

Ecclesia laborans (Berlin, 6–7 Mar 26)

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Mar 6–07, 2026

Deadline: Nov 3, 2025

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Ecclesia laborans: Reproductive Labor and the Hidden Work of Liturgical Performance, 1350–1600

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Keeping the liturgy going in medieval and early modern churches was a lot of work. The daily, weekly, and yearly cycles of prayer and ceremony, with additional occasional rites such as baptisms and funerals, demanded outlays of resources and time from communities both monastic and lay. Floors needed to be swept, and hosts baked; records kept, and antiphons rehearsed; celebrations scheduled, and processional routes planned; candles lit and roofs repaired. Scholarship has had a tendency to focus on productive labor, that is, on moments of creation, construction, or composition. In this interdisciplinary workshop, we would like to attend to the routines of maintenance, the repeated acts of reproductive labor.

To this end, we invite contributions concerned with the work of coordination, maintenance, adaptation, and repair in connection with medieval and early modern Christian liturgy in the Latin West. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- planning and rehearsal of, as well as training for, correct performance of music, reading or ritual
- recording and coordinating recurring observances and obligations, such as votive masses, prayer confraternities, and commemorations of the dead
- writing, copying and updating both liturgical books per se and other documents of practice
- washing and cleaning liturgical spaces, textiles, and objects
- repairing and adapting the same to changing circumstances and requirements
- provisioning non-reusable elements such as wax and wine
- storage and inventory management
- trash disposal

In their approaches to these and other questions, we invite contributors to consider how the pragmatic needs of maintenance shaped liturgical art, as well as those moments in which the lines between production and reproduction become blurred.

In order to keep a coherent focus, we are seeking contributions on Western Christianity, from the period of 1350–1600; proposals concerning early Protestantism and the counter-Reformation are welcome, as are those anchored in late-medieval practices.

The conference will be hosted at the Humboldt-Universität in Berlin on Friday-Saturday, 6-7 March

2026. The event will be fully in-person.

We invite all interested to submit abstracts to the conference email address (labor-liturgy-2026@hu-berlin.de) by Monday, 3 November 2025.

Please include

- your name and title
- your institutional affiliation and/or academic status
- a paper title and abstract (250 words maximum)
- a brief (50 words maximum) bio for yourself

Please also send any questions to the conference email address (labor-liturgy-2026@hu-berlin.de).

Reference:

CFP: Ecclesia laborans (Berlin, 6-7 Mar 26). In: Arthist.net, Oct 9, 2025 (accessed Oct 9, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50837>>.