

## Press release

### From Assyrian Inscriptions to Asian Popular Culture

Well over 1,000 researchers in Oriental Studies expected at the largest German Oriental Studies Conference in Münster – broad range of topics: Arab revolution, human rights in North Korea, national consciousness in China, sexuality in Islam – cultural-historical lectures, from Indian Sufi music and Asian popular culture to Moroccan table culture

*Journalists are invited to report: please find information on accreditation and the press conference below and attached, as well as a DOT dossier with a selection of topics for journalists attached*

**Münster, 13 September 2013 (exc)** More than 1,000 researchers in Oriental Studies from home and abroad are expected at the largest German Oriental Studies Conference (Deutscher Orientalistentag, DOT), taking place as of 23rd September in Münster. In 900 lectures and 80 panels, recent research results about politics and cultures in Asia, Africa and the Arab regions will be presented. “The spectrum ranges from basic research to languages, literature and history to contemporary issues such as the Arab revolutions, extremism in the Middle East and national consciousness in China”, according to Sinologist Dr. Monique Nagel-Angermann of the DOT committee. “Iran’s gas exports, the human rights situation in North Korea, Islamic finance, sports marketing in Abu Dhabi or popular culture from Europe to Asia are also part of the programme. Cultural-historical lectures will deal with fashion in imperial China, beer in early Islam, or with sexuality in pre-modern societies.”

The conference, organised by the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, DMG), will take place from 23 to 27 September and is aimed at the professional and interdisciplinary exchange of experienced and young researchers in Oriental Studies from all over the world. At the same time, the DOT is to contribute to resolving misconceptions in the German image of the Orient. Arabist Prof. Dr. Thomas Bauer of the DOT committee emphasises that it is often shaped by stereotypes. Ideas of an “intolerant Islam, ahistorical Africa or evil China” predominate. The programme of the DOT is open to everybody who is interested. A conference fee is charged. A photo exhibition, “Framing Muslims”, and a concert by baritone Benjamin Appl, who will trace the image of the Orient musically in songs from Schubert to Ravel, are also scheduled.

### Evening lecture on the Sharia and public order

“The Münster programme is more comprehensive than ever before”, according to Dr. Monika Springberg-Hinsen, specialist in Islamic studies and member of the committee. The sections represented most strongly are Indology, Islamic Studies as well as Politics,

Economy and Society, followed by Sinology, Iranian Studies, Turkish Studies and Arab Studies. The DOT takes a global historical look at the Orient. “Many lectures investigate how the developments in individual countries – whether these are political revolutions, religious phenomena, economic developments or intellectual debates – are connected with other regions and what impact they have there. One example is the issue how the Gulf States, Israel and the European Union reacted to the Arab revolutions.” The grand opening of the conference will be the Freiburg Indologist Prof. Dr. Oskar von Hinüber speaking about “Messages from a bygone world: Indian Buddhists and their inscriptions” at the castle of Münster (23 September, 10.00 a.m.). Prof. Dr. Gudrun Krämer, Islamic studies scholar from Berlin, will give a public evening lecture at the castle (23 September, 7.30 p.m.) on “Arcs of suspense: Islam, secularisation and the secular principle”. She will investigate the relationship of the Sharia, the constitution and public order in Islamic societies.

### **Popular culture, religion and sexuality**

Many DOT events examine the history of the Orient from antiquity until today, as Sinologist Prof. Dr. Reinhard Emmerich, head of the DOT committee, explains. “From the knowledge of history we draw conclusions about the present. The present politics and culture in Asia or in the Middle and Far East can only be understood by looking at them through the eyes of these cultures. This is no different there than it is here.” The spectrum of historical lectures at the DOT ranges from the baptism of Ottoman prisoners of war in the early modern period and the relationship of the Britons to the Indian caste system to the fascination of the Nazis for Turkey.

The culture of the Orient will also be the focus of numerous lectures: they will address classical Arabic literature, the emergence of straight theatre in China, popular culture and youth culture from Europe to Asia, Turkish horror movies, the poetry of Afghan women, table culture in Morocco and the legends of saints in Indian Sufi music.

At the DOT, social policy is reflected in events on religions, the media, and the body and sexuality: studies on Islamic law, on religious plurality in South Asia, on religious jurisdiction, on Muslims in China and on the politicisation of Buddhism in early 20th-century Burma deal with religious issues. Further lectures will examine the influence of new media in Southeast Asia or advertising in Morocco. Other DOT lectures will deal with the body, sexuality and medicine in Islamic cultures, with the circumcision of boys and with marital norms in Indo-Islamic marital guidebooks.

### **Oldest texts known to man**

Oriental Studies focus on the languages of the Orient, including the oldest texts known to man, written in cuneiform and hieroglyphs, or also Aramaic, which has been investigated over a time span of 3,000 years. Field research on spoken dialects or fully unknown languages are added to that. “None of our fields could understand its sources without linguistics”, says Prof. Emmerich. “Those who investigate the dissemination of Buddhism in Asia need Sanskrit, Tibetan, Pali, Chinese. This requires discipline and

frustration tolerance. Even the most experienced researcher often consults the dictionary.” For example, linguistic studies about animal names in African languages or about the variety of child names in Japan will be presented at the DOT.

Among the speakers at the Oriental Studies Conference are top-class guests such as Sinologist Wilt Idema and the Ottoman scholar Cemal Kafadar from Harvard, Byzantinist Hugh Kennedy from London or art historian Robert Hillenbrand from Edinburgh. The University of Münster, the Philologies Department, the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” and Münster Marketing promote the conference. (ska/vvm)

### **Registrations:**

Journalists interested in covering the event may register with the Centre for Research Communication: Tel. Int. Code +49 (0)251/83-23376, [religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de](mailto:religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de)

Conference participants will find information on registration and the conference fee at: [www.dot2013.de](http://www.dot2013.de)

**Captions: Image 1:** Sinologist Dr. Monique Nagel-Angermann, Sinologist Prof. Dr. Reinhard Emmerich, Islamic studies scholar Dr. Monika Springberg-Hinsen and Arabist Prof. Dr. Thomas Bauer of the DOT committee (v.l.) (Foto: Exzellenzcluster „Religion und Politik“), **Image 2:** Poster of the 32nd German Oriental Studies Conference

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### **German Oriental Society**

Every three to five years, the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, DMG) convenes the German Oriental Studies Conference. The congress brings together leading scholars and young researchers. The Society was founded in 1845 and is the most important association of researchers in Oriental Studies. Its members deal with numerous languages and cultures in Asia, Africa and the Arab regions. The disciplines of Egyptology, Ancient Oriental Studies, Semitic Studies, Hebraic Studies, Arab Studies, Islamic Studies, Christian Oriental Studies, Iranian Studies, Buddhist Studies, Indology, Turkish Studies, Altaic Studies, Mongolian Studies, Tibetology, Sinology, Japanology, Southeast Asian Studies, African Studies and related fields form part of the DMG.