

JOHN OF NEPOMUK: CULT – ARTS – COMMUNICATION  
CONFERENCE 14-16 OCTOBER 2020, VIENNA, AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES  
CALL FOR PAPERS

With the intention of marking the impending anniversaries of the beatification and canonization (respectively in 1721/1729) of St. John of Nepomuk (ca. 1350–1393), the Austrian Academy of Sciences intends to hold an international conference in order to discuss the cult surrounding this particular Bohemian-Habsburg saint. The cult had already started before his official canonization and was to expand steadily throughout Europe. In this regard, the conference wishes to focus the attention on pictorial, architectural, musical and textual manifestations of Nepomuk's veneration in the Habsburg lands from the late 17th to the early 19th century.

The interdisciplinary conference shall concentrate on overarching questions such as contextualisations and forms of the Nepomuk cult, on the way in which the *vita* and virtues of the Saint have been conveyed, on communicative functions as well as on the intentionality of the arts and media.

Proceeding from the rhetorical concept of *delectare*, *docere* and *movere* and the rhetoricization of the arts, the central question arises as to their potential impact: How are imagery, architecture, music and language related to each other? Here, the conference aims to examine the Nepomuk cult and its large-scale celebrations in regard to their functions and to the integration of the arts. At the same time, it also intends to investigate media-specific symbolism and forms of representation (virtues, especially silence as a negation of language and sound).

The main objective of the conference is an interdisciplinary (methodological) discussion of different approaches to a wealth of materials and their evaluation. Papers should therefore focus less on comprehensive presentations of sources than on specific, analytical evaluations and contextualisations of the respective documents, and should take their lead from the following four thematic areas:

### **I The presence of St. John of Nepomuk in text, imagery and music**

One of the primary characteristics of Nepomuk veneration is that “images” of the saint appear in a wide variety of media, some of which interact yet also compete with each other. Here, the central question arises: what were the basic pictorial genres which typified and would largely determine the Early Modern Period's iconography of the saint? Proceeding from this basis, the conference intends to examine in greater depth the ways in which the key locations of the saint's legend (which had rapidly become canonical) were portrayed in each of the forms of media available at the time: did they lead to the development of supra-regionally valid, comprehensible and widely accepted images of St. John of Nepomuk? Since the discursive aspects of the impact of the Saint mainly reside in the production of texts (sermons, biographies and chronicles, etc.), the question arises here as to the interrelationship between visual and text narratives and to the extent to which the Saint's appellative impact potential – which primarily followed the intention of creating a sensual experience for the viewer – could be conveyed to best effect in text, imagery and music.

### **II Political and dynastic representation**

In the decade marking his beatification and canonization, and as the new patron saint of Bavaria, Salzburg and the Banat, as well as a patron saint of the Jesuit Order, St. John of Nepomuk was appropriated in the interests of furthering various political and dynastic causes. The question

here is whether the “new” saint competed with prominent, and in some cases much older, patron saints and to what extent the Habsburgs and the Wittelsbachers competed with each other in the veneration of this saint. What role did the Orders (the Jesuits and Cistercians, among others) or the rulers and nobles play in the dissemination of the Nepomuk cult? In what way was the political conflict of the 14th century a feature of the conflict between St. John of Nepomuk, a priest, and Wenceslaus, a king, in the former’s subsequent veneration?

### **III St. John of Nepomuk and the conquest of space**

Monuments to Nepomuk play an important role in the religious occupancy of urban and landscape space. To what extent were spatially strategic criteria (other than the mere proximity to bridges) key elements in the specific placement of religious monuments? Were considerations in regard to urban planning or the overcoming of social threshold areas in the cities or landscaping aspects (*point de vue*) of similar, spectacularly staged sculptural ensembles the decisive factor? Or was Nepomuk instrumentalized as a silent guardian of the bridge or in the sense of a metaphor of transition? Which aspects led to (intentional?) conflicts or synergies with other sacred or profane monuments? Last but not least, the conference also intends to discuss the importance of performative aspects: did the Nepomuk monuments offer a place and occasion for cultic actions, such as the holding of public processions and litanies involving musical elements?

### **IV Image creation and profile of St. John of Nepomuk**

One possible reason for the considerable popularity of St. John von Nepomuk lies in his multi-functional profile. Believers could call on his intercession in many matters. Probably his most widely disseminated image was that of “Saint of Bridges”. In his priestly attire, he appears as the incarnation of a simple priest. Furthermore, the inconsistency and multifaceted nature of his image (silence *and* speech) are reflected in his qualities as the keeper of the priest-penitent privilege and as a preacher. His characteristic attributes of a halo of five stars and his tongue contribute to the unique profiling of the saint and raise further questions: did aspects of his biography – such as his testified devotion to Mary or his prominent reputation – enable him to be more easily integrated into other cults and thereby further spread his veneration?

In the sense of the explicitly interdisciplinary approach of the conference, the Austrian Academy of Sciences welcomes papers not only from practitioners of the disciplines of art history, the history of architecture, and musicology, but also from related disciplines such as literature, historical, religious and cultural sciences. This call for papers is also emphatically addressed to qualified young scientists.

Abstracts (max. 2000 characters) for 20-minute presentations and a short CV (max. 500 characters) can be submitted in German or English by no later than 6 January 2020 to

[kunstgeschichte@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:kunstgeschichte@oeaw.ac.at).

Organisation team: Ramona Hocker (musicology), Herbert Karner (art history), Stefanie Linsboth (art history), Werner Telesko (art history)