

## ORGANIZATION AND ORGANIZERS

### Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

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## VENUE AND REGISTRATION

Cluster of Excellence lecture theatre  
Room JO 1  
Johannisstr. 4, 48143 Münster

To participate via Zoom, register at:  
**veranstaltungenEXC@uni-muenster.de**

**ANNUAL THEME 2024 / 2025 “BODY AND RELIGION”**

In the world's religions, the body is both an object and an expression of religious ideas. This is the issue that the Cluster of Excellence is exploring in the 2024/2025 annual theme "Body and Religion". Whether healing and purification rituals, asceticism and fasting, head coverings and tattoos, or practices on the dead body – religious ideas about people, gods, and the worlds beyond are reflected in how people have treated the human body across epochs and cultures. The lines of tradition stretch from ancient polytheistic religions to today's interpretations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The annual theme presents the Cluster of Excellence's current research on "Body and Religion" in an exhibition and an extensive programme of events that allow researchers and the general public to come together for discussion.

## CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE “RELIGION AND POLITICS”

The Cluster of Excellence has been investigating the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures since 2007. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in this funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the “dynamics of tradition and innovation”. They analyze in transepochoal studies ranging from antiquity to the present day the conditions and factors that make religion an engine of political and social change, with their focus being above all on the paradox that religions often develop their innovative potential precisely by drawing on their traditions. The research network is the largest of its kind in Germany; and, of the Clusters of Excellence, one of the oldest and the only one to deal with the issue of religion. It will receive funding of 31 million euros from 2019 to 2025.



Lecture and reading series at the Cluster of Excellence

# AESTHETIC CONCEPTIONS OF THE BODY BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

**6 May 2025 – 8 July 2025**



## AESTHETIC CONCEPTIONS OF THE BODY BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

Conceptions of the human body are not given by nature; rather, they are historical, social and cultural constructs. Religious rituals and ideas, legal and political stipulations, medical rules and hygienic practices – these shape the body through language, image and power. In literature and the visual arts, the exposed body manifests the often conflict-ridden or violent interplay between individual and society, be it in the form of martyred and sacralized bodies, be it in the form of bodies that are deformed or beautiful, flawless. Writers and artists shed light on the relationship between body and mind, and explore how the body manifests internal processes and how these processes can be depicted. They analyze body images prevalent in society, and question religious and political norms by exposing corporeality in linguistic and pictorial signs.

The lecture series highlights artistic perspectives on the body from the Middle Ages to the early modern and modern periods, and explores works of literature and the visual arts in terms of their ideas about the human body in the context of religious, political and scientific discourses.





PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 6 May 2025, 6.15 pm

**Planetary bodies: Religion and medicine in medieval anatomical images**

Taylor McCall (Cambridge, MA)

In medieval medicine, healing the body was tied indelibly to conceptions of the micro- and macrocosm—the relationship between the body and the cosmos—and the Christian worldview. To better understand these complicated ideas, medieval thinkers developed diagrams and images to translate complex information into simplified graphic forms. This talk will explore a variety of medieval anatomical images, including zodiac and planetary figures, bodies as microcosms, and depictions of physiological processes, to shed light on the ways in which medieval people understood their physical bodies relative to the divine.

Tuesday, 20 May 2025, 6.15 pm

**Italo Svevo's ironic view of the body in pre-fascist Trieste**

Pia Doering (Münster)

The Trieste-born writer Aron Hector Schmitz (1861–1928), who chose the pseudonym Italo Svevo (“the Italian Swabian”) to emphasize his German-Italian roots, analyzes in his novels the situation of the modern human against the backdrop of the cosmopolitan trade and border city of Trieste, where nationalist conflicts had increasingly made themselves felt since the late 19th century. Svevo uses sharp irony to illuminate aspects such as health and illness, youth and age, sexuality and gender relations, thereby undermining the body images promoted by the fascism that was then emerging.

Tuesday, 27 May 2025, 6.15 pm

**The representation of the body in the work of Boualem Sansal**

Reading with Carsten Bender (actor and speaker, Münster)

In his novels and essays, the Algerian writer and Peace Prize winner Boualem Sansal takes a critical perspective on Islamism and totalitarian regimes. He was a guest at the Cluster of Excellence for the Annette von Droste-Hülshoff reading at the beginning of 2024. In November, he was then arrested upon entering Algeria and has been imprisoned ever since. In the reading, the actor and speaker Carsten Bender and students will present selected texts by Sansal that focus on the significance of the human body in the context of political and religious repression.

Tuesday, 24 June 2025, 6.15 pm

**Martyrized, staged, sacralized – Art historical perspectives on the body in the early modern period**

Eva Krems, Jens Niebaum (Münster)

The body became a central motif in early modern art. Unlike the often stylized and symbolic representation of the body in the Middle Ages, artists now placed great emphasis on anatomical accuracy and realistic proportions. The lecture examines the martyrized and exhibited bodies of saints, as well as the heroized and sacralized bodies of kings and emperors, with particular attention being given to the blurred boundaries between the heroic and the sacred.

Tuesday, 8 July 2025, 6.15 pm

**Nudity and clothing in Montaigne's *Essais***

Karin Westerwelle (Münster)

“It is necessary to turn over the ridiculous rag that covers our morals”. Montaigne’s self-observation in the *Essais* (1580, 1588) refers critically to human morals and customs. What is the relationship between dress codes and nudity? Montaigne examines the close connection between body and soul, and reflects on the naked body and sexuality. Neither the Fall of Man nor the shameful discovery of nudity provide Montaigne with a model for self-interpretation; rather, he draws on the naked body of the cannibal and the depiction of nudity in ancient literature.