

Holy Bones and Relics in the Early Modern Christian Missions in Asia

Workshop of the SNSF-founded Project

Global Bones: Entangled Histories, Transfers and Translations in the Early Modern Age

University of Bern, April 24–25, 2024

In the last two decades, researchers started to pay greater attention to the significance of bodily relics for the globalized Christian mission of the early modern period. Case studies reveal the diversity of forms of relic veneration and its medial propagation in the various contact zones and suggest that a systematic study of the topic is a broad and fruitful field of research.

The workshop is dedicated to the role of venerated human remains for the Christian missions in early modern Asia. What functions did relics transferred from Europe, found, and newly created in Asia have for the missionary work and its legitimation? How were bodily remains treated and presented? What forms and functions did hagiographies, images, reliquaries, liturgical devices, architectural and ritual framings take in promoting the bodily remains and their veneration?

We are interested in the mediation of relics of old and new saints, in the role of bones and secondary relics in successful and failed canonization campaigns, and in the negotiations and conflicts that arose over relics between the religious and cultural traditions that came into contact in the respective territories. In addition, we would like to explore which methodological approaches from different disciplines of the humanities are helpful in the study of these phenomena.

During the one-and-a-half-day workshop the invited participants and members of GLOBO project staff will have the opportunity to present and discuss current research. Furthermore, we would like to use the meeting to exchange experiences regarding research in Asian and European institutions.

External Researchers

- Antonio De Caro (University of Zurich, GLOBECOSAL)
- Wei Jiang (University of Zurich, GLOBECOSAL)
- Maria Cristina Osswald (University of Macau) (Roundtable, online participation)
- Raphaèle Preisinger (University of Zurich, GLOBECOSAL)
- Miguel Rodrigues Lourenço (Centro de Humanidades (Universidade NOVA de Lisboa))

GLOBO Team

- H el ene Dupraz Sancho (PhD Candidate)
- Victor Maria Escalona (PhD Candidate)
- Nicolas Galli (Database Administrator)
- David Jost (Student Assistant)
- Tamara Kobel (PhD Candidate)
- Urte Krass (Principal Investigator)
- Alberto Saviello (Postdoc)

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April 24

University of Bern, Institute of Art History
Mittelstrasse 43, 3012 Bern, Room 272

- 09:30 Welcome and Coffee
- 10:00 Presentation “GLOBO: Questions, Methods, and Goals”
- 10:30 Antonio De Caro, “Holy Soil and Blessed Souls: Collecting Contact Relics from St. Francis Xavier’s Grave in Shangchuan Island (1644–1933)”
- 11:15 Miguel Rodrigues Lourenço, “The Saint returns to the Mission. Uses of the relics of St. Francis Xavier in the Philippines, Macao, and Japan”
- 12:00 Lunch
- 13:30 Roundtable “Exchange of Experiences. Research into the Early Modern Christian Missions in Asia”
- 14:30 Wei Jiang, “Relics of the Venerable Jerónima de la Asunción OSC (1555–1630) and her beatification process”
- 15:15 Coffee break
- 15:45 Raphaële Preisinger, “The Incipient Devotion to the Martyrs of Japan: ‘True Images’ of the ‘Calvary of Nagasaki’”
- 16:30 Alberto Saviello, “The Reception of Roman Relics in Manila in 1597. Manila as a Nodal Point in Christian Relic Transfers”
- 17:15 End of the session
- 19:00 Joint Dinner

April 25

Excursion to Solothurn

- 9:00 Meeting at Bern main station
- 10:30 Guided tour of the Museum Blumenstein and its catacomb saints (with the director of the Museum Dr. Erich Weber)
- 12:30 Lunch (followed by individual departure)