When Materials Meet. Intermateriality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period

Interdisciplinary Conference of IMAREAL in Krems an der Donau (Austria)

2 – 4 March 2026

Organiser: Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture (IMAREAL)

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The conference served as the kick-off for the research perspective "intermateriality" at IMAREAL. It focused on relational networks between two or more materials and their interactions. Materials rarely appear as isolated entities but rather occur in conjunction with other natural or synthetic substances. The aim was to examine objects from the perspective of their materials and to relate them to concepts such as intermediality and materiality. "Intermateriality" was thus understood as an umbrella term for these diverse material relations.

HENRIKE HAUG (Cologne) opened the first section, **Materials: Definitions | Distinctions | Attributions**, with a paper on notions of pure and impure silver. Drawing on 16th-century mining literature, she showed how different manifestations of silver, whether as ore embedded in mineral compounds or as the rare occurrence of native pure silver, were explained, evaluated, and hierarchized. Central to her argument was the concept of purification, which encompasses both metallurgical refining by fire and religiously charged notions of purity and value. For the interpretation of a statuette of a man with a worked face but a body of raw silver, the motif of the Wild Man proved decisive, since in many medieval contexts it mediated between a raw natural state and its cultural transformation.

JULIA VON DITFURTH (Freiburg im Breisgau) interpreted a detail in the Elisabeth Medallion Window (1243–1249) of Marburg Cathedral, the yellow pearl bands surrounding red and green lozenges as golden filigree wire setting rubies and emeralds, thus creating material illusion within stained glass. Starting from this detail, she demonstrated that stained glass makes materiality visible not only through colour, but equally through form, internal structure, and modes of production. For this reason, the window can be related to reliquaries, ornate book covers, liturgical practice, and the idea of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

In the second section, **Intermaterial Functionality and Aesthetics**, HELENE EISL (Vienna) used the bindings of selected large-format codices from Vorau to illustrate how rebindings and the rearrangement of components alter materiality. Drawing on the concepts of intermateriality and aspectualization (*Aspektivierung*), she analysed the interplay of wood, leather, parchment/paper, and fragments reused in bindings as a key factor in shaping value attributions, aesthetics, function, and practices of use.

THOMAS WOZNIAK (Klagenfurt) presented wax tablets as once widespread writing supports that have suffered heavy losses in transmission. He emphasized their defining feature: they could be erased and reused without leaving residue. This functionality relied on the interplay between a rigid support, a malleable wax mixture, and suitable styli. This, in turn, gave rise to further effects, such as coloured wax and the use of wax tablets as carriers of secret messages.

LISA WOOP (Jena) approached spectacles, from their emergence in the late 13th century onward, as a paradigmatic case of intermateriality, since this visual aid only comes into being through the combination of a transparent material (glass/rock crystal) and a frame. Frame materials changed over time, from bone and wood to horn and metal. Drawing on examples from Nuremberg, she showed how the choice of material was shaped by norms, cost, and workability, while also influencing the use and meaning of spectacles.

ADELINE SCHWABAUER (Frankfurt am Main) examined horn vessels (drinking vessels, reliquaries, and incense containers) as vivid examples of intermateriality. Only through the technically and aesthetically sophisticated metal mount does the horn sheath become an artefact and acquire its characteristic form. Analysis of individual objects made clear that functional qualities such as lightness, volume, and stability emerge only from the interplay of horn and mount, while natural properties such as curvature, shifting colour, and diaphaneity are deliberately emphasized.

ELISABETH SOBIECZKY (Krems/Salzburg) explored the intermateriality of polychrome finishes on high medieval sculptures. She demonstrated that these finishes systematically employed combinations of materials, ranging from visibly applied foreign materials to embedded inserts concealed beneath the ground layer, and that the juxtaposition of paint layers and metal leaf likewise highlights the material mix as a constitutive feature of the surfaces. In doing so, she developed a methodological approach to intermaterial constellations within the “microcosm” of the artefact.

In a public evening lecture, SUSANNE WITTEKIND (Cologne) spoke on the staging of natural materials in medieval goldsmiths’ work. She showed how goldsmiths deliberately staged material differences by highlighting *naturalia* such as coconuts, ostrich eggs, or corals through mounts, supports, and sacralized forms. In this way, the relationship between natural objects and man-made *artificialia* was negotiated, demonstrating that material value and meaning arise only through combination, convention, and context.

In the section **Intermaterial Constellations and Practices**, HEIKE SCHLIE (Krems/Salzburg) demonstrated that many of the few surviving high medieval bronze doors consist of panels nailed onto wood, whose overlapping frames generally conceal the joins and thus render the wooden core invisible at the surface. Using the door of San Zeno in Verona as an example, she asked why the wood was not concealed but instead deliberately made visible. Both the materials themselves, wood and bronze, and the respective techniques used are theorised in the depictions of the Deposition and Noah's Ark to convey the significance of the door as the entrance to the church.

LUISA RADOHS (Freiburg im Breisgau) presented an archaeological case study of nearly 600 late medieval dress accessories from burials in Mecklenburg–Western Pomerania. The analysis focused on the frequency of different materials, intermaterial compositions, and their distribution across find contexts to draw conclusions about material hierarchies and patterns of use. Only a small proportion of the objects consisted of more than one material. These included rings, brooches, fastenings, mounts, and pilgrim badges.

Drawing on the *Vita Sanctae Hedwigis* and related image cycles, MONIKA SACZYŃSKA-VERCAMER (Berlin/Warsaw) examined how Hedwig's sanctity is narrated and visualized through the body and through interactions between body and objects. She focused on practices and objects situated between asceticism and princely worldliness, as well as on the dead body as an object endowed with agency. She asked how materiality transforms the status of persons, objects, and sanctity within such relationships, and to what extent this may be conceptualized as intermateriality.

SABINE VON HEUSINGER (Cologne) analysed a ciborium (second half of the 13th century) in the Museum Schnütgen as a *vas sacrum* deliberately produced through intermaterial combination. It features a wooden core with painted decoration, metal elements, and a textile covering onto which parchment embroidered with pearls and small metal leaves has been stitched. Such an ensemble presupposes the collaboration among artisans. Against the tension between a traditional iconographic programme and seemingly inexpensive materials, she asked how categories such as "cheap" and "expensive" can meaningfully be applied here, and what they reveal about the conditions of production and distribution.

URSULA MARINELLI (Innsbruck) discussed the early modern Christmas crib as an intermaterial ensemble in which figures and landscapes were produced from different materials according to regional traditions. For the "crib mountains", both natural and artificial materials such as cork, bark, or papier-mâché were employed to create realistic verism. She also traced the way in which, especially in Naples, the Christmas crib developed from a didactic medium of devotion into a prestige object.

ISABELLA NICKA (Krems/Salzburg) asked how, in the late Middle Ages, wood came to be differentiated in visual media as an ensemble of distinct manifestations, such as different species, grain patterns, cuts, and signs of cracking and damage, that could carry both

functional and semantic significance. Starting from the increasing precision of wood representation from the 14th century onward, she explored to what extent the concept of intermateriality is applicable here and which methodological approaches might be used to analyse such material relations within the image itself.

From a conservation-restoration perspective, MONIKA KAMMER (Vienna) explored how age-related material changes, such as fading, yellowing, or increasing transparency, interact with environmental factors to shape the visual appearance of medieval and early modern artworks and therefore must be considered in conservation concepts. Using examples such as lead white, she demonstrated how profoundly ageing processes can alter both visual impact and the perception of meaning. She also discussed contemporary knowledge of these processes in treatises and recipes and emphasized the importance of intermaterial analysis prior to restoration interventions.

The next section focused on **Material Change and the Integration of New Materials**. PATRICK SCHICHT (Krems) analysed high medieval architecture as a medium of communication and, taking brick as an example, demonstrated how building material, colour, and techniques of workmanship could function as visible signs. Brick enabled new construction techniques, yet it was also ostentatiously displayed, presumably to signal innovation and international connectedness. In combination with natural stone, it created a particularly high-status effect. Schicht distinguished mixed masonry with brickwork framed by stone and isolated brick surfaces in otherwise stone-built structures.

KATHARINA ROTTÉ (Berlin) explored the transfer of forms from white marble to travertine in Rome around 1500. Master builders translated established marble forms into the less costly surrogate material of travertine, transforming what had initially been a pragmatic choice into one with aesthetic and symbolic implications. Drawing on case studies, she distinguished three forms of intermaterial transformation; besides the straightforward replacement of marble, she also identified constellations in which travertine as a material disappeared beneath thin marble revetments. She demonstrated how form transfer and material substitution interact and asked how travertine came to serve as both a functional and a semantic substitute.

DAVID HOBELLEITNER (Salzburg) traced the development of liturgical fans from their practical origins, i.e. cooling, providing shade, and repelling insects, to a ritual and symbolic function. From the 4th century onward, they were understood in the Christian East as manifestations of the cherubim and came increasingly to accompany the Eucharist as part of its solemn celebration. He demonstrated how intermateriality and material change opened new layers of meaning and use, while also raising questions about the interplay of material properties, practices of use, and liturgical-symbolic interpretation.

FRANCESCO DE NARO PAPA (Heidelberg) demonstrated how the South Italian tradition of *opus sectile* decoration was renewed in the 12th century through the use of glass paste and, around 1200, expanded by another "new" material: fragments of imported vessels from the *Dār al-Islām* used as inlays. Using case studies from church furnishings in Campania and the facade of San Lorenzo in Genoa, he showed how imported ceramics, in interplay with local stones and glass paste, were rendered visible as part of a trans-Mediterranean culture of trade and status, while also being materially accentuated as an innovative material from overseas.

The final section focused on **Intermateriality and Intermediality**. JANINA AMMON (Bern) examined the embroidered partbooks preserved at Ambras Castle as rare early modern courtly gifts of music, probably produced in the context of the imperial coronation of Charles V. Representation was articulated not only through text and sound, but also through material aesthetics. She approached them from the dual perspective of intermateriality (linen, silk, gold and silver threads, pearls, and passementerie forming a status-coded interplay of sheen, colour, and tactility) and intermediality, since the layout and ornamental logics of contemporary print were transferred into embroidery.

SEYED ABDOLREZA HOSSEINI (Vienna) addressed pouncing techniques in 19th-century Iranian workshops. He examined these as an intermaterial and intermedial process in which motifs are produced through a series of material translations across paper, perforated stencils, charcoal traces, and the final surface, e.g. tile, metal, plaster, or ceramic. He also demonstrated how this practice of transfer allowed motifs to migrate between Iranian decorative traditions and European porcelain, giving rise to new meanings through shifts in colour, scale, and context.

The concluding discussion revisited the concepts employed throughout the conference and questioned whether it is meaningful to speak of "mono-materiality" at all, given that every choice of material necessarily excludes other materials and thus already generates relations. It also addressed the extent to which intermediality takes intermaterial perspectives into account, or whether the two categories ought to be thought together more consistently. Terms such as material diversity and material heterogeneity were used to characterize different potentials and modes of operation within material combinations, while material spectra referred to the range of materials available for purposes within regional, temporal, and socio-cultural contexts. Acts of referring/referencing were further topics, through which materials and practices were understood as networks of relations in which material hierarchies and forms of use mutually influenced one another. The discussion further explored whether the concept of intermateriality should also be applied to material groups (for example stone or wood), and how transmateriality might be positioned in relation to intermateriality. In addition, embodied knowledge, material assemblages, and skeuomorphism were identified as productive concepts for grasping more precisely the entanglement of material, form, perception, and meaning. Overall, the

kick-off proved extremely productive and enabled the establishment of an international and interdisciplinary research network.

Programme

Monday, 2.3.2026

Welcome and Introduction (Elisabeth Gruber / Isabella Nicka / Thomas Kühtreiber)

Materials: Definitions | Distinctions | Attributions

Chair: Thomas Kühtreiber

Henrike Haug (Cologne), gediegen / geläutert? Vorstellungen von reinem und unreinem Silber in der Frühen Neuzeit

Julia von Ditfurth (Freiburg i. Breisgau), Von Perlen, Gold und Edelsteinen – Überlegungen zu Intermedialität und Intermaterialität in er mittelalterlichen Glasmalerei

Intermaterial Functionality and Aesthetics

Chair: Astrid Breith

Helene Eisl (Vienna), Judge a Book by Its Cover. Überlegungen zum Material- und Materialitätsbewusstsein im Kontext mittelalterlicher Bucheinbände

Thomas Wozniak (Klagenfurt), Wiederbeschreibbare Wachstafeln als intermateriale Schriftträger

Chair: Matthias Däumer

Lisa Woop (Jena), Horn, Metall und Glas: Nürnberger Brillen als Fallstudie zur Intermaterialität in der Frühen Neuzeit

Adeline Schwabauer (Frankfurt a. Main), Angeschmiegt und fortgesetzt. Spätmittelalterliche Hornscheiden in Metallfassungen

Elisabeth Sobieczky (Krems/Salzburg), Intermaterialität in hochmittelalterlichen Skulpturenfassungen. Techniken, Funktionen, Bedeutung

Chair: Elisabeth Gruber

Public Evening Lecture: Susanne Wittekind (Cologne), Kristall, Kokosnuss und Koralle. Inszenierung natürlicher Materialien durch mittelalterliche Goldschmiedekunst

Tuesday, 3.3.2026

Intermaterial Constellations and Practices

Chair: Isabella Nicka

Heike Schlie (Krems/Salzburg), Die Bronze ans Holz schlagen: Intermaterialität und Technikikonologie

Luisa Radohs (Freiburg i. Breisgau), Materialvielfalt spätmittelalterlicher Kleidungsaccessoires – archäologische Aufschlüsse zu Materialverwendungen und Nutzungsmentalitäten an der nordostdeutschen Ostseeküste

Chair: Sabine Miesgang

Monika Saczyńska-Vercamer (Berlin/Warschau), Der heilige Körper – Materie, Intermaterialität und Dinge im Kontext religiöser Handlungen. Das Beispiel der heiligen Hedwig von Schlesien

Sabine von Heusinger (Cologne), Intermaterialität auf dem Altar? Liturgische Geräte und „neue“ Materialien

Chair: Anna Vierlinger

Ursula Marinelli (Innsbruck), Intermaterialität in frühneuzeitlichen Weihnachtskrippen – eine Materialschlacht im Dienste von Frömmigkeit und Repräsentation

Isabella Nicka (Krems/Salzburg), Varianz im Material: Intermateriale Beziehungen und Darstellungsformen von bearbeitetem Holz

Chair: Elisabeth Sobieczky

Monika Kammer (Vienna), Vom Verbleichen, Gilben und Verschwärzen. Künstlerische Materialien im Austausch mit Licht, Luft und Klima

Material Change and the Integration of New Materials

Patrick Schicht (Krems a.d. Donau), Unterschiedliche Baumaterialien als wechselseitige Bedeutungsträger im Mittelalter

Intermateriality and Intermediality

Janina Ammon (Bern), Textile Typografie. Stickerei, Druckästhetik und intermateriale Medienstrategie um 1530

Wednesday, 4.3.2026

Material Change and the Integration of New Materials

Chair: Elisabeth Gruber

David Hobelleitner (Salzburg), Flügel aus Stoff, Metall und Feder. Liturgische Fächer als intermateriale und intermediale Objekte

Francesco De Naro Papa (Heidelberg), Stein, Glas und Importkeramik. Einlegearbeiten um 1200 zwischen Amalfi und Genua

Chair: Heike Schlie

Katharina Rotté (Berlin), Surrogat und Formtransfer zwischen Travertin und Marmor in der römischen Architektur um 1500

Intermateriality and Intermediality

Seyed Abdolreza Hosseini (Vienna), Pounce Practice and Intermaterial Dialogues in Early Modern Iranian Artisanal Workshops

Chair: Thomas Kühtreiber | Isabella Nicka | Heike Schlie

Final Discussion