

Press release

Jan Assmann is new Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor

Renowned cultural scientist and Egyptologist working at University of Münster's Cluster of Excellence on his concept of cultural memory in times of digital change – Public evening lecture on 2 February on religion and culture from Ancient Egypt to the modern period

Münster, 26. January 2021 (exc) The cultural scientist and Egyptologist Jan Assmann is the new Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor at the University of Münster's Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics", where he will focus on the effects of digitalization on his concept of cultural memory and on the relationship between religion and culture from Ancient Egypt to early forms of Judaism, and to Christianity in the modern era. Interested parties are invited to the public evening lecture "Religion and Culture: Egypt – Israel – Occident", which will be held via zoom on 2 February. "Jan Assmann has been studying for decades the relationship between religion and politics from ancient cultures to the modern societies that build upon them, and has been a major source of inspiration for research at the Cluster of Excellence", say Egyptologist Angelika Lohwasser and Catholic theologian Johannes Schnocks. "What has also given us important ideas is his concept of cultural memory. We will have the opportunity to discuss with him how in this context the global use of the Internet impacts on cultures."

"The starting-point of our workshop with Jan Assmann on cultural memory in times of digital change is the idea that culture connects people by means of rules and values, and forms a bridge from yesterday to today through the memory of a shared past", says Angelika Lohwasser, "with images and writing making it possible to reclaim the forgotten". The workshop will discuss, for example, whether algorithms from search engines lead to cultural segmentation because only specifically tailored content thereby becomes visible, and what the effect is when original specialist knowledge becomes globally accessible. Beyond the historical dimension, the workshop will also shed light on the processes of cultural memory.

"New tensions between religion and state"

The new Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor himself says: "In Ancient Egypt, religion and culture were identical. Religion was all-encompassing and best rendered by the Egyptian term 'ma'at', which encompassed cult, law and cosmic order". With Israel, a new form of religion emerged in the 6th century BC that distinguished between religion and culture, and that subordinated culture to religion. "This form of religion also emancipated itself from the state". Christianity then ushered in the "age of faith" by "making the new religion accessible to all peoples and revolutionizing the ancient world through its rapid spread". In the Christianized West, new tensions developed between religion and state, and between religion and culture.

The programme of the Blumenberg Visiting Professorship also includes a master class on “Religion – Violence – Memory”, in which Jan Assmann will work with early-career researchers at the Cluster and with advanced students from the disciplines of history, religious studies, theology, and cultural studies to explore religious violence and cultures of remembrance. (maz/vvm)

Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professor Jan Assmann

Born in Langelsheim on the edge of the Harz in 1938, Jan Assmann is emeritus professor of Egyptology at the University of Heidelberg and holds an honorary professorship in the theory of religion and general cultural studies at the University of Constance. In his studies on religion and politics, he has investigated in particular the modes in which societies draw on the past in order to create their identity, demarcate themselves, or carry out transformations. Together with his wife Aleida Assmann, he developed the concept of cultural memory. He has been honoured with numerous awards for his work, including the Federal Cross of Merit First Class and the Thomas Mann Prize, as well as the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (together with his wife), the Karl Jaspers Prize, and (most recently) the Order “Pour le Mérite for Science and Arts”.

Jan Assmann has published widely on Egyptology, cultural studies, and religious studies, including *Exodus: The Revolution of the Ancient World* (2019), *Axial Age: An Archaeology of Modernity* (2018), and *Total Religion: Origins and Forms of Puritan Intensification* (2016). Numerous visiting professorships and fellowships have taken Assmann to Yale, Jerusalem, Houston, Paris, Oxford, and Chicago. He is a member of many academies of science, including the Heidelberg Academy of Science, the Academia Europaea, and the Accademia delle Scienze di Torino.

Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professorship for Religion and Politics

The “Hans Blumenberg Visiting Professorship for Religion and Politics”, named after the influential Münster philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996), is designed to help bring innovative ideas from international research to Münster, and to strengthen the Cluster of Excellence’s interdisciplinarity. Jan Assmann will be succeeded in the summer term of 2021 by the social scientist Marc Helbling from the University of Mannheim, who will draw on his research on integration, xenophobia, and the dynamic role of religion in politics to discuss issues in the Cluster of Excellence’s annual theme for 2020/21, “Belonging and Demarcation”. (maz/vvm)

Registration: Public evening lecture “Religion and Culture: Egypt – Israel – Occident”

Tuesday, 2 February 2021 | 6.15 pm; participation via zoom; registration by Friday 29 January 2021 at veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de

Caption: Prof. Dr. Jan Assmann (Photo: Martin Kraft)

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