

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Inscribed Christian Culture(s) (4th – early 6th centuries)

Berlin, 21–23 April 2027

in collaboration of Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Universität Wien, HU Berlin and Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (BBAW)

We invite proposals for contributions to a forthcoming conference, to be held at Berlin on 21–23 April 2027.

The colloquium will be dedicated to the study of “Inscribed Christian Culture(s) (4th – early 6th centuries)”. The contributions should focus on the inscribed space of churches (walls, floors, inscribed larger and smaller objects and monuments in churches like altars, baptisteries), including inscriptions outside, over or / next to the entrance of churches.

We welcome proposals that address (but are not limited to) the following topics and questions (including developments concerning time and place):

- Who is permitted to ‘mark his or her place’ in the church, when and how?
- How is authority generated through words – authority in relation to God (‘holiness’), theological authority, religious authority within the church hierarchy, and communal authority amongst the members of the congregation in their faith?
- Church founders, bishops and, to a lesser extent, other clergy – which other individuals are given a place in the church for this kind of permanent (or perhaps, depending on the medium and nature, temporary) presence, whether in a functional capacity or by name? Are women, for example, only granted a presence in their explicitly stated role or status as widows or virgins?
- Christianity is made up of individuals and many local communities, most of them connected to individual bishoprics. Is there room in the local churches for the ‘laity’, the ‘ordinary’ believers? Are they represented in a church’s inscribed language? What about graffiti?
- The liturgy in this very space is based on words – holy texts, the bishop’s sermons, the performance of the Eucharist, and, for example, baptism, which is accompanied by words. The church interior is a space adorned and made of by prayers, words, both spoken and unspoken. Most ‘sacred’ practices take place (or at least start) within this space. Are there interactions and rivalries arising from the proliferation of texts in churches?
- For what purpose and at what point are images, decoration and texts brought together and illustrate, enforce or perhaps change the meaning of the words?
- Are the objects and the contexts in which they are inscribed interchangeable? Do the texts, then, perhaps lead a life of their own in terms of communication (and if so, with whom)? Could a text, even if it refers explicitly to baptism, for example, be placed not only by a baptismal font but also at another location in the church (whether or not with a view of the font)?

- There will be questions regarding developments over time that may affect larger regions; the specific nature of regional developments; and the travelling objects and craftsmen who may carry traditions with them – from mosaics to workshop marks, which can be designed like large emblems and, depending on where they are placed, seek visibility whilst serving as both information and decoration.

These are just some of the questions which may ultimately also help to address the oft-asked question of ‘what is a Christian inscription?’. The church interior, which is at the heart of the conference, safeguards us, as it were, from having to engage with this question as a *conditio sine qua non*.

We aim to explore to what extent the selection of epigraphic texts reflected the intellectual, societal, communal, theological, religious mindset(s) of the time, the region, the individual bishop etc., and how these practices may have contributed to the choice of words as well to the choice where and how these texts were inscribed.

We are particularly interested in the spatial relationships (which, in terms of agency, can take on a life of their own), the individuals and groups involved, and the textual strategies underlying the inscriptions.

Papers can be presented in English, French, Italian, Spanish or German.

We will be able to provide some financial support to early-career researchers. This support could include coverage of travel and accommodation expenses, subject to availability of funds and specific eligibility criteria. Further details regarding the application process and selection criteria will be made available in due course.

Proposals (250–500 words), along with a short bio, should be sent to horster@uni-mainz.de by **18 October 2026**.

Accepted authors will be notified by **15 November 2026**.

On behalf of the organizers,

Marietta (Horster), Mainz, Ute (Verstegen), Erlangen-Nürnberg and Philipp (Pilhofer),
Wien