

Ritualizing Rome: Visual Culture, Space, and Liturgy (Rome, 19–20 Nov 26)

Rome, The Norwegian Institute in Rome (University of Oslo), Nov 19–20, 2026

Deadline: Jun 15, 2026

Martin Lešák

Ritualizing Rome: Visual Culture, Space, and Liturgy (c. 300–1300).

How was the city of Rome ritualized in Late Antiquity and during the Middle Ages, and what was the role of visual culture, architecture, materials, and religious practices in that process?

This seemingly straightforward yet immensely layered question has occupied scholars for decades. Since its foundation, the city of Rome served as a stage for a wide range of religious and civic rituals. During Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, its streets were used as processional routes, while novel spaces were conceived, adapted, and constructed to accommodate the needs of varied religious communities and their developing and changing rituals.

From the fourth century onward, Christian worship and liturgy began to weave one of the most impactful layers into the fabric of the city. Yet, in the art historical study of late antique and medieval Roman visual culture and architecture, liturgical sources have not always been fully integrated into analyses of ritual space. Even Richard Krautheimer's *Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae* only occasionally engages with such documents, despite the valuable information they contain for many of the churches it discusses. More recently, scholarship has increasingly acknowledged the importance of liturgical evidence, building bridges between Roman visual culture, architecture, urban space, and ritual practice. In parallel, art historical research has paid growing attention to the notions of space, movement, and the built as well as natural environment, particularly in relation to the performative dimension of ritual. This international workshop seeks to address and build on such lines of inquiry by inviting contributions that engage with this cityscape in permanent mutation.

How are spaces created, staged, and maintained to accommodate existing or developing Christian as well as non-Christian ritual practices? What were the sensorial dimensions of rituals, and how did such experiences shape subsequent understandings of space? Which material and textual sources allow us to explore these issues, and what are their limits? These are some of the central questions of the workshop, which aims to open new avenues for interdisciplinary research that bring into dialogue art history, liturgical studies, archaeology, architectural history, religious history, and more.

We especially welcome contributions that:

- examine the interaction between ritual practice and the visual, architectural, and urban transfor-

mation of Rome;

- analyze the historical and liturgical sources to reconstruct ritual practices and their development;
- explore processions and other forms of ritual movement within and beyond the city walls;
- address the sensorial and performative dimensions of ritual in relation to artworks and built as well as natural environments;
- investigate questions of memory, identity, authority, and community formation as shaped through visual culture, space, architecture, and ritual.

Confirmed invited speakers include Professors Kristin B. Aavitsland (Oslo), Harald Buchinger (Regensburg), Manuela Gianandrea (Rome), and, for the keynote lecture, Sible de Blaauw (Nijmegen).

Interested scholars from various career stages may send a short bio, selected list of publications and an abstract of c. 250 words to martin.lesak@roma.uio.no before 15 June 2026. Further practical information will be circulated after the selection process.

Researchers without access to institutional funding may apply for a travel grant. Please indicate in your proposal if you would like to be considered for this support.

Reference:

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