

1 Session at IMC (Leeds, 1–4 Jul 2024)

International Medieval Congress (IMC 2024), University of Leeds, Jul 1–04, 2024

Deadline: Sep 24, 2023

Mats Dijkdrent

[1] Commemoration and the Senses in Late Medieval Europe

From: Mats Dijkdrent

Date: Sep 4, 2023

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In the lesser-known treatise *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, Augustine of Hippo argued that tombs, when located in beautiful surroundings, are particularly powerful tools to incite genuine experiences of prayer in the mourner. Though writing in late antiquity, Augustine's words would be echoed in several late medieval texts concerning commemoration, as a myriad of sensorial experiences was thought to be an integral component of the commemoration of deceased individuals. The ensemble of funerary art was charged with meaning through the careful orchestration of rituals and their sensorial input. Material remains, such as the tombs of the deceased, are only one of the sensory aspects once associated with the commemoration, while ephemeral displays of emotion by individuals through gesture, music, or clothing and other meaningful sensory signifiers are often hard to trace. Access to these ephemeral details is in the direct or indirect accounts of funerary rituals that tried to capture a sensory experience in text. These descriptions charged a monument or other funerary object with meaning, and allowed it to leave its material form and to start circulating throughout Europe in textual and visual copies.

While Augustine's thought on the importance of senses in experiencing tombs was agreed upon and taken over by many authors in Late Medieval Europe, modern-day scholarship on funerary monuments and other commemorative practices has taken a long time to catch up with the intricate intellectual legacy on that matter. Particularly in the last two decades, scholarly attention has shifted to how commemoration goes beyond what remains visible today. Sharon Strocchia's seminal 1992 book on burial rituals in 15th-century Florence was one such trailblazer, showing that key parts of the cityscape could be appropriated and activated to commemorate significant deceased individuals. While this and other publications have prompted more scholarly attention for the rituals surrounding commemoration in many parts of the European continent and beyond, much still remains to be said on how actively the senses were targeted in these rituals and what the link is between commemoration and the senses in the period after the ritual. This session therefore proposes to look at funerary practices and their associated objects in Late Medieval Europe through the lens of sensory experiences. In our section we tend to explore this intersection between ritual and object in which an object gets charged, activated or loaded with a certain meaning through a sensory effect at its initiation.

As such we would be very interested in posing questions such as (but certainly not limited to); In what way was existing liturgy embedded in the sensory “experience” of mourning? How was the sensory experience of funerary monuments and rituals captured in words? How could funerals temporarily “take over” public spaces by their ephemeral sensory presence? How could mourning, sermons, and commemorative literature be used to comment or reflect on a material object and its artistic qualities or another sensory performance. How did the spatial arrangements of the funerary monument relate to a specific funerary ritual and its sensory expressions? How did views of gender impact commemorative practices? How was music used to commemorate or commiserate? To what extent did certain rituals guide the gaze of the audience through the spatial arrangement? How were ephemeral rituals remembered and did the interpretation of them leave a lasting impression in the material culture?

This session encourages scholars to present new types of sources and approaches that give us new insights on the relation between the senses and mourning rituals. The session furthermore shows the importance and interconnectedness of sensory experience and commemoration, as it allows us to research the mechanisms and strategies of consolidating memory into existing rituals and spaces in Late Medieval Europe.

Submissions from a variety of disciplines are accepted, including but not limited to: archaeology, hagiography, religious studies, cultural and textual studies, humanist studies, musicology, history, history of art etc. Please submit a 200-300 words proposal (in English) for a 15-20 minute paper. Proposals should include an abstract and be accompanied by a CV (including contact details, institution and academic or other affiliation).

This session is planned to take place in-person.

Please submit all relevant documents by 24 September 2023 to the following email addresses:
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Reference:

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