



## **Dynamics of urbanity: configurations of boundaries in pre-modern cities.**

**A conference by the subcluster Urban Roots / Cluster of Excellence ROOTS**

**Chairs:** Patric-Alexander Kreuz (Urban Archaeology) / Ulrich Müller (Historical Archaeology)

**Venue:** Kiel University (Germany), IBZ Kiellinie

**Date:** 17/07/2026 - 18/07/2026. Evening lecture on Thursday, 16/07/2026

**Chronological frame:** c. 1 to c. 1200 CE

**Target group:** Archaeologists and related historical disciplines focusing on premodern urban spaces.

**Setting:** The conference language is English. A publication of the contributions is envisaged. Contributions should be no longer than 25 minutes to allow for intensive exchange and discussion.

Within the Cluster of Excellence ROOTS, boundaries function as a key analytical concept for understanding dynamic social, spatial, ecological, as well as symbolic constructions that simultaneously enable, structure, and constrain connectivity. They can illuminate how social order is produced, stabilised, and contested, and why processes of division are as constitutive of history as those of connection—particularly in urban settings.

Cities in the past, as well as today, are places of density, interaction, and negotiation. They are characterised by shared places, spaces, and topographies, as well as by a supposedly shared understanding of what constitutes an urban community and its lifestyle(s). However, urban environments have always been characterised by intriguing differences—differences lived, embodied, shaped, and articulated through material, social, and mental boundaries: not only walls, but especially markets, neighbourhoods, ritualised settings, forms of social affiliation, patterns of behaviour, or “invisible” lines of belonging, attribution, and exclusion. As such, urban boundaries were never static but constantly subject to configurations that were reshaped, stabilised, inscribed, or dissolved through transgression and disruption. However, boundaries should by no means be understood solely in negative terms, as obstacles, restrictions, or means of exclusion. They also have enormous potential, for example in their ability to shape and structure an undifferentiated environment.

Configuration is in this context understood not only as the process of “making”, but also as highlighting the specific arrangement of heterogeneous elements—actors, practices, discourses, and spaces—that together form a patterned and meaningful whole. Configurations are thus always

relational, dynamic, and context-dependent: as configurations change (especially through social practices, technological shifts, or political contestations), boundaries are renegotiated. While boundary-making produces distinction, configuration captures the relational arrangement in which such distinction becomes meaningful and effective. In this understanding, both concepts offer a promising perspective on urban orders as dynamic, situated, and contested formations.

The conference seeks to approach boundaries and boundary-making as a ubiquitous and pervasive facet of the urban phenomenon and aims to explore this phenomenon by bringing together archaeological and text-based perspectives. Especially in premodern urban contexts (c. 1–1200 CE), we can observe how boundaries were created, maintained, shifted, crossed, or broken, and how they impacted urban societies and urban dynamics. The conference invites archaeologists (Classical Archaeology, Historical Archaeology) to explore the role of the configuration of boundaries and boundary-making in the urban historical landscape. We will address the topic in four closely interconnected sections, focusing on (Roman) Antiquity, Mediterranean Late Antiquity as a transitional phase (“long Late Antiquity”), and the European Middle Ages. In addition, we will examine transitional urbanity, including Sub-Saharan and East African as well as Central Asian perspectives.

While the contributions will primarily focus on archaeological approaches to the analysis of material and immaterial boundaries—especially when developed in dialogue with cultural studies concepts of boundary-making—we explicitly encourage contributions that approach the topic from a comparative or intercultural perspective.

If you are interested in joining us in the summer on the Firth of Kiel, we kindly ask you to let us know by 28/02/2026.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions ([umueller@ufg.uni-kiel.de](mailto:umueller@ufg.uni-kiel.de); [kreuz@klassarch.uni-kiel.de](mailto:kreuz@klassarch.uni-kiel.de))