Chapter 5
Sacralisation

Tobias Frese, Wolf Zöller, Stefan Ardeleanu, Nikolaus Dietrich, Dennis Disselhoff, Annette Hornbacher, Lisa Horstmann, Jiří Jákl, Tino Licht, Hanna Liss, Giuditta Mirizio, Anett Rózsa, Anna Sitz, Mandy Telle, Sebastian Watta, Franziska Wenig

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Within the Abrahamic religious tradition, it is obvious that writing is something important, indeed fundamental: the written word is the medium through which the eternal Word of God and his revealed truth is believed to be communicated. The obviousness of this statement is called into question, however, as soon as we investigate the significance of inscribed artefacts in sacred contexts from a cross-religious, cross-epochal, and cross-cultural perspective.[1]

Apart from the simple observation that writing is of no significance whatsoever in some religions, we must concede that its status cannot even be unambiguously determined in distinct writing cultures, much less in the so-called 'religions of the book'. For the latter, but also with respect to many other cultures and religions—we can generally assert first of all that writing has hierographic potential (Thesis 24). However, the way in which this potential was used and activated differs greatly, depending on a variety of ideological and cultural factors. In Balinese rituals, for example, an inherently powerful effect is ascribed to individual written characters and their pictographic arrangement,[2] while in rituals of sacralisation in classical antiquity, the connection between what is written and what is spoken played a major role, with the use of writing in such instances being often possible, but not always necessary. In the Christian Middle Ages, by contrast, we find an almost ambivalent appraisal of the sanctity of writing. On the one hand, the Bible itself could be regarded as offering a sceptical view (seen, for instance, in the juxtaposition of the "letter [that] kills" with the "Spirit [that] gives life" [2 Cor 3:6]), while on the other hand, this very same book was regarded as 'Holy Scripture' and cultically venerated in its manifold material forms.

The sacred in itself eludes the analytical methods of both the natural sciences and the humanities. In material culture, however, we can identify attributions of a sacred quality to objects, places, or people, as is demonstrated for example in the creation and hierarchical structuring, or internal differentiation, of sacred spaces. These complex processes of 'sacralisation'[3] can be described as processes of discursive construc-

1 This cannot be done with the same intensity for all world religions. In what follows, we focus on Graeco-Roman antiquity, Christianity, and Judaism, as well as on East Asian religious cultures.

2 In this case, writing not only indicates *sacrality,* but also *sacralises* the object.

3 When we refer to sacralisation through writing, we mean (ritual) acts by means of which objects, spaces, and persons can be both sacralised and also desacralised, either through (active) writing or

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tion which often involve diverse media and where the sacred quality is recurrently and repeatedly ascribed or perceived by the people involved, thus becoming accessible to academic research.[4] Looking across cultures and different time periods, we encounter a mind-boggling diversity of concepts of the sacred that are implemented in this way and are also very dynamic in character.

If we inquire into the concrete role of writing in the production of sacred spaces and artefacts, we find that this role is highly flexible and takes on an extremely diverse array of forms. Thus, inscriptions often served to mark and protect the boundary[5] between the profane and the sacred; at the same time, however, writing could also make these boundaries permeable, generate its own intermediate spaces, and moderate existentially significant transitions (Thesis 25). Since sacral status is always in jeopardy, writings were also regularly deployed to authenticate, legitimise, and stabilise sacrality over the long term (Thesis 26). Finally, inscriptions were used to define and establish sacred spaces, but they were also positioned so that they profited 'parasitically' from the sacredness of a space, as it were (Thesis 27).

As diverse and in part contradictory as these functions of writing in sacred contexts may be, what they all have in common is a fundamentally dynamic quality and performative character. By participating in processes of sacralisation, inscribed artefacts were always more than mere external signs of transcendent messages. On the contrary, they had their own "communicative agency"[6] and effect, and they were always integrated into complex 'writing rituals'.[7] However, these ritual acts of writing took place not only in the context of religions with a strong, emphatic concept of sacred scriptures, but also in religions whose use of scripture was optional in character, and even (or especially) in a 'religion of the book', whose theologians polemicised against magical writing practices.

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through the reception of writing. Cf. the etymological references to the terms 'sacralisation' ("Sakralisierung") or 'de- and resacralisation' ("De- und Resakralisierung") in Herbers 2013, esp. 12–13.

4 Cf. Gemeinhardt/Heyden 2012, 421–422. On church construction: Watta 2018, 21–24; Jäggi 2011.

5 Cf. the emphasis on the boundary or demarcation in Eliade 1958, 1, who posits "that the sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and the secular life"; cf. Herbers 2013, 12: "Derived from this is *sancire,* 'to demarcate something as sacred', understood as a juridical act. What is demarcated is the *sanctum;* if one demarcates a person, that person is a *persona sancta* or *sanctus/sancta*" (our translation, German text: "Abgeleitet davon ist *sancire,* etwas als heilig abgrenzen, verstanden als ein juristischer Akt. Das Abgegrenzte ist das *sanctum,* grenzt man eine Person ab, ist diese eine *persona sancta* oder *sanctus, sancta*.").

6 Tilley 2002, 25. In general: Wieser 2008.

7 Cf. Frese/Keil 2015.

Thesis 24
Writing has hierographic potential.

Inscribing an artefact can sometimes lend it a sacred status. We refer to this possibility of direct sacralisation through inscribing as the hierographic potential of writing (from Gr. ἱερός ['sacred'] and γράφω ['to write/draw'], and thus in the sense of 'inscribing sacrality'). By the 'sacred status' of an artefact, we understand here any efficacy attributed to it which we can ascribe to the realm of the sacred, provided we also keep its ambivalent nature in mind.[8] Traditionally in some scholarly disciplines, such as Egyptology or papyrology, the concept of the magical has been used to describe such 'sacred efficacy' of artefacts and associated practices, with this efficacy understood to involve supernatural powers. This term is also used in the following, in contexts where it is established as a *terminus technicus;* yet we remain nonetheless aware of the problematic nature of this category, by means of which certain phenomena considered particularly irrational have been artificially separated from the continuum of cultural practices.[9] We speak of hierographic writing, then, when the inscribing of an artefact can be understood as an inscribing of sacred status that coincides with a qualitative change of this artefact in terms of its efficacy.

This qualitative change can either be 'merely' indicated by writing or, in a stronger sense, only come about in the first place through such writing. As we shall illustrate below via a number of significant objects and practices, this hierographic potential of writing is explored in different epochs, cultures, and religions to different degrees and in different ways. In comparing the concrete forms that the hierographic potential of writing can assume, the following questions in particular arise: what is the relationship of hierographic writing to orality and the spoken word, which is often central to forms of performative ritual action? What role does the meaning of the text play with regard to the hierographic quality of writing in relation to the materiality of what is written? To what extent is the act of writing itself significant? Does the audience play a role as a potential recipient group of what is written or of the act of writing? And finally: what is the relation of what is written to the concrete efficacy of the artefact?

The concept of hierographic writing can be used to describe some contemporary practices of the Balinese script,[10] which we will discuss here at the outset in order to counteract any impression of a linear historical development. Special visual arrangements of mystical characters *(aksara modré)* are applied to or carved into objects or onto the bodies of initiates in visible and 'invisible' form (by means of paint, liquid wax, or sanctified water for example). What we have here is a process of transforma-

8 An example of this is Agamben's analysis of the *homo sacer* and the latter's ambivalent status between being cursed and being consecrated to God. Cf. Agamben 2017.
9 On the reception and discourse history of the term: Otto 2011.
10 Cf. Hornbacher/Neumann/Willer 2015.

tion of the respective object or person, the goals of which can vary greatly. Amulets or metals with *aksara modré* can protect those bearing them or the buildings in whose foundation they are embedded from harmful influences, while mystical characters applied by a priest to the human body serve to spiritually purify or transfigure an initiate, e. g., from the state of an ignorant child to that of a discerning adult in the context of ritual tooth filing *(metatah)*. Depending on the arrangement of the characters and the objective of the specialist, such pictograms can promote physical and spiritual life, but also destroy it.[11] Yet written pictograms are also commonly used in public ritual contexts on Bali, and this far more frequently than hitherto observed. Thus, in the context of elaborate death and cremation rituals *(ngaben),* various effigies are crafted (e. g., *kajang, puspa)* that manifest the physical, ethereal, or divine body of a deceased person by adorning material writing supports (white cotton cloth, leaves, sandalwood) with arrangements of characters.

The Indo-Malay world can boast of a longstanding tradition of ritual text practices that are more oriented around the spoken word and at the same time reminiscent of Agamben's *homo sacer,* the cursed outlaw who through a broken oath belongs entirely to the god by whom he swore. Ancient Malay stone inscriptions from the late seventh century CE refer to a similar concept and use writing as a powerful manifestation of the eternally valid royal word, for example on oath tablets. In such cases, water would be poured over a stone inscription on which a king's retainers swore an oath, which included their accursedness should they break it. The water thus 'imbued' with potential curses would be collected through a spout at the bottom of the stone tablet and drunk by the participants of the ritual. One such stone tablet, still extant today, was erected by Talang Tuwo in 683 CE on the occasion of a major campaign by Sumatran troops against the island of Java. The royal word, 'imbibed' by the soldiers in this same manner together with its concomitant provisions, was intended to ensure military discipline.[12] What is remarkable, by contrast, about the above-mentioned writing practices from contemporary Bali, is that the efficacy in the premodern example lies not in the representation of an authoritative word or oath, but decidedly in the written arrangement of characters. These characters are effective less through being read, heard, or understood as individual characters or a whole text (i. e., through the semantic reception of what is written), but rather through the characters' being visualised, which can also be ephemeral in nature. Thus, certain inscribed effigies unfold their agency in the process of being burnt.[13] Writing here is less a representation of authoritative speech than a semantically overdetermined manifestation of cosmological or spiritual speculations, which in many cases are no longer phonetically 'legible'.[14]

11 Hooykaas 1980, 75–79; Fox/Hornbacher 2016.
12 Casparis 1956.
13 Hornbacher 2019.
14 Hornbacher 2016, 98.

The semantically unambiguous understanding (and observance) of eternal oaths written down on the ancient Javanese stone tablets is contrasted here with writing as a visual and material manifestation of a cosmological reality that need not be understood in order to be efficacious. Such efficacy is often described by practitioners as an emanation of energy that involves spatial proximity and a particular way of dealing with what is written. The hierographic quality of writing therefore differs significantly from case to case. In the ancient Javanese example, writing works as the materialisation and internalisation of an oath, whereas in contemporary Balinese rituals, it works as the manifestation of creative energies which refer to the process of cosmogonic emanation and form a deeper, hidden layer *(niskala)* of visible/material reality *(sekala)*.

This absolute equation of the hierographic with the individual written character is not necessarily found in the very writing system in which one would most readily expect it: namely, in the ancient Egyptian writing system of the hieroglyphics (from Gr. ἱερός ['sacred'] and γλυφή ['carving, carved work']). The Egyptians themselves already imputed a sacred character to their writing, calling their script *zẖ3.w-n-mdw.w-nṯr*, the "script of divine words". According to some sources, the hieroglyphs were created by Ptah, the primordial creator god.[15] But it was also the speaking of words that played an important role during the creation of the world.[16] Even in Graeco-Egyptian magical practices—such as those which have come down to us in large numbers on inscribed magical gems, lead tablets, and papyri, of both private and public nature—the efficacy of the artefacts does not seem to have been based solely on the hierographic quality of what is written on them. The sacralisation of the artefacts (in the sense of charging them with magical power) usually also took place with the help of spoken words in the form of a recitation for instance, in addition to other ritual acts.[17] The perpetuation of the power was then ensured by writing down the spoken formulas. Thus, this act of writing definitely has a hierographic quality, as it can permanently change the status of the mobile or immobile[18] artefact and endow it with supernatural powers.[19] However, this ritual act of writing is no independent work, but rather carried out in conjunction with a speech act.

The same is true, for example, in the case of the so-called *defixiones* documented in Greek and Latin since the late sixth century BCE. These are written lead tablets by which one could secure 'legal protection' as a means of punishment or as a protective measure from the gods by 'fixing' a potential enemy, not least by writing down his name (Lat. *defigo*, 'to make fast, to fix'; Gr. καταδέω, 'to bind, tie down'). Even though this 'effective' act of writing the name proves the hierographic quality of the writing

15 This is also known from other cultures; see for example Schulz 2020, 41–42 on the invention of the runes in Old Norse mythology.

16 A. Assmann/J. Assmann 2003

17 Cubelic/Lougovaya/Quack 2015; Meyer-Dietrich 2010.

18 Theis 2015.

19 On the transfer of power to the artefact: Speyer 1992.

here, the *defixiones* nevertheless remained integrated into a specific ritual act (one of harm) that had a performative and oral character.[20]

Biblical tradition also recognises the hierographic quality of writing in connection with ritual acts: the so-called 'Ordeal of Jealousy' (Num 5:11–31), known in rabbinic literature as the *inyan soṭa,* is a ritual that a man can have performed if he suspects his wife has not been faithful. In the ritual, the woman must drink a solution of holy water which has been mixed with dust from the floor of the tabernacle and to which is added a formula invoking a curse on her in the case of guilt. This curse is written onto a scroll, with the writing being washed off by the priest into the water that is to be drunk. If she is innocent, the woman should remain physically unharmed.[21] The special significance of what is written is shown in the description of a medieval magical fragment from the genizah in Cairo. This text mentions that running water and dust from the synagogue are physical components of the ritual, but additionally prescribes more precisely that what is to be written out are (secret) divine names that are to be given to the woman to drink.[22]

Magical gems are another example of hierographic writing on account of the divine names, individual wishes, and magical signs and words *(charaktēres* and *voces magicae)* often inscribed on them.[23] For such gems, a consecration rite (Gr. τελετή) has come down to us[24] in which the actors temporarily received the power of the deity in question and transferred this power to the artefact.[25] The *charaktēres* consisted of script-like magical signs that were meant to convey magical qualities, even if people did not necessarily understand them.[26] Here, the meaning of the text was not a priority; rather, the signs reinforced the artefacts' function as a means of communicating with supernatural beings. Once the consecration had taken place, the presence of the writing and the knowledge that it was present was alone sufficient for the characters to be effective.[27] A public audience was not always necessary for the reception process, which in turn means that it was not necessary for the writing to be visible and

20 Faraone 1991; Frankfurter 2019; Graf 2011; Kropp 2011. Graf 2005, 247: "Prayers, curses, and oaths are spoken rites that are closely interrelated. All three are performative utterances in which the action described in words and the action itself coincide." (Our translation, German text: "Gebet, Fluch und Eid sind gesprochene Riten, die eng miteinander verwandt sind. Alle drei sind performative Äußerungen, in denen die in Worte beschriebene Handlung und die Handlung selber zusammenfallen.")

21 Cf. for example Liss 2007.

22 Veltri 2002.

23 On magical gems in general: *The Campbell Bonner Magical Gems Database* (CBD), online at http://classics.mfab.hu/talismans/ (accessed 16/12/2022). Cf. also Dasen/Nagy 2019; Endreffy/Nagy/Spier 2019.

24 Such statements can be made on the basis of magical papyri that functioned as manuals for such consecration rituals while being physically separated from the artefacts in question.

25 Eltram 1939.

26 Gordon 2014; Dzwiza 2019.

27 Quack 2014; Keil et al. 2018.

legible. Finally, these artefacts were often partially or completely hidden and concealed, and thus potentially served as instances of what might be called "restricted scriptural presence".[28]

From the same time period and cultural area, we know of another classic case in which writing has a hierographic quality in the literal sense of inscribing sacrality: namely, consecration inscriptions such as can be found on votive offerings in ancient Greek sanctuaries, for example. While *defixiones* and magical gems required performative rituals and speech acts in order to activate the hierographic quality of what was written on them, Greek votive inscriptions were less likely to be read as written traces of something spoken, as is made clear by the typical form in which such inscriptions are found. This kind of inscription, usually a more or less abbreviated form of the statement "X has consecrated [it] to the deity Y", can be found on all manner of consecrated objects within such sanctuaries, from humble clay vessels to colossal statues. In most cases, the reference to what was respectively consecrated remains implicit in the consecration formula, with the inscribed artefact itself usually taking the place of the accusative-case direct object in the phrase. The interweaving of material writing support and text can hardly be more concrete: as a spoken text without the writing support, the sentence would be grammatically incomplete and meaningless. The ritualistic understanding of consecrative inscriptions as being the written trace of spoken consecration formulae, something obvious in the case of *defixiones* and magical gems, thus becomes considerably less plausible here. Only in their material connection to the respective votive offerings do the dedicatory inscriptions retain their meaning.

While such short dedicatory inscriptions thus do not function as autonomous texts, the votive offerings by contrast can still function quite well without any consecratory wording. Unlike Christian relics, whose sacred status depends on a perceived reliable identification,[29] dedicatory inscriptions do not fulfil any urgent need for authentication. Even more numerous than the dedicatory inscriptions that have come down to us are votive offerings without dedicatory inscriptions in ancient Greek sanctuaries. This applies, for instance, to dedicated weapons, a particularly important type of votive gift in the archaic and early classical periods for which thousands of examples have survived in the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia. These include bronze helmets, greaves, breastplates, shields, lances, and swords, all of which found their way into the sanctuary as dedications of booty (or, more rarely, as dedications of one's own weaponry) in gratitude for victories in battle. Only a fraction of these precious offerings is also inscribed,[30] one such artefact being a Corinthian helmet from around 500 BCE (Fig. 1). This helmet owes its fame to the fact that it was consecrated by none other than Miltiades, the Athenian commander who was victorious at the Battle of

28 Hornbacher/Frese/Willer 2015, 87–100; Willer 2015. Foundational here: Frese/Keil/Krüger 2014.
29 Ferro 2021.
30 According to H. Frielinghaus, only 5–6 % of the helmets and greaves dedicated at Olympia bear inscriptions.

Fig. 1: Helmet votive dedication from Olympia with dedicatory inscription along the lower edge: Μιλτιάδες ἀνέ[θ]εκεν [ː τ]õι Δί ('Miltiades dedicated [it] to Zeus'), ca. 500 BCE. Olympia, Archaeological Museum, inv. no. B 2600. Photo: Oren Rozen (via Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Marathon against the Persian army in 490 BCE.[31] Beginning on the left cheek-guard, the simple inscription—Μιλτιάδες ἀνέ[θ]εκεν [ː τ]õι Δί. (IG I³,2 1472, "Miltiades dedicated [it] to Zeus")—stretches from there across to the back of the neck screen.

Continuing along the undulation of the helmet's lower seam, the etched inscription submits to the morphology of the object, instead of taking pride of place via a more frontal positioning (which could end up demoting the helmet to the status of a mere writing support). Now, this inscription was undoubtedly legible, but we must bear some other factors in mind. First, this kind of dedication of weaponry or armour usually stood for but a short period of time within the sanctuary fixed to wooden posts

31 Olympia, Archaeological Museum, inv. no. B 2600. See Frielinghaus 2011, 383, cat. no. D 478 (with bibliography) and 548, no. 40 (on the inscription), table 114.3. See also Dietrich 2022. That the Miltiades mentioned in the inscription is actually identical with the historical figure cannot be proven beyond a doubt, yet does not seem implausible.

before being taken down.[32] Second, deciphering the inscription also requires close-up observation of the artefact, which would entail a special attention that surely would have only very rarely been accorded to a single helmet amidst so many others. The inscription does not so much proclaim its content as a communicative act to the outside world as much as it etches it into the object (both literally and figuratively). The relationship between the consecrator and the receiving deity, based on the principle of *do ut des* and maintained through the practice of votive offerings, is additionally affirmed in the case of this helmet by the inscription of the names of Miltiades and Zeus, thus becoming part of the helmet's materiality. However, since such consecrative inscriptions could just as well be absent, the object does not necessarily require the written text to possess a hierographic quality in order to attain sacral efficacy as a votive offering.[33]

The positions taken in Christianity on the hierographic quality of writing are much more ambivalent. As in other monotheistic 'religions of the book', the written word initially plays a central role in the Christian faith: after all, the Bible is not only understood as a documentary account of divine deeds, but is also regarded as being the Word of God itself. In the liturgy, 'Holy Scripture' guarantees the presence of the divine Logos and is not only used as a book, but is also revered and venerated: in entrances into churches and in processions, it is solemnly carried by the clergy and literally staged on the altar. The celebrants treat the book of the Gospels with great reverence; priests and deacons still kiss it during the Roman Catholic liturgy.[34] Even if the solemn reading from the Gospels and the epistles is certainly the most important act of reception (in the Liturgy of the Word), the book-object itself is obviously attributed great power and efficacy in liturgical acts: for example, during the consecration of a bishop, it is customary to hold the Gospel book or codex over the head and neck of the ordinand.[35]

However, such sacralising acts of scripture are not limited to the handling of the Bible or the Gospel book in Christian liturgy. We find attestations of them elsewhere, with the so-called 'abecedary' of a church consecration serving as an impressive example.[36] In this consecration ritual, the bishop writes out—in rows and in their entirety—the Latin and Greek alphabets on the ground with his staff. Each letter is

32 On the length of time during which such dedications of weaponry remained standing at Olympia, see Frielinghaus 2011, 170–183.

33 This distinguishes such dedicatory inscriptions on votive weapons from the practice of inscribing graphemes on weapons, known from the Balinese cultural area. Here, the hierographic effectiveness of the inscription applies to such weapons, which—unlike weapon votive offerings—were still intended for practical use in battle and, which such dedication intended to increase the weapons' fighting power. See Hooykaas 1980.

34 Hermans 1984, 186–187; Ganz 2017, 93.

35 The process is described by Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129/1130), *Vita Herberti*, 45–46. On the consecration of the bishop himself, see also Engels 1987. In detail and with further examples: Schreiner 2011, 284–307; also Kehnel/Panagiotopoulos 2015, 3–5.

36 See Forneck 1999, 201–202; Schmitt 2004, 475–478 and Schreiner 2006.

written in scattered ashes or even traced out invisibly directly on the bare stone, with the rows of the letters forming an X-shaped cross. The bishop here is neither presenting a sacred text nor conveying a Christian message. Rather, this sequence of letters is only visible for a short time (if at all) and is not intended to be read in the literal sense of the word. What counts is the act of writing, with which a profane space is transformed into a consecrated and sacred one. Now, on the one hand, we can assume that this rite has its roots in older pagan customs,[37] but on the other hand, a specific Christian re-interpretation and legitimation of this writing ritual can be expected (God as the alpha and omega, following Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).[38] In the ancient sense, the abecedary was believed to have an apotropaic, i. e. defensive or protective, power that could guard the church against demonic influences.[39]

In Jewish understanding, it is not so much the holy book of the 'Bible' *in toto* as much as the handwritten Torah scroll with the Pentateuch text that can be identified as the decisive artefact (Fig. 2). The starting point of this 'artefact theology', however, was likely not (only) the hierographic power of what was written (especially the names of God), but also the need to protect the cultic handling of the Torah scroll (bowing before the Torah; kissing the Torah mantle;[40] using the Torah scroll to ward off demons[41]) from the accusation of idolatry in terms of religious law and theology. This need emerged because the Torah scroll is a man-made artefact, and the anti-image polemics found in Isaiah (Isa 40–46) were often applied by Jews to Christians' handling of the cross and the Bible. Therefore, medieval Jewish theologians in Western Europe—especially the mystic circle around R. Yehuda ben Shmuel of Regensburg, called 'the Pious' (*he-ḥasîd;* d. 1217)—developed a kind of 'Torah artefact theology', in which the Torah scroll as bearer of the divine names vouches for God's presence and power. In R. Yehuda's theology, the upper (divine) and lower worlds (Torah) are conceived of as belonging together in a quasi-substantive way. Bowing before the Torah does not simply function as a substitute for the contemplation of the Eternal One which can no longer be accomplished; rather, such an act is itself that very contemplation of the Eternal One. In this way, the Torah guarantees the immediate presence and tangible experience of the divine presence.[42] Just like the prophetic vision, the Torah scroll before which the pious prostrate themselves becomes a (real) symbol of

37 Stapper 1937, 143–144.

38 God and Christ themselves are symbolically designated by John in his book of Revelation with the Greek letters alpha (A) and omega (Ω) (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13) as an expression of the beginning and the end of all that is created and has come into being, which coincides in God. Cf. Schreiner 2000, 64–65. The Word is the beginning of everything: cf. John 1:1 ("ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος"; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God").

39 Schreiner 2006, 184. Cf. Dornseiff 1925, 69–81 and Glück 1987, 219–220.

40 Liss 2014, 209–211.

41 Cf. Liss 2015, 169–172.

42 Liss 2001, 281–291.

Fig. 2: Mantled Torah scrolls with Torah shield *(tas)*, Torah pointer *(yad)*, and Torah crown *(keter)*, or two Torah crowns *(rimonim)* in the Torah shrine *(aron ha-qodesh)*. Heidelberg, synagogue. Photo: Hanna Liss.

the divine presence and thus enables an immediate realisation of (and participation in) the divine world. The Torah becomes *pars pro toto* the vehicle of the divine. In the Torah, the Creator himself—his essence, his wisdom, but also his power—is revealed to and made tangible for human beings.

If these writing practices are strong evidence for an emphatic understanding of writing and scripture, the objection has to be raised in the same breath that positions that were explicitly sceptical of writing and possibly inspired by (Neo-)Platonism have also played a major role in Christianity. Thus, we find influential theologians from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas always speaking out against the permissibility and meaningfulness of the practice of scriptural magic, which was particularly popular and prevalent in lay piety.[43] If we think again of the aforementioned cultic veneration accorded to 'Holy Scripture' in the liturgy, we might be further astonished by writing practices that testify to a remarkably irreverent treatment of this book-object. Thus,

43 See Schreiner 1990 for more detail. The practice of curing illnesses of the head (physical or mental) through contact with the Bible, a practice apparently already known in late Christian antiquity, was tolerated by Augustine. Cf. Schreiner 2002, 82.

the same liturgical book venerated within the Christian liturgy could be destroyed only a short time later, regarded as an obsolete and irrelevant manuscript and economically recycled as scratch paper or flyleaves (maculature).[44] Was no supra-temporal permanence accorded to the hierographic quality of the writing, to its sacral power and presence?

Surely, we must understand the ambivalent values and practices of the Christian Middle Ages in the context of a genuinely ambivalent understanding of scripture, such as was prefigured in patristic literature, but also previously in the New Testament itself.[45] In Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, for example, we learn that the living God inscribed himself "not with ink [...] on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3) and that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτείνει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ, 2 Cor 3:6). In this sense, according to Paul, true believers are not 'servants of the letter' but 'servants of the Spirit'. Without a doubt, this Pauline polemic helped in part to shape the theological understanding of scripture in the Christian Middle Ages. From this perspective, it was hardly possible to understand writing in the substantial sense as something sacred or effective: the hierographic potential of writing always had to play out in the ritual connection with the spoken word and liturgical action. Against this background, however, it is remarkable that popular and paraliturgical practices of sacralisation through writing, written characters, and books—extending even to mantic and magical usages[46]—have long remained a part of Christian piety despite the vast criticism and objections against them from the quill and pen of theologians.

Thesis 25
Writing opens up possibilities for the separation of profane and sacred space, thus creating spaces of liminality.

Already in the ancient Mediterranean world, writing served to separate profane from sacred space: stone inscriptions were sometimes used to mark the boundaries of ancient Greek sanctuaries and ensure that these boundaries were not crossed accidentally or carelessly. This task was primarily assigned to the precinct walls or *horos* (boundary) stones and their Greek inscriptions. Basically, horos stones could mark all kinds of boundaries and borders in the Greek world: inter-state borders, asylum

44 Senzel 2018. Such waste paper—i. e., paper and parchment that has already been written on—can be used as flyleaves to reinforce the bindings of new prints and manuscripts. In the process, no value is attached to the writing itself, whereas the material finds use and importance. Kühne-Wespi/Oschema/Quack 2019, 15–16.

45 On this also: Frese 2014; Reudenbach 2021.

46 Further examples in Schreiner 2000.

areas, administrative and settlement borders (i. e., those of specific demes), the borders of public areas and buildings, and those of private property.[47] In the Athenian Agora, a carved stone from the fifth century BCE declares: "I am the boundary of the Agora" (hόρος εἰμὶ τῆς ἀγορᾶς).[48] This and other similar stones served to ensure that anyone entering the agora abided by its rules; for example, murderers were not allowed to enter this space. This concern for the control of boundaries was again of particular urgency in the case of sanctuaries. On a fifth-century-BCE stone from the island of Aigina, we can read: "Boundary stone of the sanctuary of Athena" (*ẖ*όρος τεμένος Ἀθεναίας).[49] At first glance, this text read as a simple declarative statement: the stone identified itself as a horos, thus establishing a boundary and designating the area beyond it as a sacred space belonging to Athena (which also thus constituted a distinct legal sphere). Beyond this literal reading, however, such an inscription also had to be understood by the recipient as an appeal: as an invitation to stop and check one's own right to enter.[50] Accordingly, in the Greek worldview, only those who were free of any 'defilement' (Gr. μίασμα) were allowed to enter the sanctuary.[51] Such ritual defilement could arise from 'unclean' events, some of which were beyond human control, such as a birth or a death in the household. A person thus 'defiled' who entered the sanctuary risked nothing less than the entire community being punished.

In an inscription at a sanctuary in Priene (Asia Minor), the concern for purity was formulated as follows: "One should enter the sanctuary pure in white garments" (εἰσίναι εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν ἁγνὸν ἐν ἐσθῆτι λευκῆι; second century BCE).[52] Here, the appeal to the potential visitor of the sanctuary was not merely implicit, but rather expressed with utter clarity. The boundary between the profane and the sacred was transformed into an area where one should not only pause to reflect on one's ritual purity, but also where one could do something concrete about this pure state (or lack thereof), such as purifying oneself with sanctified water or washing one's hands in the blood of a sacrificed animal. In this sense, the inscribed stone did not simply mark a 'hard' boundary line, but rather opened up a space for reflection and action: namely, a liminal space of transition.

The reference to the concept of 'liminality',[53] a subject of intense discussion within the field of cultural studies, is obvious here. Very much in the vein of the basic

47 Seifert 2006.

48 IG I³,2 1087; Lagner 2017, 69. For other 'speaking objects': Edelmann-Singer/Ehrich 2021.

49 IG IV²,2 792; Seifert 2006, 30–33.

50 Ober 1995, 93.

51 Carbon/Peels-Matthey 2018. The following, however, must be borne in mind here: "A convincing unifying account of Greek pollution remains elusive [... it] is an immensely flexible metaphor that could be applied in many different spheres" (Parker 2018, 27).

52 Blümel/Merkenbach 2014, 402.

53 'Liminality' is an anthropological concept originally developed in the context of the study of rites of passage. See van Gennep 1909 [2005]; Turner 1964. For the adoption of the concept in more recent art and cultural studies, see Kern 2013; Krüger 2018; Foletti/Doležalová 2020.

anthropological inquiry as to how existentially significant transitions were moderated in societies by means of rituals, we can pose an analogous question here: what significance was accorded to inscriptions at 'critical' transitions, i. e., at gates, thresholds, and entrance areas? And in our context: what specific tasks did writing take on at sanctuary thresholds? As anthropological research has repeatedly emphasised, transitions that effected a change in status were perceived in pre-modern societies as something that fundamentally threatened the existing order. For this reason, 'containing' the potential threat posed by liminal spaces through rituals, ceremonies, and images always seems to have been especially important.[54] In this sense, we can assume that the use of writing (inscriptions, shields, sacred books, pictorial text, metaphysical texts in narratives) at or within a liminal space not only served to define more clearly the respective 'in-between space' and to fill the latter with content, but also contributed to stabilising a potentially dangerous location in a symbolic way. For example, rites of initiation into ancient mystery cults included various practices that involved secret objects and aimed at the ritual transmission of secret, unwritten knowledge. However, the specific rules required for many different rituals could be chiselled in stone at the entrance to the sanctuary.[55]

Writing's potential power to reinforce boundaries and generate liminal space is particularly evident in the early Christian period (fourth–sixth centuries CE), during which ritual defilement was considered to be less problematic than individual sinfulness.[56] Various inscriptions from the late antique Near East that were placed in church vestibules or at their entrances addressed the need for visitors to make a self-examination before entering the sanctuary, with such persons being admonished to reflect before entering on whether they had prepared themselves and were worthy to encounter God and his saints in the church space.[57] There was always the danger of damaging the sacred character of the church space and incurring punishment for this, should physical (but especially spiritual) purity be lacking.[58]

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54 On images at the threshold and receptive performativity in entryways, cf. Bawden 2014; Kern 2004.

55 Harris 2015; I. Petrovic/A. Petrovic 2018.

56 Cf. van Opstall 2018.

57 For example, in a damaged mosaic inscription in the Church of the Martyrs (al-Khadir) in Madaba, Jordan (second half of the sixth century/early seventh century): "Let whoever enters here carry a pure palm branch (?) with him, preserving the memory of the most holy martyrs, and praising God as is fitting"; on the inscription: Di Segni 2006, 586; Denis Feissel has suggested the reading "a pure heart", see Feissel/Gatier 2008, 754–755 (no. 571). On the building: Watta 2018, 246–247 no. 61 with figs. 74, 166; Piccirillo 1997, 129–131 with figs. 142–157.

58 Clement of Alexandria, for example, identified both forms of purity as an essential prerequisite for contact with God and the saints around 200 CE in his treatise *The Pedagogue,* and not only for the clergy but for the congregation as well: "[...] the man and woman each must come to the church dressed becomingly, with an unaffected walk, respecting silence, possessing 'charity unfeigned' [cf. Rom 12:9], pure of body and pure in heart, prepared to offer worship to God" (English transl. by Simon P. Wood, C. P.: Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator,* 259; cf. *Clementis Alexandrini Paedagogus* III 11, 79, 3–4).

Unlike in ancient Greece, Christians had a holy book from which they could quote, and biblical texts written on church doors called on those viewing them not only to self-reflect but also to repent inwardly before entering the sacred space.[59] Ps 117:20 (LXX) was a particularly popular choice: "This is the gate of the Lord; righteous ones shall enter in it" (αὕτη ἡ πύλη τοῦ κυρίου, δίκαιοι εἰσελεύσονται ἐν αὐτῇ)—in its original context a reference to the holy temple in Jerusalem and, even in Christian belief, a prototype of the heavenly Zion.[60] Through this written reference, the threshold to the church building was ennobled as the "gate of the Lord" (πύλη τοῦ κυρίου) and in this way accentuated as a special place between the profane and the sacred, the earthly and the heavenly kingdom, the present and the future.[61] It is interesting to note that this 'gate' apparently also inspired everyday visitors time and time again to adorn the threshold with inscriptions of their own. Engraved graffiti (prayer texts, crosses, etc.) can often be found at entrances to sacred areas—for example, at a Greek temple near Aphrodisias that was converted into a church (Asia Minor, around 500 CE) (Fig. 3). Here we find both official and unofficial instances of writing or signs in the form of crosses (both professionally engraved ones and graffiti), a reference to the resurrection of Christ, and petitions for divine assistance.[62] The overlapping texts form a palimpsest on marble that points to the supra-temporal significance of entering a church; this collection of graffiti suggests that various actions took place in this liminal space: pausing, looking, reflecting, as well as ritual activity.[63]

However, the significance of this boundary of the sacred building was not only supposed to be apparent to those entering therein. In individual cases, inlaid floor mosaic inscriptions in the area of the main and side entrances to late antique churches and chapels (which speak about the construction or beseech salvation, eternal rest, etc.), or extended areas of mosaic work decorated with figures, were oriented towards the west or outwards. They were thus obviously directed at visitors who were leaving the church buildings and thus sought to preserve the salience of the messages represented by them at the moment when people would be going out through these portals.[64] This is also the case in the use of the aforementioned verse from the Psalms:

59 Even though the ancient Greeks also had a category of texts (not always in written form) which they called 'sacred accounts' (ἱεροὶ λόγοι): Henrichs 2003.

60 Leatherbury 2020, 258–267; Breytenbach 2012, 389–394; Watta 2018, 84–85, 92. English translation of LXX text: NETS, 606.

61 Frese/Krüger 2019.

62 Reynolds/Roueché/Bodard 2007, 1.21 and 1.22.

63 Yasin 2009, 143; Sitz 2019, 151.

64 For example, in the church of the apostles at Anemurium in Turkey: intercessory inscription (Leatherbury 2020, 120–121 fig. 3.26); in the northern church at Herodion in Israel: intercessory and psalmic inscription (Leatherbury 2020, 265–268 fig. 6.16); in the basilica of Dometios (Basilica A) at Nicopolis in Greece: building and psalmic inscription (Leatherbury 2020, 80 n. 220, 141–142, 265); in the Basilica of Anastasia at Arkasas in Greece: building inscription (Leatherbury 2020, 64–66, 267–268). For Jordan, see Watta 2018: cat. 47.1., 48, 52, 63 (inscriptions); cat. 43, 47.1., 47.2., 48, 52, 64 (elements of figural scenery).

Fig. 3: Marble doorpost with graffiti, ca. 500 CE and later, Aphrodisias (near present-day Geyre, Turkey), entrance to the sanctuary of Aphrodite, converted into a church. Photo: Anna Sitz.

if church visitors left the so-called Acropolis Church of Maʿin, Jordan (719/720 CE) through the western entrance, they would see inside directly in front of the threshold a west-facing *tabula ansata* with the building inscription. This text was connected with the quotation from Ps 117:20 (LXX) mentioned above, but here also supplemented by another quotation, this time from Ps 86:2 (LXX): "The Lord loves the gates of Sion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." The entrance area of the church is thus also directly associated with God here and subordinated to his power. The connection of the church portal with the 'gates of Sion' relates the Christian sacred building even more clearly to the 'City of God', the Heavenly Jerusalem.[65] In various Middle Eastern church buildings, inscriptions with this psalm verse also served as a kind of apotropaic protection at the entrances through their assignment to God's power, meaning

65 On the church: Watta 2018, 248–250 no. 63 with fig. 76, 169–170; Piccirillo 1997, 200–201 with fig. 304–312. Note on the inscription SEG 35, 1579; Gatier 1986, 186–187 no. 158. On the psalm inscriptions in general: Leatherbury 2020, 249–270; Watta 2018, 84–86; Vriezen 1998. English translation of LXX text adapted from NETS, 590.

Fig. 4: Crucifix, detail: Aaron draws the letter T on the gable of a house with the blood of the lamb, twelfth century, champlevé enamel. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no. 7234. Reproduction from Schreiner 2000, 73.

that the positioning in this liminal area was apparently much more decisive than the orientation towards either the inside or the outside.[66]

In medieval Christendom, however, sacralising effects were attributed not only to crosses and certain sentences of the Bible, but also to the alphabet as a whole[67] and even to individual letters.[68] In the context of liminality, great importance was attached in particular to the Greek letter tau (τ) or the Latin letter T. In this case, it was first of all the figurative resemblance of the letter to the cross that made it a symbol for salvation. Furthermore, medieval Christian theologians were convinced that the Israelites had already marked the "two doorposts and [...] the lintel" (Exod 12:7) with this sign on the Feast of Passover in order to be spared from the final Egyptian plague (Fig. 4). The

66 Vriezen 1998, 249 n. 5 with examples. Likewise, apotropaic elements in the floor mosaics of imperial villa complexes are not always oriented towards the visitor entering from the outside; Swift 2009, 43 with n. 77.

67 Cf. note 36 above.

68 The Greek letter pairs of chi and rho, as well as that of alpha and omega, can be mentioned as prominent examples. Cf. Debiais 2017.

Hebrew Bible does not report anything about writing on the doorposts in this context; instead, this interpretation of the apotropaic effect of writing possibly harks back to the prophetic description in Ezek 9:4–6, where a divine messenger is sent to place a 'mark' *(tāw;* also the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet [ת] and the equivalent to Greek tau and Latin T) on the foreheads of the God-fearing men of Jerusalem so as to protect them from death.[69]

Christian exegesis was extremely consequential for the interpretation of the letter T as a sign marking a boundary and protecting a space. This did not necessarily have to be an architecturally delimited ecclesiastical space, but could also refer to the spiritual 'space' within an individual believer. In the case of book art, it was in turn the "sacred writing space"[70] of a codex that could be structured by initials.

A prominent example here is a sacramentary[71] of the East Frankish King Henry II, dating from the early eleventh century and probably produced in Regensburg (Fig. 5). In this liturgical manuscript, a magnificent panel adorned with an initial is presented on fol. 16r, where we find the beginning of the Roman Canon: *Te igitur, clementissime pater* ("[We] therefore [humbly pray and beseech] you, most gracious Father [...]"). The first letter of the text is highlighted in the manuscript by a large initial letter T. The letter's interior is marked by interweaving decoration and entwined with golden tendrils, enabling the initial to attract the reader's attention and captivate his gaze. The T certainly had a strong effect both as a symbol and as a signal in the context of the celebration of the Mass. Thus, the reader (i. e., the celebrant) was clearly made

69 The word תָּו in the Hebrew *urtext* is ambiguous and can mean the letter (ת/*tāw*) as such, or else another common meaning, namely 'sign'. The Septuagint text here reads simply τὸ σημεῖον ('the sign', Ezek 9:4–6). In the Vulgate, both readings are represented (*signa thau*, Ezek 9:4; *thau*, Ezek 9:6). The interpretation of this sign mentioned by Ezekiel as the letter tau can be found—despite the differences mentioned—in the patristic theology of both the East and the West. Cf. Suntrup 1980, 290—294; Schreiner 2000, 69—77. See also Liss 2008, esp. 30–32. As a sign of admonition, though without apotropaic effect (and thus also with an anti-magical implication), the Book of Deuteronomy calls for people of Israel to write the confession of the unity of God *(Shema Yisrael)* on their doorposts. To this day, the placing of a *mezuzah* (a small tube into which have been placed the scriptural verses Deut 6:4–9 and 11:13–21, written on parchment) on every internal and external doorpost of a house (except for the bathroom and toilet) is obligatory. By this, a Jewish home becomes neither a sacred nor a specially protected space, but rather a space distinguished from the external environment, which through the mezuzah symbolises the duty to live a law-abiding life and which never releases the Jewish person inside it from this duty. This relation of the creation of distinct spaces by means of writing is encountered everywhere in Jewish tradition, although we must stress that it is the writing that constitutes the spaces, and not that the spaces attribute meaning to what is written. Cf. also Liss 2014.

70 On this concept of "sacred writing spaces" (our translation, German text: "sakrale Schrifträume"): Frese/Krüger 2019.

71 A sacramentary contains the prayers and blessing formulae that a priest had to recite during the Mass. The most important part, the Canon of the Mass, begins with a direct address of the priest to God: "We therefore humbly pray and beseech you, most merciful Father, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord [...]" *(Te igitur, clementissime pater, per Iesum Christum Filium tuum Dominum nostrum, supplices rogamus ac petimus* [...]).

Fig. 5: *Te Igitur* page from the Sacramentary of Henry II, after 1002 CE, Bavarian State Library Munich, Clm 4456, fol. 16r.

aware that the Liturgy of the Word with its readings had been concluded and that the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist was about to begin. The T thus marked an important caesura not only within the text, but also within the event of the Mass itself. In this way, the scriptural space of the manuscript corresponded to the liturgical space of the sacrificial prayer, into which the celebrant—as we read in an early medieval

Order of the Mass—was to enter "alone" and "silently".[72] In this sense, the golden tendrils that spread across the nearly illegible majuscule letters in the lower area acted on the one hand like a metal grille, warning against unauthorised entry.[73] On the other hand, the celebrant also had a divine sign of protection before his eyes at this point, which illustrated to him the certainty of sacramental salvation during the transition into the Canon of the Mass.

Liminally significant inscriptions can also be found in spiritual narratives from the European Middle Ages. Here, narrative spaces with profane connotations are separated from sacred spaces via inscriptions appearing in the narrative.[74] Spaces not already explicitly designated as sacred—such as a church room, a monk's cell, a hermitage, and so on—can be sacralised within the narrative by means of inscriptions that are immanent in the text. Instances of writing with explicitly spiritual/religious content (Bible texts, credal formulae, liturgical phrases), letters (tau, alpha, and omega) and signs (the cross) also mark out sacred spaces in texts. Just as in the real-world contexts described in the foregoing, these sacred characters placed above portals and doors in texts must be perceived, deciphered and read before one enters the space on the other side within the story. Moreover, since they indicate a threshold between two disparate spaces (profane vs. sacred), they often play an important role in the narrative.

The Latin version of *Wisdom's Watch upon the Hours (Horologium Sapientiae,* fourteenth century)[75] by Heinrich Seuse (a.k.a. Henry Suso, a medieval mystic from southern Germany) recounts for example a spatial allegory that marks off a sacralised space from a secular one via such a text-immanent inscription. To the protagonist of this mystical account, a "disciple" on a quest for the "wisdom of all the ancients",[76] there appears in a vision "a golden sphere, amazingly vast in extent and beautifully adorned with gems, in which there lived countless masters and students of all the arts and sciences".[77] This allegorical space—a school—is divided into two 'hemispheres': in the one, the liberal arts are taught, while in the other, the focus is on the teaching of theological truth. Three kinds of students and scholars learn and teach in the school of theology.[78] An inscription above the entrance, giving information about the afore-

72 "The bishop alone rises and silently enters into the Canon" *(Surgit solus pontifex et tacito intrat canonem). Ordo secundum Romanos (Ordo V),* in: Andrieu 1948, 209–227 (our translation).

73 Frese 2019, 49–51. Cf. the elaborate physical barriers that separated the sanctuary—the holiest area of a Byzantine church—from the nave where the congregation was gathered; on this, see Pallis 2017.

74 Cf. Lieb 2015, 18–19.

75 Heinrich Seuse, *Horologium Sapientiae,* 519–521 and 525–526; English transl. by Edmund Colledge: Henry Suso, *Wisdom's Watch upon the Hours*.

76 Heinrich Seuse, *Horologium Sapientiae,* 519: *sapientia omnium antiquorum*. English transl. by Edmund Colledge: Henry Suso, *Wisdom's Watch upon the Hours,* 234.

77 Heinrich Seuse, *Horologium Sapientiae,* 520: *sphaeram auream, mira amplitudine diffusam et pulchritudine gemmarum perornatam, ubi cunctarum artium et scientiarum magistri et scholares innumeri degebant*. English transl. by Edmund Colledge: Henry Suso, *Wisdom's Watch upon the Hours,* 234.

78 Heinrich Seuse, *Horologium Sapientiae,* 521: *tres studentium ordines atque doctorum*.

mentioned, marks off as profane space the School of Liberal Arts by identifying the space behind it as sacred: "This is the school of theological truth, in which Eternal Wisdom is teacher, truth subject matter, and eternal felicity end."[79] The space that opens up behind the entrance is only receptively distinguished as being sacred when the inscription above the threshold is perceived: "When he [sc. the disciple] read this, he hastened to enter the academy, longing with all his heart to be one of its pupils, for he hoped through it to attain his desired end."[80] The writing is linked to the formulation of a religious haven that has everlasting bliss as its goal (cf. also Augustine, *On the Blessed Life*) and thus literally guides the recipient to enter the new space in a transgressive way, while at the same time enabling him to assume the role of disciple and pupil. This disciple, who passes through a liminal phase as he internalises the received inscription and its writing, becomes affiliated with the institution of the 'School of Theology' through his entry (in the broadest sense of the term) into the sacralised space and thus evidently also comes to be numbered amongst its pupils and teachers.

The allegorical narrative of the 'spherical' school is, as it were, integrated into the *Horologium Sapientiae* as a good example of the theme of the 'spiritual meaning of scripture'. Before a kind of voice *(quasi vox)* conclusively interprets the allegorical meaning of what is seen—"The three divisions that you [i. e., the disciple] have seen are three ways of studying and teaching Sacred Scripture"—the narrative inscription is first descriptive in function while at the same time explanatory as to the subsequent allegorical reading of the vision.[81] Here, the inscription serves as a prelude to the decoding of what has been seen and marks the disciple's new status as being part of the School of Theology.[82]

In summary, we can say that writing in ancient, late antique, and medieval spaces often had the task of commenting on, reinforcing, or even determining the division between profane and sacred areas. It is significant here that in all the examples mentioned, it is only through the use of writing that the local boundaries were transformed into a liminal threshold space—a reflexively significant, critical in-between space. The inscriptions and characters set at boundary points were used to prevent impure or unworthy persons, but also demonic powers, from entering, and in this way were

79 Heinrich Seuse, *Horologium Sapientiae,* 520: *Haec est schola theologicae veritatis, ubi magistra aeterna sapientia, doctrina veritas, finis aeterna felicitas.* English transl. by Edmund Colledge: Henry Suso, *Wisdom's Watch upon the Hours,* 235.

80 Heinrich Seuse, *Horologium Sapientiae,* 520: *Quibus perlectis festinanter accurit, et scholas intravit, cupiens totis visceribus huius scholae discipulus esse, per quam sperabat se ad finem desideratum pervenire.* English transl. by Edmund Colledge: Henry Suso, *Wisdom's Watch upon the Hours,* 235.

81 Heinrich Seuse, *Horologium Sapientiae,* 525: *Tres ordines, quos vidisti, tres modi sunt studendi atque docendi sacram scripturam.* English transl. by Edmund Colledge: Henry Suso, *Wisdom's Watch upon the Hours,* 240. On this, cf. Disselhoff 2022, 71.

82 Heinrich Seuse, *Horologium Sapientiae,* 526: *Igitur discipulus, aliis omissis, cupiebat cum his mansionem habere.* On this, cf. Disselhoff 2022, 74.

deployed to protect the sacred sphere. Furthermore, such written characters could also serve to moderate the liminal phase of crossing said boundary, ensuring the protection of those entering (and exiting) and encouraging self-reflection. Apart from the narrative texts analysed towards the end, we can assume that (materially real) inscriptions and characters did not fulfil these functions alone, but rather in interaction with special actions, prayers, and rituals. In the Christian context, writing at the border of sacred spaces also had a strong prophetic character:[83] writing at entrances, whether implicitly or explicitly, made the promise of individual salvation and heavenly bliss clear to whoever should enter.

Thesis 26

The status of sacrality is always endangered. The demonstrative use of writing serves to authenticate, legitimise, and stabilise sacrality.

Whether sacrality is endangered or potentially able to be lost or revoked is bound up with the question of the existence of religiously neutral spheres. Especially in polytheistic religions, we find ideas of the omnipresence of the sacred, which would suggest a negative answer. However, Roman antiquity—like other ancient cultures—knows of an opposition of sacred and profane and develops an understanding of divine right *(ius divinum),* a distinction between (not fully) private and public sacrality, and a notion of divine property. In these contexts, we find terms used for transferring something from the holy *(sacrum)* to the non-holy *(profanum)* or vice versa: profanation *(profanatio)* and consecration *(consecratio)*, or in slightly older English, 'unhallowing' and 'hallowing'. In addition to representational and local categories, there is also the category of the personal (e. g., the word *profani* in reference to the uninitiated).[84] The Latin Church Fathers understand what is pagan (as well as what is heretical) to be non-holy and replace the traditional term *sacer* with *sanctus*. Something similar happens in Greek. Analogously, every religious transformation ends up using forms of erasure, profanation, renaming, and rededication to express the overcoming of old cults and religions. The extent to which sacrality is lost or absorbed here must be judged on a case-by-case basis and is certainly a matter of opinion. In any case, though, there are numerous examples of the continuity of old sanctuaries that sometimes have a multi-layered history of changes in cult, but in which remnants of 'original' sacrality are visibly carried over. What sacralises a place or object is a question of religious specifications. Nature-related notions of sacrality recognise a presence of the

83 On prophecy as an important "threshold coordinate" (our translation, German text: "Koordinate der Schwelle"), cf. Bawden 2014, 28–29.
84 De Souza 2010.

sacred in whatever is high up or elevated (a tree or mountain), separated (a spring), or planted (a grove). Institutionalised religions and their practices make use of distinctively enclosed areas with assembly rooms or sacred buildings as cult centres. As discussed in Thesis 25, writing serves to mark, delimit, and stabilise such spaces; epigraphic research operates with its own type of consecration inscription along with a characteristic protocol. In order to understand the function of writing, we could step back from the technical aspect of the term 'inscription' and speak instead of 'consecratory superscription'. Examples of such consecratory superscriptions can be found wherever writing and written characters form part and parcel of established cultural techniques.[85]

In what follows, we limit ourselves to the phenomena of consecratory superscription and the sacral function of writing, respectively. These can be best understood in contexts that are well-documented with regard to praxeology, such as Christian sacred spaces and the liturgical rites connected to these, for example. In many sacred spaces, writing is a defining element. Whether it be in the apse within the sanctuary, on windows, in wall paintings, frescoes and mosaics no matter the location, on the altar itself, on the reredos or on objects around and on the altar (such as on liturgical vessels and implements), in the form of valuable codices or on and in reliquaries: writing serves to document the sacred quality of a place. The fact that this quality is endangered can be traced back to various aspects. This status can be forgotten or even revoked; the space itself and the artefacts representing this status can be destroyed. The (e)valuation of the place can change or be rejected through competition and rivalry that can lead to a reinterpretation of status. For this reason, there is a need to authenticate, legitimise, and stabilise sacred status. The latter can be traced back to the place itself, the saints venerated there, and the rites dedicated to them, but also to the high material value of the artefacts in question, which can serve to illustrate sacred glory and divine splendour. We can also observe here reciprocity between places and artefacts with regard to sacrality: objects can become elevated in status on account of where they are placed or kept, or they can imbue a formerly neutral or profane place with sacrality by their very presence (cf. Thesis 27).

That sacrality can indeed be lost through forgetting is shown by the ubiquitous efforts to combat such oblivion. There is an awareness that the annual cycle of feast days is a stabilising force for memory. As Archbishop Peter Chrysologus (d. ca. 450) of Ravenna put it: "It is for a purpose that the birthdays of the martyrs are celebrated every year with joy: that that which happened in the past should remain in the memory of devout men of every century."[86] Alongside the temporal dimension of *memoria*,

85 Campanelli 2016, 161–162.

86 Petrus Chrysologus Sermo 129, 2: *Idcirco ergo natales martyrum annua laetitia celebrantur, ut quod semel actum est, per omne aeuum in memoria maneat deuotorum* (see *Sancti Petri Chrysologi Collectio sermonum*, 793–794; English translation by George E. Ganss, S. J.: Saint Peter Chrysologus, *Selected Sermons*, 214).

we find a spatial one: the place associated with those who are venerated becomes the place of worship. On the oldest dated Christian authentics (inscribed labels attached to relics), it is not the relics themselves that are referred to, but rather their 'commemoration'. Thus, the former did not initially read 'the relics of Saint *N.*' *(reliquiae Sancti)* but rather 'commemoration of Saint *N.*' *(memoria Sancti)*, as in the case of an authentic made from slates of mica for relics of Saint Julian, datable to 543 CE and discovered during excavations at Henchir Akrib in Algeria.[87] That such a remembrance or commemoration was not fixed in place and immobile is easy to see and prove: just as the bodies and other physical remnants of saints moved, so too did the location of their cult: in the case of Augustine from Hippo via Sardinia to Pavia; in the case of Benedict from Montecassino to Fleury; in the case of Isidore from Seville to León.[88]

If sacrality can be lost and transferred, then it can also be revoked or removed. In 962, Bishop Rather (d. 974) robbed the Veronese faithful of their saint, Metro, and justified this in a penitential sermon to them, giving as reason for his actions the lack of veneration in literary form towards their holy patron.[89] From the research carried out by Jutta Fliege, we know that Metro's body was brought to Gernrode, where a new place of his veneration subsequently arose.[90] If a place is revalued or increases in value in this way (e. g., by housing relics), a new sacred place can be established even where there once was desolation. The three churches founded by Pope Paschalis I (d. 824) in Rome—Santa Prassede, Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, and Santa Maria in Domnica—are examples of this (Fig. 6).[91] Whereas the veneration of the relics of many Roman saints initially took place outside the city walls near the cemeteries in chapels, oratories, basilicas, and in the catacombs themselves, Paschalis judged some saints to be so worthy of veneration that he transferred their mortal remains into the urban space proper.[92] Among other things, the tituli of the apse mosaics bear witness to this: in Santa Prassede, the titulus informs us that it was the pope who brought the bones of many saints to that place,[93] while the one in Santa Cecilia shows that it was only through Paschalis's involvement that it was possible to transform the house of Saint Cecilia, which lay in ruins, into a splendidly radiant house of God into which the bones of the saints could be transferred from the catacombs of Praetextatus. Once in ruins as well, Santa Maria in Domnica was transformed under this pope's leadership into a place worthy of the veneration of the Virgin. All three buildings stand as evidence that Paschalis was also interested in demonstrating *intra muros* that his

87 Edition information in Licht/Wallenwein 2021, XXXIII–XXXIV.

88 On the establishment of several places of worship for Augustine during the sixth, and again in the nineteenth/twentieth centuries, see Ardeleanu 2019 and Ardeleanu 2020.

89 Berschin 1999, 53–58.

90 Fliege 1990.

91 Thunø 2015, 1–3.

92 Goodson 2010, 198–199; Poeschke 2009, 190–205.

93 Goodson 2010, 228.

Fig. 6: Apsis mosaic, between 817–824 CE, Rome, S. Maria in Domnica. Reproduction from Poeschke 2009, 193; photo by Abbrescia Santinelli, Rome.

supra-temporal understanding of sanctity went further than had been cultivated up to that point.[94] In order to authenticate and legitimise the correctness of his actions, he established a connection between the martyrdoms and the relics, securing their identity by means of cult objects and inscriptions.

As the following example shows, such decisions were not without far-reaching consequences. In less prominent cases, where there was no single obvious place of veneration, but rather competing local traditions, a decision on the right place or object of veneration had to be made based on documentary evidence. At the beginning of the twelfth century, Abbot Guibert of Nogent (d. 1124) discusses such a case in his remarkable text on relics, *On the Saints and their Tokens (De sanctis et eorum pigneribus)*. According to Guibert, Saint Firminus, the first bishop and martyr of Amiens, had been moved to a new tomb by one of his successors, but no authentic was found next to the supposed body of the saint. Accordingly, a lead tablet was inscribed and placed with the body in the new reliquary casket. At the same time, the abbot of Saint-Denis had reburied at his own monastery a body, in the nostrils of which was found an authentic identifying the body as "Firminus, martyr of Amiens". Guibert of Nogent recommended that careful consideration be made, concluding that the case might need to be decided in favour of Saint-Denis, since there one could rely on something written that had not been reproduced later on. As Guibert himself

94 Goodson 2010, 1–4, 197, 255–256.

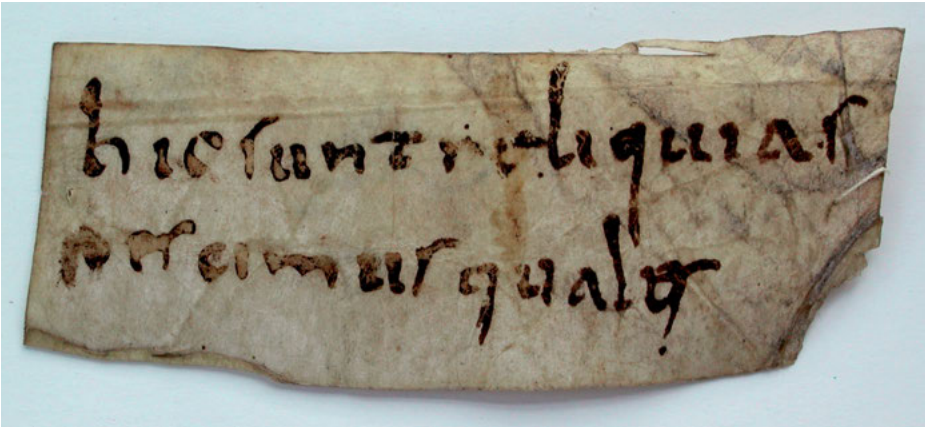

Fig. 7: Early medieval authentication of unknown relics: *Hic sunt reliquias* [sic] *nescimus quales* ('Herein are relics, we know not which ones'), ca. 800 CE, height 2.2 cm, length 5.5 cm. Sens, Trésor de la cathédrale (CEREP-Musées), J 36.

pondered rhetorically: "What is a greater sacrilege than to venerate as holy something that is not?"[95]

What is unexpected about Guibert's remarks is not only the fact that in the case of the founding bishop of Amiens, the abbot recommends against deciding in favour of the saint's own cathedral, but also the basis on which Guibert grounds his decision. It is not an appeal to a tradition or a reference to some miraculous event that is decisive, but rather the rational faculty *(ratio)* which literally chairs the dispute and does so by making use of writing. For Guibert, written evidence is a factual aid in decision making on the question of the authenticity of the saint's body. Let us consider here the tension between the supposedly marginal documents—the labels superscribed on relics were barely the size of a modern-day doorbell label—and their inherent documentary value. Given this, the loss of an authentic could have dire consequences. Authentics are amongst the few witnesses of older literacy of which we often have duplicates preserved together with the original: the older original and/or copies verify the tradition of the saint, while more recent copies serve to update legibility and stabilise sacrality. Incidentally, Guibert's attitude that unjustified veneration should be considered as sacrilege was by no means a special or idiosyncratic position. The words *Hic sunt reliquias* [sic] *nescimus quales* ("Herein are relics, we know not which ones") are written on an authentic made around or soon after 800 CE and preserved in the holdings of the cathedral of Sens (Fig. 7).[96] Here too, we see that one wished to avoid committing the sacrilege of recording false saints' names.

95 Guibert of Nogent, *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus*, 103–104; English translation: Head 2000, 418.
96 Wallenwein 2021, 259; further examples in ibid., 269, n. 26.

Fig. 8: So-called Prudentia shrine, ca. 1230–1240, gilt silver plate, embossed, stamped, engraved, nielloed, gilt copper, filigree, precious stones, and so-called 'Alsen gem'. Oak wood centre. Height 69.5 cm, width 41.5 cm, length 102.5 cm. Beckum, Catholic parish church of St Stephen. Photo: Stephan Kube, Greven.

Similar potential for conflict arises from the history of the so-called Prudentia Shrine (made ca. 1230–1240) in the Provost Church in Beckum, Germany (Fig. 8). An inscription on one of the outer gilded mouldings of the artefact lists the names of saints Stephen, Sebastian, and Fabian, although the three are absent from the pictorial programme. Stephen can be proven as being the patron saint of the town of Beckum since 785, while Sebastian is first mentioned as such via the inscription on this shrine. Fabian's feast day coincided with that of Sebastian on 20 January, which is probably why he was also included in the inscription.[97] Whether there were actually relics of the three inside the shrine, and whether they were also provided with corresponding authentics, is to be expected on account of the inscription. However, neither in Beckum itself nor in the diocese of Münster, which today is responsible for the administration of many sources hailing from the town, have any medieval or early modern inventory registers with corresponding references been preserved.[98] From the Middle Ages until 1814, the shrine was carried through the streets of Beckum to surrounding chapels in a large, seven-hour procession on the feast of Saint Vitus (15 June) and later

97 Gesing 2007, 26.

98 Many thanks to Prof. Dr. Thomas Flammer for the reference.

on that of Saint John the Baptist (24 June).[99] The inscription referring to the saints suggested—at least to those who knew how to read—that relics of the saints who were mentioned were in fact contained within the artefact, thus certifying the latter's sacred quality.

The fact that sacrality was endangered by the loss of relics or their authentics is also shown in a letter from the parish dean Hagemann to the mayor Marcus, dated 16 May 1836. The cleric alludes to the absence of particles of the saint's relics and to the concomitant loss of status brought about by the ban on processions that was in effect at the time as a result of secularisation: "Since it is now ecclesiastically forbidden to carry around such objects during processions, the casket no longer has any value for the church here [...]".[100] In 1881, relics of Saint Prudentia were therefore transferred to the shrine, which the former chaplain of Beckum, Johann Bernhard Brinkmann, had received from Pope Pius IX during a visit to Rome in 1878. A certificate confirming the authenticity of the relic fragment is held in the parish archives in Beckum[101] and demonstrates that relics had to be authenticated via inscriptions. Ever since, the shrine has been known as the Prudentia Shrine.[102]

It thus becomes apparent that sacrality in the Christian contexts discussed here is not encountered in the essentialist sense as a 'fixed', perpetual, or even pre-figured state/status, but was apparently already regarded as insecure and fragile in late antiquity and the Middle Ages and therefore had to be commemorated, updated, and revitalised. Threats such as the forgetting, revoking, or transferring of saints and sanctity were taken into account and prevented, in particular through the use of inscribed artefacts, which in turn assumed the functions of authentication and of the guaranteeing of sacrality.

99 Gesing 2007, 83.

100 Gesing 2007, 86, and Kreisarchiv Warendorf, Stadt Beckum B 333 (our translation, German text: "Da nun das Herumtragen solcher Gegenstände bei den Prozessionen kirchlich verboten ist, so hat der Kasten für die hiesige Kirche keinen Werth mehr [...]"). In the chronicle of Beckum, Chaplain A. Pollack also records on 14 October 1875 the absence of relics in the shrine and that in light of secularisation, "[...] it was in danger of being put under the hammer or sent to the museum in Berlin as an antique. Afterwards it has still happily escaped such profanation or destruction. [...] May it soon be returned to its old purpose as a reliquary and find a more suitable place" (Gesing 2007, 87, our translation, German text: "[... es] in Gefahr stand, unter den Hammer gebracht zu werden oder ins Museum zu Berlin als Antiquität zu wandern. Danach ist er noch glücklich solcher Profanation oder Destruction entgangen. [...] Möchte er recht bald wieder seinem alten Zwecke als Reliquienschrein zurückgegeben werden, und einen passenderen Platz finden").

101 Gesing 2007, 28 and n. 12.

102 Gesing 2007, 9.

Thesis 27

Sacred places (temples, churches, altars) attract writing: inscribed artefacts partake there of the sacred, while simultaneously contributing to sacralisation themselves.

The study of sacred places boasts of a long tradition in the disciplines of classical and medieval studies. However, in the treatment of individual manifestations of the sacred—or of the respective hagiographic, epigraphic, and archaeological sources—the sacred usually appears as being firmly defined and absolute. Sanctuaries, churches, or temples hardly seemed to require explanation as far as of their 'sacrality' is concerned. Yet for a long time, the question as to which elements contributed decisively to the sacralisation of spaces (be they of an urban, funerary, religious, or private nature) hardly lay at the heart of research on antiquity or the Middle Ages. It is only recently, under the influence of constructivist theoretical approaches and an increased interest in cult practices, that special attention has been given to the production of sacrality and to processes of sacralisation in various spatial contexts.[103] Likewise, the sanctity of cities and even of entire landscapes, along with the sacrality of objects or of concepts such as 'dominion' are increasingly being put up for discussion,[104] especially from a diachronic and interdisciplinary perspective.[105] Nevertheless, the role of inscribed artefacts in these analytical contexts—i. e. the part they play in the creation, demarcation, and legitimation of sacrality—has so far only been considered via isolated case studies and without the necessary systematisation.[106]

In ancient studies, inscriptions from sacred contexts are increasingly perceived as important 'actants' in the sacralisation of spaces. The role of consecrative inscriptions and normative epigraphic regulations in ancient Greek sanctuaries and in early Christian churches has already been discussed above (cf. the remarks on 'hierographic quality' in Thesis 24 and on 'liminality' in Thesis 25). Such texts guaranteed and documented the correct worship of the gods and thus the correct performance of the cult. But within the sanctuaries, there is also an immense number of official, public documents on stone. These include contracts between cities, letters from kings and emperors, as well as manumissions of slaves dating from the archaic to the late

103 Hamm/Herbers/Stein-Kecks 2007; Beck/Berndt 2013; Herbers/Düchting 2015; Bihrer/Fritz 2019. On sacrality in urban space: Ferrari 2015; Lafond/Michel 2016. On the relationship between space and liturgy: Bauer 2010.

104 On power/dominion: Erkens 2002; Herbers/Nehring/Steiner 2019; as well as Chapter 6 'Political Rule and Administration'. On landscape: Walaker Nordeide/Brink 2013; Belaj et al. 2018. On objects: Beck/Herbers/Nehring 2017.

105 Hamm/Herbers/Stein-Kecks 2007; Ferrari 2015; Bergmeier/Palmberger/Sanzo 2016; Belaj et al. 2018.

106 Egypt: Luft 2014, esp. 33–34. From the Archaic to imperial era: Dihle 2003 (on the ancient vocabulary of sanctity); Parker 2012; Borgeaud/Fabiano 2013; Roels 2018. Late antiquity: Yasin 2009; van Opstall 2018; Watta 2018, 73–99.

Fig. 9: Marble column with inscriptions from the second/third century CE, Klaros (near present-day Ahmetbeyli, Turkey), oracular temple of Apollo. Photo: Anna Sitz.

antique periods (sixth century BCE to fourth century CE).[107] Entire cities sought out the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi in central Greece so as to consult the oracle, issue civic documents, and consecrate victory monuments after wars fought against both Greek and non-Greek opponents. In imperial-era Klaros (near present-day Ahmetbeyli in the Menderes district of İzmir Province, Turkey), delegations from various cities immortalised records of their visit on the pillars and steps of the temple, furnishing the latter with an unusual 'inscribed skin' (Fig. 9).[108] Initially, it may seem that these 'profane' documents hardly contributed to the sacrality of the sanctuaries discussed here, but rather benefited from this sacrality, acquiring an inviolable or sacred status by being entrusted to the gods. In reality, however, these written testimonies linked rulers, cities, and gods in a web of relationships, in which the political success of the mortal actors confirmed and thereby reinforced the sacral aura of the deity.

Late antique churches and burial spaces also serve as promising fields of inquiry for our questions.[109] Recent contextual analyses show that inscriptions not only played a major role in the creation of sacred spaces, but also qualified, structured, hierarchised,

107 Roels 2018; Drauschke 2019.

108 Ferrary 2014.

109 Churches: Jäggi 2007; Bergmeier 2017; Watta 2018. Tombs: Duval 1982; Ardeleanu 2018. Not all periods of antiquity saw tombs as part of sacred spaces. In Greek sanctuaries, for example, burial was prohibited within the *temenos*.

and protected the latter to a considerable extent through their own communicative character. In the excellently preserved churches of Jordan dating to the fifth–eighth centuries CE, veritable 'inscribed carpets' with psalm quotations, intercessory inscriptions, and building inscriptions directed the gaze (and thus also the movement) of visitors towards the sanctuary and other central cultic zones (e. g., the baptistery) (Fig. 10).[110] The area in front of the sanctuary, which was closed off and accessible only to clergy, served as the terminus for the range of movement of lay visitors and was the closest they could get to the liturgical happenings at the altar. It thus constituted a special 'place of attention', with the floor covered with particularly elaborate mosaic fields replete with large-format inscriptions and detailed figurative representations.[111] Various quotations from Holy Scripture were probably recited or sung as part of the liturgy or the commemoration of the dead, thus significantly contributing to the sacred effect of the space.[112]

Monumental inscriptions on church façades, on the other hand, could announce the sacrality of the place as soon as one entered (cf. the explanations in Thesis 25).[113] When these texts were spoken aloud (partly in the first person), they made it possible to experience sacred places in a personal way. The accumulation of endowments near the altar, observed in the mosaic inscriptions from donors in *Histria et Venetia*, demonstrates that the holiest place in the church offered the donors the maximum potential for acquiring prestige (Fig. 11).[114] Inevitably, however, the concentration of such inscriptions also entailed a further ennobling of the holiest zones in purely visual terms, irrespective of the question of the public's literacy. In addition to the character of this area as a zone of special attention and increased prestige, the accumulation of donor images and inscriptions in front of the sanctuary barriers of the late antique churches located in present-day Jordan points to another motive of the patrons of those buildings. In the media of image and inscription, which were understood as veritable entities of representation, such persons sought to draw near to the altar and

110 Cf. Watta 2018, 74–99, who emphasises the "multiple use of designations of the conceptual field of the 'sacred'" in the inscriptions (our translation, German text: "vielfache Nutzung von Bezeichnungen des Begriffsfeldes 'heilig'"). The gaze-directing framing of the inscriptions by *tabulae ansatae*, contraposed pairs of animals, or circles must also be considered: Leatherbury 2020, 97–124; cf. Chapter 2 'Layout, Design, Text-Image'.

111 Watta 2018, 52, 71, 93, 106.

112 Papalexandrou 2007; Yasin 2009, 143, 226–228; Cubelic/Lougovaya/Quack 2015; Leatherbury 2020, 14–18; of ca. 800 biblical quotations in late antique inscriptions, 163 are attested from funerary contexts. There, they could function apotropaically and in relation to the funerary cult, but also purely as captions and 'permanent prayers' in the context of resurrection: Felle 2006, 406–408; cf. inscriptions that explicitly call for chanting/prayer, e. g. CIL VIII, 20 903: *omnis sacra canens manus porrigere gaudet / sacramento Dei* [...] (Ardeleanu 2018, 482–487).

113 Papalexandrou 2007; Leatherbury 2020, 168–169; on portal inscriptions cf. Dickmann/Keil/Witschel 2015, 126–127.

114 Yasin 2009, 123–129; Bolle/Westphalen/Witschel 2015, 494–498; cf. the database 'Mosaikinschriften auf den Fußböden von Kirchenräumen in der spätantiken Provinz Venetia et Histria' (https://mosaikinschriften.materiale-textkulturen.de/).

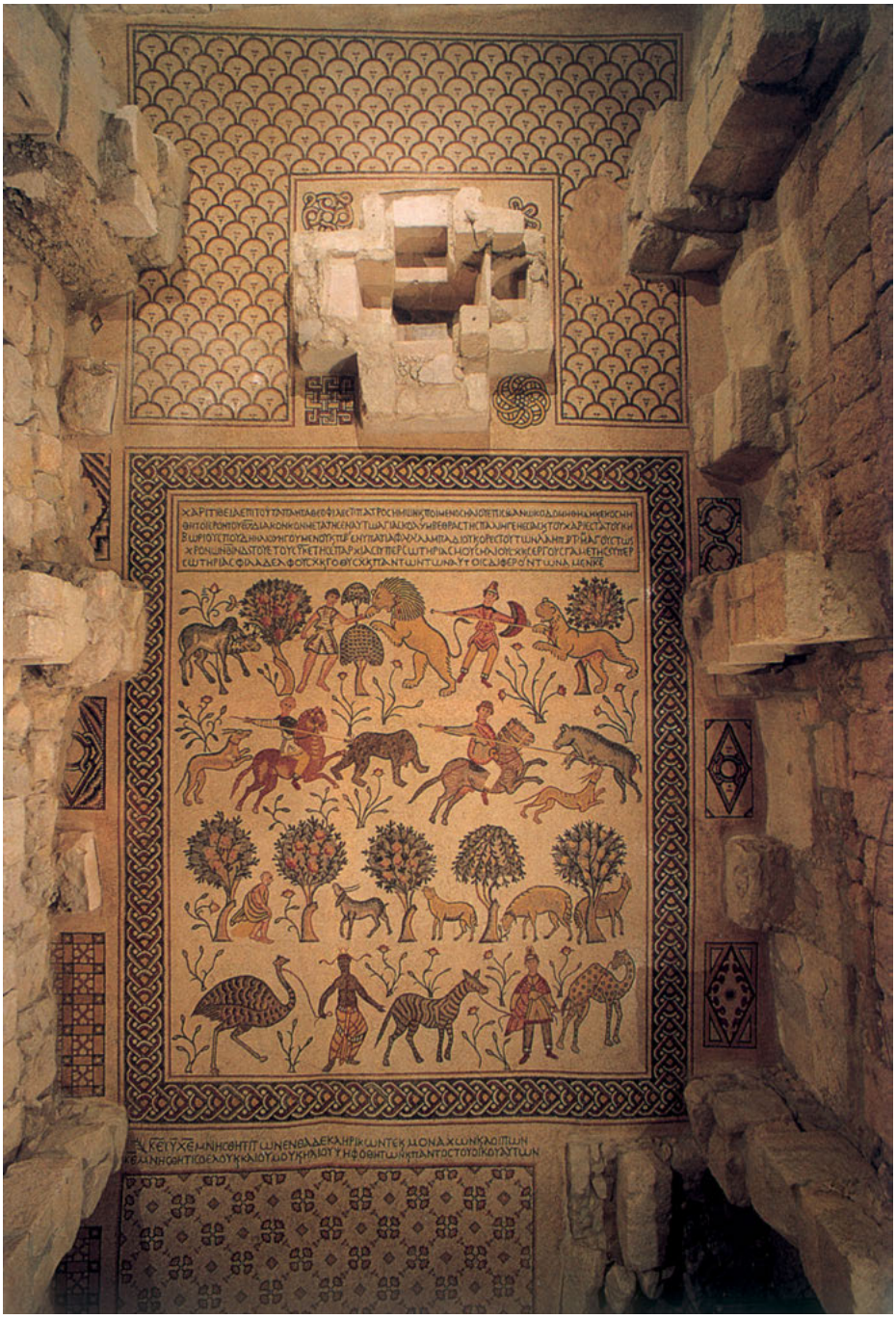

Fig. 10: Baptismal complex with mosaic carpets, 530 CE. Room adjoined to the pilgrimage church at the shrine of the Prophet Moses on Mount Nebo (Jordan). Reproduction from Piccirillo 1998, 273, fig. 12 (Courtesy of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem).

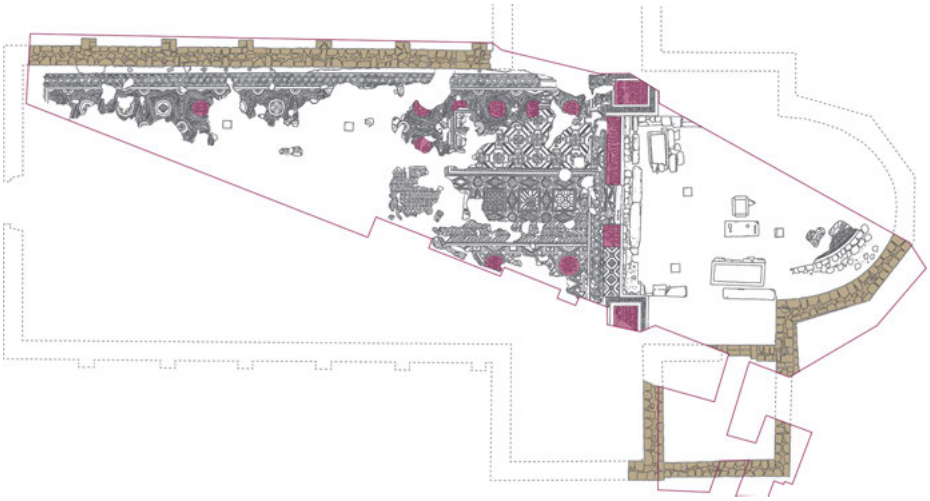

Fig. 11: Donor inscriptions (fifth/sixth century CE) in front of the altar area. Trieste, church on the Via Madonna del Mare. Photo from: https://mosaikinschriften.materiale-textkulturen.de/plaene.php (SFB 933, redrawing by Christoph Forster).

the saving Eucharistic liturgy performed there through a permanent commemorative presence within the medium.[115]

Since the fourth century CE, one widespread strategy for transferring ideas of sanctity to the church building as a whole, but also to the area of the sanctuary in particular, has been the creation of parallels with Old Testament sanctuaries and above all with the temple in Jerusalem. There are many corresponding references that can be found not only in sermons, but also in architecture and furnishings, in pictures and inscriptions.[116] For example, the mosaic field in front of the altar of the chapel of the Theotokos within the memorial church dedicated to Moses on Mount Nebo in Jordan, completed in the early seventh century, shows a combination of an inscription bearing Ps 50:21 (LXX) ("Then they will offer calves on your altar") and a depiction of the Jerusalem Temple with the Holy of Holies and the altar of burnt offering, flanked by two bulls (Fig. 12). For the viewers, central components of Old Testament temple sacrality were transferred via the ritual to the present-day Christian cult building and its liturgy, with Old Testament and Christian themes of offerings and sacrifices standing in parallel with one another.[117]

The above example shows that inscriptions can never be considered in isolation. In the sacralisation process, symbols such as crosses or nimbi/haloes, luxury mate-

115 Watta 2018, 93, 105–106, 143–144; on the accumulation of donor representations at focal points of the liturgy, cf. also Bauer 2013, 185–233.

116 Branham 2012; Ousterhout 2010; McVey 2010.

117 SEG 8, 321; Piccirillo 1997, 133–151; Branham 2012; Watta 2018, 86–88. On the chapel of the Theotokos: Watta 2018, 216–217 no. 46.8. English translation of LXX text: NETS, 572.

Fig. 12: Mosaic floor with a quotation from Ps 50:21 (LXX) and figurative depictions, early seventh century CE, sanctuary of the Chapel of the Theotokos at the shrine of the Prophet Moses on Mount Nebo (Jordan). Reproduction from Piccirillo 1998, 301, fig. 74 (Courtesy of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem).

rials, targeted lighting, architectural decoration, wall paintings, barriers, etc. took on central roles.[118] The creation of sacred spaces can also be traced in late antique buildings that had a funerary function. Such burial spaces must first be understood as social spaces that were regularly visited for the commemoration of the dead. In North Africa, numerous such buildings increasingly took on the features of churches in the course of the fourth century (naves, barriers, apses, altars, baptisteries), with inscriptions supporting this sacralisation process. The commemoration of deceased parishioners was 'codified' in the church floor by commemorative as well as funerary inscriptions at neuralgic points of liturgical rites.[119] The donors emphasised the parts of the church they had 'sacralised' (*sancta altaria fulgent:* 'the holy altars shine'; *limina sancta:* 'the holy thresholds'; *clausula iustitiae:* 'the threshold of justice') and hoped for a special reward in the age to come through the targeted positioning of their funerary inscriptions at liturgically relevant locations and the collective reci-

118 Jäggi 2007; Bergmeier 2017.

119 The decisive factor here was the position and reading direction: Duval 1982; Yasin 2009, 56–100; Ardeleanu 2018.

Fig. 13: So-called Basilica of Alexander (right) with martyrs' burial ground (left) from the fourth to the sixth century CE, Tipasa (Algeria). Red: inscriptions *in situ* with reading direction. Light green: reconstructed liturgical sequence. Reproduction from Ardeleanu 2018, fig. 3.

tation of the former in the course of worship, respectively (Fig. 13).[120] The sacrality of such buildings was also greatly augmented through the deposition of martyrs' relics, which were often only brought into the buildings over a period of time. Inscriptions above or at the 'graves' announced in striking fashion the presence of the saint.[121] Individuals could partake permanently of this sacrality by having themselves buried as close as possible to the 'graves of the saints' *(ad sanctos)*.[122]

With later centuries in mind, it is equally possible to discuss the extent to which inscriptions in ecclesiastical or sacred spaces contributed to charging such space or even imbuing it with sanctity in the first place. Instead of providing a broad overview, we refer here to a pertinent case study in which the questions raised so far were not only dramatically acute, but also ritually staged. What is meant—and what is up for discussion—is the sanctity of places that seemingly needed no further attribution of sacrality, at least according to common Christian conceptions: namely, the *loca sancta* of the Bible in Palestine connected with the life and Passion of Jesus.

A unique epigraphic witness from twelfth-century Jerusalem demonstrates that the problem outlined here is not merely the product of modern academic discourse,

120 CIL VIII, 20 903; 20 906; 20 914. In detail on the inscription quotations mentioned above: Ardeleanu 2018, 478–492.

121 Duval 1982; Bergmeier 2017.

122 Some of the epitaphs explicitly referred to the physical proximity to the saints' tombs: AE 1973, 650 (from Tipasa): *co[r]pus sanc[tae] martyris [Sa]ls(a)e Clim[ene(?)?] adiun[cta] est sep[ultura(?)]*.

but was already being critically reflected upon by contemporaries of that time. To wit, we are talking about the inscription commemorating the dedication of the new, Crusader-era building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1149; this inscription unfortunately no longer survives in material form, but its wording has survived in copy. The patrons or authors (who can be identified as the protagonists of the liturgical dedication of the cathedral and hence equated with the Latin patriarch and cathedral chapter of Jerusalem) used the inscription to express their conviction, also attested elsewhere (e. g., in charters and other documents), that the centre of their religious life, the place of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, was sanctified by his blood alone and would not acquire any additional sacral potency through their own intervention. In their view, the place of worship erected over the sites of the Passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ had merely been formally and newly consecrated. The decisive beginning of the inscription reads as follows:

> This holy place has been sanctified by the blood of Christ / Through our consecration we add nothing to this holiness / But the house built around and over the holy place / Has been consecrated [literally, 'sanctified'; translator's note] on 15 July [...].[123]

The statements made here contrast, of course, with the rites of consecration that were carried out with great performative power. In the context of efforts to legitimise the still relatively new Latin rule over the holy sites of the Promised Land, these rites were accorded the highest political and theological significance and served to create a sense of identity and belonging in the ecclesiastical and cultural life of the Latin diocese and kingdom of Jerusalem.[124] From this point in time onwards, the feast of the 'dedication of the church of the Holy Sepulchre' *(dedicatio ecclesiae sancti Sepulchri)* was to be celebrated annually, and even overlapped with the so-called liberation of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, which was commemorated on the very same day and which, in 1149, dated back exactly fifty years. In this context, it was no coincidence that the inscription itself referred to the very biblical passages on which the Roman rite of the dedication of the church *(dedicatio ecclesiae)* was based and which were incorporated in several places into the newly composed festal liturgy.[125]

Reflecting on one's own actions and existence in the face of what was held to be the very source of salvation nurtured an almost paradoxical relationship between

123 Our translation, Latin text: *Est locus iste sacer sacratus sanguine Christi* / *Per nostrum sacrare sacro nichil addimus isti* / *Sed domus huic sacro circum superedificata* / *Est quinta decima Quintilis luce sacrata* [...]. Reconstruction of the text according to medieval and early modern pilgrim reports in Linder 2009, 31–32. Cf. also *Peregrinationes tres,* 123 and 156; and Franciscus Quaresimus, *Historica, theologica et moralis terræ sanctæ elucidatio,* 483.

124 On the liturgy in Crusader-era Jerusalem in general, see most recently Shagrir/Gaposchkin 2019. On the rite of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre, see Dondi 2004 as well as the overview in Zöller 2018, 93–107.

125 Linder 2009, 35–37.

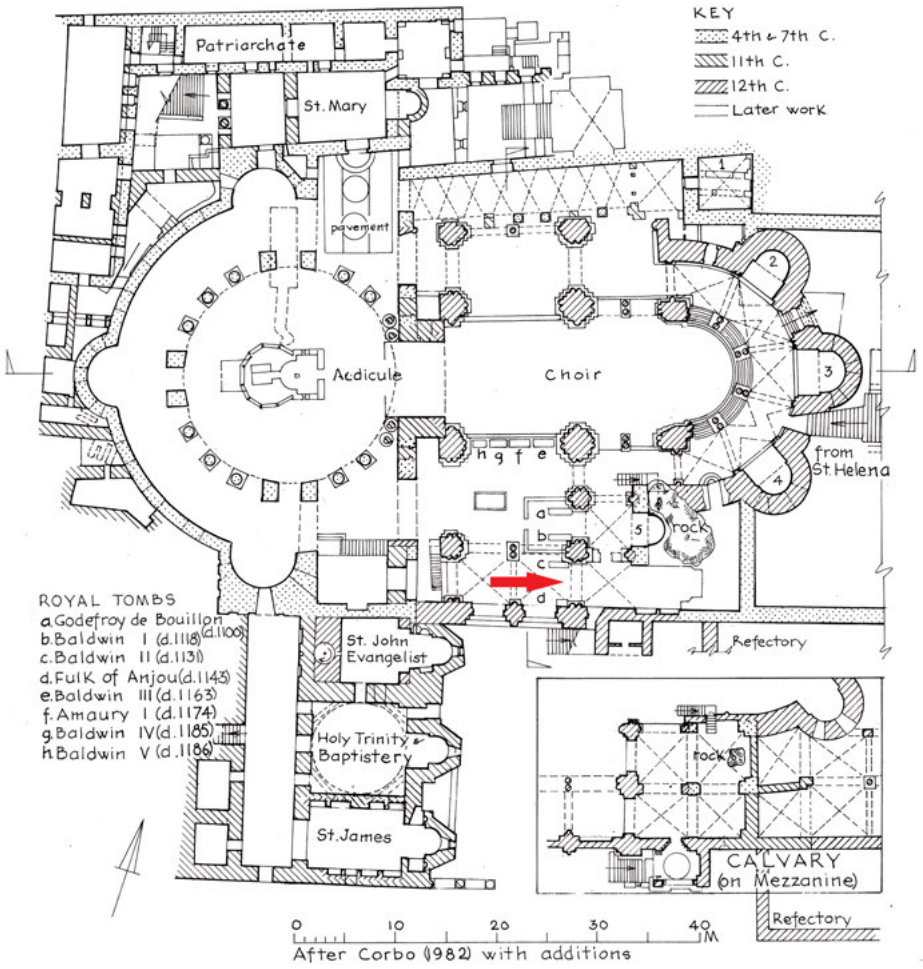

Fig. 14: Floor plan with possible location (arrow) of the Crusader-era dedicatory inscription, twelfth century, Jerusalem, Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Reproduction from Pringle 2007, 39.

two poles, i. e. the explicit conception of the unalterable sacrality of the Holy Sepulchre on the one hand, and, on the other, the epigraphic proclamation and inscribing of this sanctity into the material substance of the church, which was peppered with references to the corresponding actions and pious formulae used in these rites. Right next to the stairway to the Crusader-era Calvary Chapel, the supposed site of Jesus' crucifixion located above the rock of Golgotha (i. e., in the immediate vicinity of the main portal of the cathedral, only a few steps away from the entrance to the church's interior), the inscription monumentalises in an architecturally prominent position the credo of the seemingly inviolable sacrality of the site, which, supposedly, lay beyond the reach of mortals (Fig. 14). At the same time, however, the text commemorates the

earthly events surrounding the rededication of the church, the act of sacralisation as well as the clerical dignitaries involved in or responsible for the latter.

The necessarily selective choice of the examples in the foregoing illustrates that sacred places, or places considered as such, attracted to themselves with particular intensity acts of writing or invited people to inscribe and superscribe buildings and objects in a variety of ways. At the same time, we find that complex webs of interaction unfolded in such spatial configurations between the ascribed, constructed sanctity of the place and the inscribed artefacts that were found and/or created there and which participated in or benefited from processes of sacralisation to various extents and degrees. Inscriptions at sacred sites not only proclaimed the outstanding specific character of the space in question, which set it apart from profane spheres; they also motivated and supported the performance of central cultic and religious practices. From a topological and praxeological perspective, these inscriptions assumed important functions in the creation, maintenance, and safeguarding of sacrality. In outstanding cases, they even bear witness to the reflection on and critical engagement with contemporary concepts of sacrality.

Bibliography

Abbreviations and Sigla

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