The Cluster of Excellence

Understanding Written Artefacts

cordially invites you to the workshop

Inscribing Initiation:

Written Artefacts in Rites of Passage

Thursday, 19 January 2023, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm CET
Friday, 20 January 2023, 10:00 am – 6:30 pm CET
Saturday, 21 January, 9:30 am – 1:15 pm CET

Warburgstraße 26, 20354 Hamburg

Hybrid Event

Organised by Jochen Hermann Vennebusch
(Universität Hamburg)

Registration:
https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/en/register-workshop35
Nearly all cultures of the world, both contemporary and now defunct ancient, know initiatory acts by which a person’s transition to another social, religious, or political status or standing is ritually expressed and exploited. As a rule, these rituals regularly consist of a combination of acts of speech and signs. Additionally, these acts often involved objects that were necessary to bring about or to guarantee the agency and efficacy of the ritual, or even to record the new status of the person on whom the act is performed. Often these artefacts operate with writing, either by writing something down on or with them, or by bearing writing characters themselves. In the context of the first group of objects fall, for example, documents like the certificate of a monastic profession, which is signed on the main altar of the monastery church during the ritual, but also matriculation books, in which the name and matriculation number of the newly admitted student are entered during the matriculation. While the written form in these cases has more of a documentary function, inscriptions on other objects, such as on Jewish circumcision knives and blankets, sometimes also on baptismal fonts, as well as on oil ampoules associated with Christian ordination ceremonies, have an interpretive function, as they provide information about the content of the (liturgical) act through the inscriptions (and images) attached to them. In some rituals, the affixing of characters or inscriptions is itself part of the performance of the ritual. On the one hand, this refers, for example, to the Egyptian consecration of kings, in whose course characters are affixed to the hand of the pharaoh and then licked off and almost physically absorbed by him. On the other hand, at the beginning of the consecration of churches in the Middle Ages, for example, the Latin and Greek alphabets were inscribed by the bishop with his staff into a heap of ashes on the floor of the church to be consecrated.

The conference will explore the phenomenon of writing and inscription in initiation rituals in a broad cultural-historical context. In doing so, such rites of passage will be analysed from an intercultural, comparative, and interdisciplinary perspective beyond Europe. Especially the objects used in this context will be examined, whether they are documents recording the new status of the person or inscribed objects used in the context of the ritual. Here, the double character of the word ‘inscribe’ will be explicitly assumed, which recurs both to the inscriptions on or with the artefacts and to the inscription as a kind of certification and perpetuation. A particular interest is the materiality of the objects used or possibly produced in the context of the ritual or ceremony, which is often constitutive for the success and completion of the initiation ritual.
Programme

Thursday, 19 January, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

6:00 – 8:00  Keynote: Ingo Runde (Heidelberg) and Heike Hawicks (Heidelberg)
*University matricula as material testimonies of the initiation culture at universities*

8:00  Dinner

Friday, 20 January, 10:00 am – 6:30 pm

10:00 – 12:00  Guided Tour – Exhibition MARKK (speakers only)
*UnBinding Bodies – Lotusschuhe und Korsett*

12:00 – 1:00  Lunch and Registration

1:00 – 1:15  Jochen Hermann Vennebusch (Hamburg) and Kaja Harter-Uibopuu (Hamburg)
*Introduction*

Performing Inscriptions in Rituals

Chair: Kaja Harter-Uibopuu (Hamburg)

1:15 – 2:00  Harald Buchinger (Regensburg)
*Church dedication as initiation? With particular attention to the inscription of the alphabet*

2:00 – 2:45  Carina Kühne-Wespi (Heidelberg):
*Inscribing pharaoh’s initiation: The use of writings and written artefacts in Egyptian kingship rituals*

2:45 – 3:15  Coffee break
Entering a New Sacred Status

Chair: Leah Mascia (Hamburg)

3:15 – 4:00
Alkuin Volker Schachenmayr (Heiligenkreuz)
*The Benedictine document of monastic profession from the 16th to the 20th century*

4:00 – 5:00
Petra Kieffer-Pülz (Mainz)
*Ordination as a Buddhist monk or nun and kammavācā manuscripts*

Inscriptions and Pilgrimage

Chair: Ondrej Skrabal (Hamburg)

5:00 – 5:45
Dominic Goodall (Pondicherry)
*On Śaiva Tantric initiation as performed in South India today and on its earliest traces in epigraphy across Asia*

5:45 – 6:30
tba

tba

Saturday, 21 January, 9:30 am – 1:15 pm

Titling and documenting

Chair: Jochen Hermann Vennebusch (Hamburg)

9:30 – 10:15
Chris de Lisle (Durham)
*Crystallising initiation: Athenian ephebic inscriptions*

10:15 – 11:00
Peera Panarut
*Consecrating the golden leaves: Rituals for inscribing golden-plate inscriptions in the Thai royal court*

11:00 – 11:30
Coffee break
Establishing Irrevocable Affiliations

Chair: Peera Panarut (Hamburg)

11:30 – 12:15  Jochen Hermann Vennebusch (Hamburg)  
‘Whoever is baptised in this holy font is washed from sin and considered Catholic.’  
The effects of the sacrament of baptism reflected in inscriptions and pictorial programs on medieval bronze baptismal fonts

12:15 – 1:00  Dilshat Harman (Göttingen)  
Inscriptions on the 18th century embroidered Mappot from the Göttingen collection and their audience

1:00 – 1:15  Closing remarks and Farewell
Abstracts and Contributors

Ingo Runde (Universität Heidelberg) and Heike Hawicks (Universität Heidelberg)

*University matricula as material testimonies of the initiation culture at universities*

Thursday, 19 January, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

At many medieval and early modern universities in Europe, members of individual colleges, (student) nations, or faculties were registered in university registers (matriculation books, matriculation rolls). With a certain emphasis on the universities of the Old Empire, the entry forms evolved from rather rudimentary details (name, diocese of origin, property status for the payment of a fee) to pre-printed double-sided tables with information on the date of enrollment, date of birth, place of birth, status and residence of parents, religion, field of study, university previously attended, and amount of the tax. Often they also served as an oath book for incoming university members, and thus were integral to formal acceptance into the community of teachers and students. Calendars of non-teaching days and commemorative entries for particularly meritorious members may also be included, as well as marginal notes on particularly important events in a given semester. The university registers are thus not only an important cultural heritage and one of the most important sources for research into university history, but also the material testimony to the initiation culture at European universities.

Harald Buchinger (Universität Regensburg)

*Church dedication as initiation? With particular attention to the inscription of the alphabet*

Friday, 20 January, 1:15 pm – 2:00 pm

The paper shall investigate the medieval Western rites of Church Dedication; it shall ask how the complex and diverse celebration can be understood as initiation. Particular attention shall be paid to the ritual of inscribing the alphabet and to its materiality both in the actual execution of the rite and in the manuscripts.
Carina Kühne-Wespi (Universität Heidelberg)

Inscribing pharaoh’s initiation: The use of writings and written artefacts in Egyptian kingship rituals
Friday, 20 January, 2:00 pm – 2:45 pm

In this paper I will consider the use of writings and written artefacts in ancient Egyptian kingship rituals. What role did writings and written artefacts play in constituting kingship? After giving an overview of the sources at hand that can be instructive on the kings’ initiation, his enthronisation and coronation, I will focus on the scene of the noble ished tree. This scene is attested primarily on temple walls of the New Kingdom and referred to in some statues and smaller objects from the same period. When depicted as part of relief decorations, the ished scene shows the king in the presence of gods who inscribe his name on the leaves of the holy tree, carve the year risp, set the crowns firm on his head and equip him with a prosperous reign. The sources for the scene of the ished tree offer many interesting aspects to discuss in more detail and I shall elaborate on three of them, namely on the significance of the king’s name and its presence on the ished tree, the importance of the writing process, and finally the materiality of the scene. In closing, and on a different note, my elaborations will include a brief excursus into another kingship ritual in which the king himself serves as writing support for a very short hieroglyphic inscription.

Alkuin Volker Schachenmayr (Benedict XVI Philosophical-Theological University, Heiligenkreuz)

The Benedictine document of monastic profession from the 16th to the 20th century
Friday, 20 January, 3:15 pm – 4:00 pm

The document of monastic profession is a basic type of record in monastic archives in the Benedictine tradition, often more predominant than charters or papal privileges. The Rule of St. Benedict describes its function as the proof of having made monastic vows, and forbids the document’s disposal, even if the monk who signed it should leave the community. The documents show varying degrees of aesthetic quality, from splendid decorations to rustic signatory Xs made by illiterate monks and nuns. My research perspective, as a monk and archivist, is on the object as the culmination of the administrative process that precedes it. The monk must first petition for admission to the novitiate and then, later, must again request admission to perpetual vowed life ‘usque ad mortem’ (until death). With an emphasis on Early Modern Benedictine men and women, I examine the documents that go before the solemn initiation. For example, written assurances of honest religious intent were often required in advance. Other documents might
follow later in life, like a monk’s renewal of monastic vows after many years in the community. By analysing the form and content of this array of documents, I offer an introduction to monastic recordkeeping procedures in Austrian monasteries from the 16th to the 20th centuries.

Petra Kieffer-Pülz (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz)

*Ordination as a Buddhist monk or nun and kammavācā manuscripts*

Friday, 20 January, 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm

The administration of Buddhist monastic communities (Sanskrit, Pali *saṅgha*) is the task of a local community. Most matters are formally regulated to be carried out in legal acts (Sanskrit *karma*, Pali *kamma*). For their implementation, the Buddhist communities of monks or nuns (they act separately) must assemble in full within a ritual space, and act according to the respective prescribed legal act, with the precisely prescribed wording of the corresponding formula (Sanskrit *karmavācānā*, Pali *kammavācā*). A fault in the recitation or pronunciation of the formula renders the act legally invalid. Therefore, manuscripts containing these formulas for recitation during the legal act exist everywhere in the Buddhist world. They are inscribed on palm leaves, birch bark, or, nowadays, are even printed on cardboard. However, in addition to these purely practical manuscripts, there are precious *kammavācā* manuscripts made of eminent monks’ robes covered with red or black lacquer and gold, or of metal sheets (gold, silver, copper) or ivory, and are inscribed with ornamental scripts that are barely legible. Thus, they no longer serve the practical purpose of being read during the legal act. Often they are donated by lay people including the royalty to a monastery or a community as an act of merit at a special occasion, especially ordinations. Ordination as a monk or nun is one of the most important legal acts, since the continuity of Buddhism depends on an unbroken ordination lineage going back to the historical Buddha. The purpose of these special manuscripts thus is no longer practical, but rather ceremonial.

Dominic Goodall (Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, Pondicherry)

*On Śaiva Tantric initiation as performed in South India today and on its earliest traces in epigraphy across Asia*

Friday, 20 January, 5:00 pm – 5:45 pm

Recondite allusions to kings receiving Śaiva initiation begin to appear in the sixth and seventh centuries CE across India (Sanderson 2001, Goodall 2004, Goodall, Sanderson, Isaacson et al.)
2015), followed a little later by the first similar half-hidden references in Campā (Goodall and Griffiths 2013) and Cambodia (Goodall 2015 and 2022). Thereafter, a wealth of initiatory names appear in epigraphs from both regions (Goodall 2001 and Goodall 2016). An exhaustive account of initiation as presented by the influential eleventh-century Śaiva abbot Somaśambhu has been presented in Brunner’s edition and richly annotated French translation of the requisite portion of Somaśambhu’s manual (Brunner 1977). This paper will touch upon the epigraphical traces and attempt to give a brief illustrated account of Śaiva initiation as it is performed in South India today.

Christopher de Lisle (Durham University)

Crystalising initiation: Athenian ephebic inscriptions

Saturday, 21 January, 9:30 am – 10:15 am

The ephebate was a programme of physical, religious, and civic training, which initiated Athenian male youth into public life as adult men. Inscribed monuments commemorating the graduation of each year’s cohort crystalised the process of initiation that the young men had passed through as ephebes, i.e. they gave a permanent form to the ephebes’ experiences, elided variation between individuals and over time, and presented an agreed version of the meaning of the initiation for the ephebes themselves and for the wider Athenian society.

The monuments do this through both text and imagery, which present all cohorts as having done more or less the same activities and as having epitomised the same small set of virtues each year. The texts attribute all activities to the cohort as a whole and the images stand in for the whole cohort. In both text and imagery, all ephebes and all cohorts were presented as conforming to the Athenian citizen ideal. Viewers of these monuments were thus led to assume that all the ephebes named in each monument had successfully achieved the ideal.

The crystalised image of the ephebate which these monuments created was important for the individual ephebes, as they made sense of their experiences, but also for Athenian society as a whole. By asserting that each year’s ephebes had been successfully initiated, these monuments assured Athenians of the vitality of their society.
Peera Panarut (Universität Hamburg)
Consecrating the golden leaves: Rituals for inscribing golden-plate inscriptions in the Thai royal court
Saturday, 21 January, 10:15 am – 11:00 am

In the royal court of Thailand, golden-plate inscriptions have been produced for various purposes. Most often they were used to record the titles, bestowed by the king, for members of the royal family and the nobility as well as for senior monks. These golden-plate inscriptions for bestowing titles are called *suphannabat* in Thai. They were given to the bestowed person in remembrance for a rite of passage; the *suphannabat* have formed a particular epigraphic tradition within the royal court from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. Furthermore, golden-plate inscriptions for the regnal titles are considered one of the royal regalia for the royal coronation even nowadays. On the other hand, in the diplomatic missions to sovereigns of foreign lands, such as China and European empires, golden-plate inscriptions were sent as a diplomatic gift for many centuries. Despite their variety, all these golden-plate inscriptions have ritual and symbolic rather than discursive functions in the Thai royal court. Thus, the process of producing and writing these symbolic written artefacts requires the performance of specific consecrating rituals of inscribing initiation. This paper explores the rituals performed in producing these different kinds of the golden-plate inscriptions in the Thai royal court, in which different groups of courtiers were involved. The consecrating rituals for these golden plates are arguably one of the most well-structured rituals for producing written artefacts in the Thai royal court.

Jochen Hermann Vennebusch (Universität Hamburg)
»Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved« – The effects of the sacrament of baptism reflected in inscriptions and pictorial programs on medieval bronze baptismal fonts
Saturday, 21 January, 11:30 am – 12:15 pm

Medieval bronze baptismal fonts not only usually have sometimes rather more or less concisely composed picture programs, but also extensive inscriptions surrounding the cuppae, where the baptismal water is preserved. In addition to the donor’s and the founder’s inscriptions, which are often connected with a request for intercession, numerous baptismal fonts have texts attached to them that address the substance of the sacrament of baptism and its effects on the recipients. In addition to a social dimension, which was justified by the function of the initiation sacrament as incorporation into the community of the church, this liturgical act also had a spiritual significance for the salvation of the baptised.
The paper will focus on two bronze baptismal fonts, which were probably made around 1225 in a workshop in Osnabrück in Lower Saxony, and which each express in a different way the origin and effects of the sacrament of baptism through their inscriptions as well as through the pictorial program. The texts attached to the baptismal fonts are placed in the context of contemporary theological debates and interpreted in light of these considerations.

Dilshat Harman (Universität Göttingen)

Inscriptions on the 18th century embroidered Mappot from the Göttingen Collection and their audience

Saturday, 21 January, 12:15 pm – 1:00 pm

My paper is dedicated to the intended readers/viewers of the inscriptions on the seven embroidered mappot (Wimpeln) made in Göttingen and nearby Adelebsen in the period from 1690 to 1742 and conserved in the Göttingen Städtisches Museum. Mappot are common in Ashkenazic communities, there they were made from the swaddling bands used in the circumcision ritual. After decoration with the standard textual formula and, sometimes, with additional texts and images, they were further used as Torah binders in other initiation rituals: first visit of the boy to the synagogue, Bar-mitzvah, Shabbat before marriage. Till the first visit to the synagogue they were kept in the family and all other time – in the synagogue itself. As a ritual object which touched the Torah scroll, mappa could not be thrown away and, when worn out, was repositioned in the genizah.

Mappot began to be seriously studied after the World War II, although they had already appeared in museums in the end of the 19th century, when Jewish families and communities were selling or donating them to the regional collections. Their importance in initiation rituals was first made clear in 1982 by Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, who suggested that the verbal text, pronounced in the synagogue in the process of circumcision was then restated on the binder and subjected to visualizations. Since then a lot of work has been done both in restorating mappot to their former glory and in researching their texts, images and meaning in the context of Jewish rituals.

In my paper I investigate how the intended audience of the inscriptions influenced the ways in which this standard formula was visualised in different mappot. I chose the objects which were made in two nearby communities, in the same technique (embroidery) and are chronologically close. The analysis shows that the borders between writing the text on the mappa and visualiz-
ing it are blurred. The letters are executed in the manner resembling the appearance of the deco-
rated capital letters in Hebrew manuscripts - multicoloured, filled with different decorative el-
ements, birds, animals and even faces. They are big and occupy the most part of the space on the
binders' surface. The inscriptions are always made in such a way that prior to reading the viewer
sees them as a piece of art and responses immediately and emotionally. This was obviously made
keeping in mind the rituals in which the mappa would play the part. All the members of commu-
nity should be able to have a glimpse of its beautiful decoration from afar, even if they wouldn't
be able to actually read the words. In 5 out of 7 mappot the important images (Moses, chuppah,
the astrological sign etc.) are of the same dimensions as the letters and inserted directly into the
line of text. Thus they could easily remind the audience (including semiliterate women and chil-
dren) what is the inscription about.

At the same time there are additional texts - for example the text of 10 commandments on the
Moses' tablets or good wishings near the image of chuppah. These are made in very little stitches
and sometimes are hardly visible. However they are readable when you are looking closely and
would be easily seen by the child/bridegroom himself, when the binder would be unwinded from
the Torah scroll before his reading. Some of them can be understood as having amuletic prop-
erties.

Third kind of audience both for the big and small inscriptions were women of the family. The
mappot were kept at home for the period from 1 to 3 years. At this time it could be used by
women as a model not only for creating other mappot, but also as a teaching material for the
girls learning how to sew. Later evidence provides us with the examples of sampler-mappot ex-
ecuted by the inexperienced embroiderers. In this way mappa, being a part of the initiation ritu-
als, sealing the entrance of the male member into the community, could be also used to initiate
the female member into the grown-up world of her obligations, as in Ashkenazi communities
the sewing for the family was understood as women's mitzva (religious duty). In this case you
didn't need to understand what was written, only to be able to copy the contours and stitches.

Thus the inscriptions on the mappot became in the first place a sign of the irreversible connec-
tion of the person and community and only then a text which was intended to be read.