

COST Action CA23143 – PRAYTICIPATE

Call for Papers



Reconsidering the Vocabulary of Prayer through Objects

COST Action CA23143 'Prayticipate' (<https://prayticipate.eu/>)

WG1 Workshop: *Material Realities of Prayer*

Hamburg, Universität Hamburg / Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek
29 May 2026 (online) / 10–12 June 2026 (Hamburg) / autumn 2026 (online)

Organisers: Dr Sara Carreño (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela); Dr Carolin Gluchowski (Universität Hamburg); PD Dr Stefan Matter (Universität Bern); Dr Katrin Janz-Wenig (Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg)

1. Workshop Context and Purpose

This workshop is organised by **Working Group 1 (WG1): Material Realities of Prayer** within the COST Action *Participation through Prayer in the Late Medieval and Early Modern World* (PRAYTICIPATE, CA23143).

WG1 gathers researchers and heritage professionals who work with the objects associated with prayer: manuscripts and early printed books, images, objects and reliquaries, rosaries and badges, altars and domestic shrines, architectures and spaces. The Hamburg workshop is designed as a focused WG1 meeting with a clear, limited aim:

to reconsider the terminology we use for prayer and devotion by confronting it systematically with specific objects and ensembles.

Rather than simply compiling a list of terms, we want to see what happens when familiar categories—*personal, private, communal, institutional; devotion, meditation, contemplation; official, unofficial; liturgical, para-liturgical*—are tested against the particularity of individual artefacts and the practices they enabled. How far do these words help us describe what we see? Where do they fail? Which new or neglected terms emerge from close work with things?

Hamburg, with its complementary collections—most notably those of the [Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg](#) and the [Hamburger Kunsthalle](#), as well as other

neighbouring institutions—offers an ideal setting for this exercise in object-driven terminological critique. The workshop will serve as a laboratory in which WG1 collectively experiments with ways of naming and describing the material realities of late medieval and early modern prayer.

2. Format and Working Method

The workshop is conceived not as a conference of self-contained papers, but as a **collaborative working meeting** focused on developing a shared analytical vocabulary. It will be structured in **three stages**:

- 29 May 2026: preparatory online session
- 10–12 June 2026: in-person workshop
- Autumn 2026: online debrief session

First, on 29 May 2026, participants will meet online for a short preparatory session. Beforehand, each participant will submit a **one-page position note** outlining their disciplinary or professional vocabulary for prayer-related materials and identifying particularly fragile or overburdened terms. The paper should centre on a **chosen object**, using it to illustrate key terminology and concepts related to prayer from the participant’s disciplinary perspective. The position note will form the basis for collective discussion and for mapping the diverse conceptual landscape of prayer and prayer practices.

While the in-person workshop will take place in Hamburg, contributions need not focus on local materials; all relevant case studies are welcome. Possible objects include prayer books and books of hours, prayer prints and indulgences, single leaves with images or inscriptions, rosaries and other handled objects, domestic devotional artefacts, and items showing signs of wear, repair, or reconfiguration. Objects from other media are equally welcome, such as sculpture, altarpieces, mural paintings, diptychs, jewellery, tombs or funerary slabs, or architectural settings associated with devotional practice (for example, portals or saints’ shrines shaped by repeated acts of touch or prayer).

Second, between 10–12 June 2026, we will meet for a two-day, in-person workshop at the Universität Hamburg and the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg. The meeting will alternate between **short plenary conversations and intensive small-group sessions**. Discussions will revolve around a curated selection of Hamburg objects in dialogue with material introduced by the participants. To facilitate this comparative work, participants are encouraged to bring images (as printouts or on digital devices) of relevant objects.

The **task in these sessions** will be deliberately modest and concrete. For each object or group of objects, we will ask: What words do we instinctively reach for when describing what is happening here? Which terms do the sources themselves provide, and how do these relate to modern categories? What falls out of view if we privilege labels such as “private devotion” or “para-liturgical practice”? Can we formulate brief, historically grounded descriptions that register not only material features, but also the practices and bodily techniques these objects invited?

Third, a final online meeting (date to be announced) will be devoted to a short writing sprint, during which participants will rework their notes into concise case vignettes and short argumentative reflections on specific terms or distinctions. A concluding debrief will allow WG1 members, including colleagues who were not present in Hamburg, to comment on the emerging glossary and to discuss how it should guide WG1's further work.

Throughout the process, we will maintain a **shared working document** in which definitions, examples, counter-examples, and terminological proposals are collected and revised. This document will form the core methodological output of the workshop.

3. Themes and Topics

The chronological focus of the workshop lies on **late medieval and early modern Latin Christianity** (roughly from the thirteenth century to the eve of or early stages of the Council of Trent), but we expect that many of the questions raised will be relevant beyond this frame.

We particularly welcome contributions that address one or more of the following lines of inquiry:

Terminology under pressure.

How do our standard categories hold up when we look closely at specific objects and their use? For example, what distinguishes “private” from “personal” prayer when we consider a book that circulates within a household, a confraternity, or a small religious community? Does it make sense to call a heavily scripted domestic practice “non-institutional”? How do contemporary labels and rubrics intersect—productively or awkwardly—with modern terminology?

Materiality and practice.

What kinds of terminological nuance are needed to bring material features and bodily practices into view at the same time? Many objects not only contain texts or images of prayer, but also register traces of handling: polished surfaces, worn corners, added cords, repairs and reinforcements, oily stains, traces of contact with relics, added images or marginalia. How should we talk about these interactions without falling back into vague notions such as “devotion”?

Intermedial and spatial configurations.

Prayer rarely attaches to a single object in isolation. It is routed through ensembles: a printed image pinned onto a wooden support; a rosary wrapped around a book; a portable panel or badge that echoes a larger altarpiece; a set of texts distributed across different parts of a building. How do we describe these configurations without losing sight of the individual components, and which terms help us mark the relationship between them?

Institutional languages and cataloguing.

Libraries, archives, and museums inevitably impose their own vocabularies: subject headings, genre labels, object categories, controlled vocabularies for materials and techniques. How do these terminologies interact with the words used by contemporaries

and with the concepts of research? Where do they create friction or silence, and how might small adjustments or additions make prayer-related practices more visible in catalogues and databases?

Ethics and ongoing significance.

Many objects associated with prayer continue to carry religious meaning. Others raise questions about handling, conservation, ownership, or access. How do such considerations shape the ways in which we are able to describe them, and what kind of methodological and terminological care is required in such cases?

These headings are meant to orient rather than constrain. Proposals that challenge the assumptions built into them, or that reveal blind spots in current vocabularies, are particularly welcome.

4. Participation and Expected Contributions

The workshop is primarily aimed at **members and prospective members of WG1 who work directly with prayer-related materials**, including historians, art historians, book historians, literary scholars, theologians, musicologists, historians of architecture, anthropologists, and scholars of religion, as well as curators, librarians, archivists, and conservators. We especially encourage applications from early-career researchers and colleagues based in a variety of institutional contexts.

In the event that all available reimbursable places are filled and a selection must be made among several proposals, priority will be given to applicants who have not participated in previous WG1 in-person meetings. Please note that funded places are available only to members of the COST Action.

Participants will be expected to:

- take part in the preparatory online meeting and submit the one-page position note in advance;
- attend the full two days of the workshop in Hamburg and engage actively in plenary and object sessions;
- contribute a brief case vignette or methodological reflection in the months following the workshop, to be included in the shared WG1 outputs.

5. Expected Outcome

The main outputs of the workshop will be a **collection of peer-reviewed essays** and a **WG1 terminology glossary** grounded in object-based analysis. In addition, participants will develop a series of short case vignettes and an outline for a joint WG1 article on the vocabulary of prayer and its material anchors.

6. Practical Information and Application

Applications should be submitted as a single PDF by **28 February 2026**, including:

- **Expression of interest** (c. 400 words), outlining your current work, its relevance to the material realities of prayer, and the terminological issues you would like to explore in Hamburg.
- **Short academic bio** (max. 150 words), including institutional affiliation and up to five relevant publications or other outputs.
- **Preliminary object or corpus proposal** (max. 200 words), describing at least one object or small group of objects that you would be prepared to discuss during the workshop, and explaining why this material is particularly challenging or illuminating for our vocabulary.

Please send the PDF to: carolin.gluchowski@uni-hamburg.de; sara.carreno@usc.es; stefan.matter@unibe.ch; katrin.janzwenig@sub.uni-hamburg.de

Indicative schedule (to be confirmed):

- Deadline for applications: **end of February 2026**
- Notification of acceptance: **late March 2026**
- Submission of position notes: **end of April 2026**

7. Acknowledgement

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