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## Fellowship in the History of Visual Culture in the Ottoman Empire: The Celsing Collection

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**The Khalili Research Centre** for the History of the Art and Material Culture of the Middle East and Wolfson College, University of Oxford, invite applications for a Fellowship in the History of Visual Culture in the Ottoman Empire. This will offer a scholar an exceptional opportunity to carry out research on a major, largely unpublished assemblage of artworks: the Celsing Collection. The two-year Fellowship is being established in collaboration with Lusail Institute, the research arm of the future Lusail Museum in Doha. Both early career and senior researchers are invited to apply.

The Celsing Collection of paintings and artefacts was assembled by three members of the Celsing family, Gustaf Celsing the elder (1679-1743) and his two sons, Gustaf the younger (1723-1789) and Ulric (1731-1805), during their service as Swedish diplomats in Istanbul in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The paintings show portraits, diplomatic receptions, architectural buildings and landscapes of Istanbul. The Celsing Collection forms an exceptional body of visual evidence about Istanbul, Ottoman-Swedish relations, the networks of European artists in Istanbul, the phenomenon of the “Oriental room” in Europe and, more broadly, European visions of the “Orient”.

The Collection was first displayed in the Stockholm residence of the Celsings and later transferred to Biby, a mansion in the countryside outside the capital acquired by the two brothers in 1781. For over two centuries, it was housed there, together with their diplomatic correspondence and a growing array of “Oriental” objects acquired by family heirs, many of which were displayed in a “Turkish Room.” In 2014, the paintings were acquired together with the full contents of the Room by Qatar Museums, with a view to maintaining its historical integrity. Meanwhile, most of the family’s historical letters and documents were transferred to archives in Sweden.

The Fellowship will enable a scholar of outstanding ability to carry out research on the Celsing Collection with a view to publishing a monograph. The research is expected to lean primarily on archival documents kept in Sweden and elsewhere, in addition to the paintings themselves (\*). The Fellow will be based at the Khalili Research Centre, which forms part of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (AMES) at the University of Oxford. AMES hosts one of the largest concentrations of specialists of Ottoman history and material culture in the world. In addition to the Fellow’s stipend, funding may be provided for work on archives in Sweden, Europe and/or Turkey, and (if required) to assist research in additional languages.

The Fellow will be expected to organise an international conference around the topic, and to publish its proceedings. While spending the bulk of their time working on their own research, the Fellow will be required to produce short research reports geared towards the needs of the future Lusail Museum, which is currently under development in Doha.

The Fellowship carries a stipend aligned with UKRI guidelines.

The successful candidate should hold a doctorate in a relevant subject and preferably have significant post-doctoral research experience, including a strong publication record. The post will be tenable for two years, during which the Fellow will normally reside in Oxford.

Candidates may request further information on the Celsing Collection by contacting:  
[krc@ames.ox.ac.uk](mailto:krc@ames.ox.ac.uk)

The closing date for applications is **3 October 2025**. Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to be held online on **21 October 2025**. The Fellowship will start in January 2026 or as soon as possible thereafter.

(\*) Due to ongoing conservation work, direct access to the paintings will be limited but the Fellow can expect to work from a set of high-resolution images.

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**The Khalili Research Centre** and Wolfson College, University of Oxford, are seeking, in collaboration with Lusail Institute, an outstanding scholar at any career stage to carry out research on the Celsing Collection of paintings. This unique role combines academic research and engagement with the museum sector, with the opportunity to carry out extensive original research on an important body of primary materials; to publish this work; to organise and publish a conference; and to bring a contribution to one of the largest museums currently being developed in the Middle East.

The main duties and responsibilities of the Fellow include:

- Carrying out research on relevant archives in Sweden, Turkey, and Europe (especially France) to document the history of the paintings (\*) and their context
- Publishing the results of this research in the form of a monograph and/or articles in peer-reviewed publications
- Organising an international conference with specialists working on topics relevant to the history of the Celsing Collection, and publishing these as an edited volume
- Producing research reports for Lusail Museum on individual paintings in the Celsing Collection, as well as further topics as required by the Director of Lusail Institute

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### Selection criteria

- A Ph.D./D.Phil. in a relevant field of study.
- A publication record of international standing appropriate to the career stage.

- Familiarity with the existing literature and sufficient specialist knowledge in the discipline to develop research projects and methodologies.
- An ability to work with primary sources in at least one of Swedish, Ottoman Turkish and French, as well as other relevant languages
- An ability to carry out archival work in these languages and, where required, travel to relevant archives and/or work with manuscript sources
- A structured plan to conduct this research over two years.
- A preliminary plan for an international conference around the topic
- Excellent communication, interpersonal, and organisational skills.
- An ability to collaborate with other researchers and museum curators.

### **How to apply**

The following application materials should be sent to the KRC ([krc@ames.ox.ac.uk](mailto:krc@ames.ox.ac.uk)):

- Letter of motivation
- Detailed work plan over two years
- Preliminary conference plan
- C.V.
- Names of two referees who are closely acquainted with the candidate's work.

The deadline is 5pm (UK time) on 3 October 2025.

Incomplete applications and applications received after the deadline will not be considered.

### **The Khalili Research Centre**

The [Khalili Research Centre](#) (KRC) is the [University of Oxford](#)'s centre for research into the art and material culture of the Islamic societies of the Middle East and of their non-Muslim members and neighbours. It is also the University's centre for teaching the subject, especially to graduate students, but also to undergraduates. The KRC is part of the [Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies](#) in the University. The artistic traditions studied at the centre cover a chronological span of over a millennium. Its horizons stretch from the Mediterranean to Iraq and Iran – and often beyond, to societies from China in the East to Morocco in the West. The centre brings together one of the largest international concentrations of specialists in this field, who form an active community of leading scholars, postdoctoral researchers, and DPhil and Master's students, usually taught in small groups.

The KRC is located on St John Street, in central Oxford. It comprises offices for staff and researchers, a state-of-the-art top-floor room with dedicated student and researcher spaces, a seminar room, and a common room.

The KRC adjoins the Art, Archaeology and Ancient World Library with its extensive holdings of books and journals on Middle Eastern art and visual culture, the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Library, with its extensive Arabic, Persian and Turkish collections, and the Ashmolean Museum, with its superb collection of Islamic art. It is a few minutes' walk from the Bodleian Library, one of the largest research libraries in the world with major collections of Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts, and a national copyright deposit library.

### **Wolfson College**

[Wolfson](#) is a modern college that has been located for over 50 years in a traditional setting positioned on the tranquil banks of the River Cherwell, overlooking its own medieval meadows. Wolfson is an exciting and inspiring academic environment with a large scholarly community of students, senior academics, postdoctoral researchers and visitors. The College has since 2000 built on its academic prestige, establishing interdisciplinary research clusters for fellows and students, ranging from Quantum Computing to the Ancient World, and from Life Writing to the Climate Emergency. These academic initiatives have been matched by a new Academic Wing and 150-seat auditorium.

With its setting and ethos, the College has been at the forefront of work to support biodiversity and decarbonisation. Its estate is engaged in a long-term effort to become fossil-free.

The College is open, informal, diverse, democratic and multidisciplinary. Its ethos has been carried through from its founding President the historian of ideas Sir Isaiah Berlin, and is embedded in the college structure up to this very day. Wolfson has one single common room to which all members of the College belong and which reflects its egalitarian philosophy.

### **Lusail Museum & Lusail Institute**

[Lusail Museum](#) is a flagship cultural project currently being developed by Qatar Museums. The Museum will delve into themes of cultural exchange, power dynamics, and shared histories. By encouraging global dialogue on decolonisation, identity, and modernity, it will promote mutual understanding through diverse narratives from around the world. These themes will be presented with a particular interest in the Middle East, but considered alongside other regions. Among its holdings is one of the world's largest collections of Orientalist paintings, including the Celsing Collection. Lusail Museum is being established by an expanding team in Doha, with a projected opening around 2030. Its building, designed by Herzog & de Meuron, will be located on Al Maha, an artificial island facing Lusail, near Doha.

Lusail Institute is the research arm of Lusail Museum. It aims to build innovative historical research into the structure of the Museum, to embed the Museum in current academic debates, and to engage the public with fundamental cultural issues addressed by the Museum.