

Call for Papers

Rituals of Gender Staging and Performance in the Middle Ages

International Conference, University of Bamberg, 03-04 May 2023

The Network for Medieval Arts & Rituals (NetMAR), an international, interdisciplinary network investigating the intersections between medieval arts and rituals, invites proposals for 20-minute papers that address the role of rituals in the staging and performance of medieval gender roles. The conference, which will include scholars of different career stages, will be held at the premises of the University of Bamberg between the 3rd and 4th of May 2023.

The Middle Ages are generally regarded as an era in which symbolic communication played an important and extensive role in almost all areas of life. Medieval rituals are, as Gerhard Althoff has defined them, “longer sequences of actions whose processes are committed to patterns and create a performative impact; they cause what they show” (*Rules and Rituals in Medieval Power Games*, 2020: 9). Rituals serve the medieval need for producing religious, legal, power-consolidating, and magical acts in symbolic ways. They can be understood, according to Hannah Vollrath, as forms of multi-sensory communication that addresses the senses and feelings of participants. In short, rituals become perceptible through the senses that render them meaningful and powerful.

Medieval ritual research has so far focused on the role of rituals in the contexts of religion and power relations. It is obvious, however, that in the patriarchally organised and male dominated societies of the Middle Ages, rituals also played a significant role in the staging and performance of gender roles. Sharon T. Strocchia comes to the same conclusion when she observes “that ritual and gender offer valuable new ways to study power and systems of social relations,” while at the same time noting that the interactions of gender and ritual have so far remained “largely unexplored” (*Funerals and the Politics of Gender*, 1991: 155). Taking this into account, a closer examination of ritual as a possible form of solidification and confirmation of gender roles seems worthwhile.

Speakers of all medievalist disciplines are invited to use various textual and/or visual sources to explore the complicated intersections of sex, body and gender through the lens of medieval ritual. Of interest are topics such as the following:

- gender-specific initiation rituals
- ritualistic consolidations of male and female family roles
- rituals of male- and female-dominated professions
- male and female power relations
- gender-specific burial practices
- the role of women in religious and magical rituals
- female agency and ritual art
- ritual and gender transgression in iconography and beyond
- rituals and pregnancy.

The language of the conference is English. Please send an abstract (max. 300 words) and a brief biographical note to michaela.poelzl@uni-bamberg.de by no later than 15 January 2023. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by February 2023.

NetMAR is funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 951875. Learn more about the network at <https://netmar.cy>.