

Dr Joanna Smalcerz

Deploying the Sacred: Political Use and Mediatization of the Sacred Sites and Religious Heritage of Rome during the Jubilee Years of Leo XIII

Abstract for the general public

The Catholic Church, which has demonstrated itself as an institution self-justified by tradition, but also one constantly trying to adapt to current realities, is an example of an institution continuously using its material heritage to communicate legitimacy and relevance in times of change. This project explores the beginnings of the Catholic Church's usage and mediatization of its material heritage to demonstrate the role of cultural heritage and artistic patrimony in communication of ideological shifts and institutional relevance. It investigates this question through the study of the use of sacred sites during the mass pilgrimages in the Jubilee Years, the promotion by papacy of papal religious heritage as objects of scientific research, and mediatization of papal heritage in mass media in the late nineteenth century.

The pontificate of Leo XIII (1878-1903) and the Jubilees he convoked offer a promising perspective for studying the mediatization undertaken by the Catholic Church with regard to its religious heritage, sacred sites and objects. The project investigates, how the religious material heritage of the papacy was deployed in papal communications reaching out to the global Catholic audience and how Rome's cultural heritage was woven into papal strategies for solving the Roman Question (i.e. the conflict between the papacy and the Kingdom of Italy over the temporal power of the popes over the city of Rome after it was annexed by Italy in 1870) to its advantage. The aim is to investigate the papacy's strategies regarding its own patrimony, and the latter's multimedial representation as both an important player in the new political order that had sidelined the papacy, and as a control of the discourse on the papacy, the Catholic Church and their relative histories. The project will clarify how the religious heritage and sacred sites of Rome became tools and places of negotiation of the pope's symbolic power over the city and a stage for the shift in emphasis from papacy's political power to global moral guidance.