

Material Memory and the Provenances of Medieval Artefacts (Berlin, 3-4 Sep 26)

Architekturforum TU Berlin, Ernst-Reuter-Platz, Straße des 17. Juni 152, 10623 Berlin, Sep 3-04, 2026

Registration deadline: Aug 31, 2026

Marie Hartmann

Objects record their material pasts: A medieval manuscript's parchment pages, for instance, retain traces of animal bodies and thus reflect their physical source. Similarly, varying states of silver corrosion and shades of gold could have reminded its readers that metallic colours were produced from differently sourced and alloyed metals (Herbert 2022; Degler/Wenderholm 2016). Illuminations with rare pigments, such as lapis-lazuli, could transport connotations of precious foreignness and geographical expanse (Dunlop 2014), while a so-called toadstone placed on a book cover may have evoked a legendary origin, such as described in the *Hortus sanitatis*.

This international conference aims to discuss how medieval objects and materials "remember" their origins (Plate 2025; Schlunke 2013; Jones 2007). Taking inspiration from the methods of modern-day provenance research as well as embracing multiple perspectives on resource extraction and variable object narratives (Binter et al. 2021; Feigenbaum/Reist 2013), we propose to investigate how the prehistories of an object's components continue to reverberate within the artefact. What role does the memory of a sometimes extraordinary or mythic origin play in endowing artefacts with particular significance? And extending the scope of provenance research to material narratives: To what extent does matter participate in processes of remembering – and, conversely, also in forgetting or actively covering up – provenance? Does matter-based memory rather emerge as a "side-effect" from a substance's properties, or could it also be actively anticipated through techniques of manufacture?

At stake in these questions is whether and how recollection can meaningfully be attributed to the materiality of medieval objects. Although one may argue that they "do not 'have' a memory of their own", but merely trigger a viewer's memory (Assmann 2008), recent scholarship increasingly challenges strictly anthropocentric memory models by foregrounding interdependencies and entanglements among humans, animals, plants, and environments (e.g. Crane 2021; Steel 2022). This can be illustrated, for instance, by how materials register time through reactive and alterable qualities such as ageing, deformation, or corrosion, which could be understood as temporal inscriptions shaping how objects contribute to processes of remembering over time.

As a working hypothesis, we propose that these aspects of materiality constitute a form of non-human participation in knowledge production, whereby matter does not merely receive meaning retrospectively but actively influences how material memory is perceived, recalled, or obscured. The publication hence conceives artefacts as having agency within their own biographies (Lehmann

2015), examining how material features prompt and preserve histories and memories – parchment reflecting animal bodies, recycled metals retaining traces of earlier uses, or textile smells evoking sensory connections to their origins.

Programme

Thursday, 3 September 2026

Welcome & Coffee (09:30 – 09:45)

9:45 Introduction, Isabelle Dolezalek & Marie Hartmann (Technical University of Berlin)

1. Recalling (Legendary) Origins (Moderation: Charlotte Wenke, Technical University of Berlin)

10:15 Animal, Material, Object: Remembering Ivory's Origins in the Gothic Period, Svea Janzen (Friedrich Schiller University Jena)

10:45 Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Material Metaphors in Late Medieval Drinking Vessels, Costanza Beltrami (Stockholm University)

Coffee Break (11:15 – 11:45)

11:45 Blemished Surfaces: The Imaginative Origins and Social Afterlives of Loštice Pottery, Agnieszka Dziki (Free University of Berlin)

12:15 "...para memoria do seu antigo aparecimento...": Narrative and Materiality Surrounding the Marian Cult in Early Modern Portugal, Diana Rafaela Pereira (University of Porto)

Lunch Break (12:45 – 14:15)

14:15 Student Interventions, Case Studies from the Seminar "Materialgeschichten. Komposite vor-moderne Artefakte und deren transregionale Provenienzen" (Summer Semester 2026, Technical University of Berlin in cooperation with the SMB, Kunstgewerbemuseum)

2. Retaining Presence and Absence (Moderation: Judith Utz, Berlin State Library)

14:45 Registering Time: The Material Memory of Black Parchment, Marie Hartmann (Technical University of Berlin)

15:15 Scented Gold: Material Memory and the Provenance of the Papal Golden Rose, Christian Sauer (Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt)

Coffee Break (15:45 – 16:15)

16:15 Beheading and Collecting in the Early Ottoman Empire, Alfie Robinson (University of St Andrews)

16:45 A Marble Palimpsest: Roman Spolia and the Maymūnah Stone (1174), Charlene Vella (University of Malta)

Snack Break (17:15 – 18:00)

Keynote Lecture

18:00 Reading the Residue: How Wax, Pollen, and Grease Reveal Habits and Emotions of Medieval Manuscript Users, Kathryn Rudy (University of St Andrews)

Friday, 4 September 2026

Excursion

09:30 – 10:30 Material Provenances of Stones and Metals at Technical University of Berlin's Campus, Gerda Schirrmeister

Coffee Break (10:30–11:00)

3. Re-using, Transforming, Forgetting (Moderation: Britta Dümpelman, Free University of Berlin)

11:00 Forging a Saint's Memory: The Material Palimpsest of the "Primitive Reliquary of St Louis" at Toledo Cathedral, Angel Fuentes Ortiz & María Teresa Chicote Pompanin (both Complutense University of Madrid)

11:30 Stones Out of Place: Re-setting Islamic Gemstones in Medieval Italian and Mediterranean Metalwork, Maaïke Abma (University of London)

Lunch Break (12:00 – 13:15)

13:15 Stone that Remembers: Pharaonic Remains and Material Memory in Medieval Egypt, Anthony T. Quickel (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science)

13:45 Conclusion, Isabelle Dolezalek & Marie Hartmann (Technical University of Berlin)

Concept and organization: Isabelle Dolezalek & Marie Hartmann

Audience members and discussion participants are warmly welcome. Please register by 31 August 2026 by emailing marie.hartmann@tu-berlin.de.

For further information see:
www.tu.berlin/kunstgeschichte/forschung/konferenzen-und-workshops/material-memory-and-the-provenances-of-medieval-artefacts

Reference:

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