

Presence and InVisibility - sign-bearing artefacts in sacral spaces.
International research conference, Heidelberg, February 23rd-25th 2015

For many cultures sign-bearing artefacts are an immanent component of sacral spaces, which constitute themselves through their presence. This applies to actual specific places, as well as to cultural space in its broadest sense. In the latter case, sacral space is to be understood as social instead of architectural.

The conference will focus on the interaction of mobile or immobile sign-bearing artefacts - ranging from smallest objects to entire buildings - and the protagonists of sacral spaces in Europe and the Near East. By analysing material residues of advanced civilizations from antiquity to the middle ages, the entire spectrum of religions within this temporal and geographical margin shall be investigated, including phenomena generally termed as "magical". An important point of investigation within this context will be the correlation of presence and InVisibility of these artefacts, as well as cultural or religious changes and transcultural relations.

The term "sign" includes all signs found on artefacts that aim to communicate in any way, may it be in characters, in pictographic signs or other undetermined forms.

Questions of interest in the context of presence and visibility/invisibility of sign-bearing artefacts could include: Are all these sign-bearing artefacts aimed at a specific group of people? Could their messages be received by others? Do authors, scribes, or commissioners put effort in reaching a specific circle of people, and if so, how? Is the visibility of such an artefact or a sign necessary to ensure the delivery of the intended message? Are artefacts or signs of restricted visibility actually to be seen as visually restricted or are they simply intended for a specific group of recipients? Do visible and invisible artefacts or signs differ in their effect on protagonists of sacral spaces? What about artefacts or signs that are visible but bear messages that cannot be understood without further means? Is an artefact always a mere medium of a message or can it be a message itself?

What practices were performed in this context and with these artefacts? Could the knowledge of presence be more important than the actual presence? Is presence exclusively provided through visibility? In what way could the material properties or conditions influence the visibility/invisibility or presence of an artefact?

The conference shall address these questions and attempt to answer them through lectures by national and international researchers. Contributions from all disciplines are welcome. The length of a

lecture should not surpass 30 minutes and can be held in English or in German.

Accommodations in Heidelberg will be provided; travelling costs will be refunded (in case of complete financing of the conference). A publication of a conference transcript is intended.

The conference is conducted by Wilfried E. Keil (Art History), Sarah Kiyarad (Islamic studies), Christoffer Theis (Egyptology), and Laura Willer (Papyrology).

Lecture proposals consisting of an abstract (1/2 page), a short curriculum vitae, and a list of previous publications can be sent as an email attachment to w.keil@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de up until September 15th 2014. The conference committee will then choose from all proposals.

Younger researchers are explicitly encouraged to contribute.