



1ST INTERNATIONAL
MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE
'EXPERIENCING THE SACRED'

THE ROLE OF THE SENSES IN MEDIEVAL LITURGIES AND RITUALS

CALL FOR PAPERS

21-23 SEPTEMBER 2022
PADOVA

ERC RESEARCH PROJECT *SENSART*

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ARCHEOLOGIA, STORIA
DELL'ARTE, DEL CINEMA
E DELLA MUSICA



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

By the Late Middle Ages, the liturgy has become the most important and elaborate ceremonial of Christianity in an already highly ritualised society. Indeed, rituals dominated the everyday life of the faithful, from the Divine Office and the Mass to the individual reading of the Hours; and they accompanied the life of people from their birth to their last breath. Besides, liturgy called for collective involvement and aimed at engaging the faithful by stimulating their senses, in order to trigger emotional and spiritual responses.

Over the past century, much has been said about the liturgy in the Middle Ages. Starting from the historical contribution of Mario Righetti (1946), in the last decades scholars have explored fresh research paths, incorporating notions and tools established by diverse disciplines. Philippe Buc (1997) and Eric Palazzo (2000) have opened up new research opportunities by assimilating sociological concepts, exploring the role of rituals as agents in shaping society and fostering social cohesion. More recently, this field has been fuelled with contributions from numerous disciplines that have started to engage in the study of the past, including neurosciences, performance studies, anthropology (Bull & Mitchell, 2016) and sensory studies (Palazzo, 2014; Neri & Caseau, 2021).

The scientific relevance of these contributions in generating adventurous approaches and opening up new panoramas is unquestionable. Following these fresh pathways, the first conference of the **series 'Experiencing the Sacred'**, established by the SenSArt ERC project, aims to develop the topic further by triangulating the liturgy (broadly intended), the experience of the faithful (understood both as an individual and as social groups) and the *sensoria* (i.e. the diverse sensory systems that existed in the Middle Ages). In so doing, it aims at showing that the experience of the sacred was not homogeneous and static. On the contrary, it was a multimodal and multisensorial activity, one that bore complex and overlapping layers of meaning, and which was perceived in different ways by the diverse groups and individuals involved.

In order to reach this objective, the conference will consider both the material and the immaterial aspects of the liturgy and will emphasise the wide range of its sensorial appeal. Images, objects, odours, words, flavours, movement, and sounds all formed part of the liturgical performance that permeated the life of medieval people. And yet, they were exploited and perceived in different terms by the diverse groups involved, such as the religious and lay community, men and women, members of the aristocracy and of the lower social groups.

The meeting will bring together a multi- and interdisciplinary community of scholars with a broad interest in the religious rituals of the late Middle Ages (ca. 1200 to ca. 1500), with particular respect to Art History, History, Musicology and Liturgy, in order to cross-fertilise these perspectives.





Scholars may address the topic with a broad approach but always considering the role of the *sensorium* in the performance and reception of the rites. This conference will focus specifically on Christian liturgies without geographical restrictions. Paper topics may include, but are by no means limited to:

- Rituals beyond the Mass such as vestments, consecrations, or monastic professions.
- Civic rituals mediated by the Church, such as coronations.
- Individual liturgical practices: how the rituals enter the everyday.
- The materiality of liturgy: the role of objects within different liturgical ceremonies (books, altarpieces, sculptures, paintings, metalworks, vestments, relics).
- Regulations and norms: how was the liturgy orchestrated? How did the church regulate the rituals?
- 'Unofficial' liturgy and subversive rituals: irregularities, contaminations and hybridisations between popular traditions and the Church regulations.
- Collective practices: how did different social groups interact with the sacred during the rituals? How were the rituals received and perceived by the faithful, from the clergy to the peasants?

Please send a title and abstract of no longer than 300 words, together with a short CV and personal data (max. 300 words), to the following emails: zuleika.murat@unipd.it; valentina.baradel@unipd.it; sara.carreno@unipd.it
The language of the conference is English.

Deadline: April 15th, 2022

This conference is organised by the ERC research project *SenSArt – The Sensuous Appeal of the Holy. Sensory Agency of Sacred Art and Somatised Spiritual Experiences in Medieval Europe (12th-15th century)*, Grant Agreement ID: 950248, ERC H-2020, PI Zuleika Murat, Università degli Studi di Padova.
<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/950248>

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