisation of the “New World”, without losing sight of the reality of the “Old World”. Therefore we point out some research topics such as: the influence and transformation of landscape on occupied territories, and their contribution in the construction of a settlement; the living habits of this period, analysing domestic, civil, religious and military contexts; and also the daily life habits of each place, further attested by the material culture.

Starting from a topic crosswise to several territories, centuries and protagonists, with distinct questions and methodologies, we intend to contribute to a deeper and broader understanding of the concept and study objects of colonial archaeology. Simultaneously, it is important to reflect on the social and cultural impact that this type of research has on contemporary societies. The disclosure of the history of a space and the return of its memory to the inhabiting community is fundamental to ensure the appreciation for the cultural heritage and the archaeological research.