

Press release

Body images and body practices in the religions of the world

Interdisciplinary conference at the Cluster of Excellence will illuminate the relationship between religion and the body – In preparation for the exhibition “Religion and the body: From antiquity to the present” in Münster in 2024/25 – Keynote lecture on 13 November by the theologian and historian Christoph Marksches

Münster, 7 November 2023 (exc) According to researchers, the body has always been part of the practices and ideas of religions worldwide. “Whether asceticism and fasting, or rituals of healing and purification, the body has been an important part of religious rituals across epochs and cultures”, says Egyptologist Prof. Dr. Angelika Lohwasser from the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster. “At the same time, people express religious ideas through the body. Spirit, thoughts, and beliefs are invisible, but they can be projected outwards through the material body. For example, head coverings, jewellery, and tattoos can express religious ideas and affiliations”.

Lohwasser made her remarks in the run-up to the conference “Körperbilder und Körperpraktiken in den Religionen der Welt”, which will take place in Münster from 13–15 November 2023. The keynote lecture “Gott und Körper. Einige ungewohnte Perspektiven aus der jüdisch-christlichen Tradition“ will be given by the Protestant theologian Prof. Dr. Christoph Marksches, who is president of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, and president of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities. The conference is intended as a preparation for the exhibition [“Religion und Körper. Von der Antike bis heute”](#), which the Cluster of Excellence will be showing at the Archaeological Museum and the Bible Museum of the University of Münster from October 2024 to February 2025. The exhibition will present outstanding objects from international institutions such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Vienna and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin on themes such as purity, initiation rituals, gender, magical practices, and dead bodies.

The conference will shed light on the relationship between religion and the body from antiquity to the present day. “The lines of tradition of rites involving the body often extend from ancient polytheistic religions to contemporary interpretations in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and modern non-European religions. They act upon the ideas that each religion has regarding humans, gods, and worlds beyond”, says Lohwasser.

The case studies that will be discussed at the conference range from ancient Egyptian rituals to bodily practices in early medieval Al-Andalus, and from magical practices in the early modern period to votive offerings in Altötting in the 17th century and bodily practices of religious affiliation in Mali. Also discussed will be current findings on the secular view of religious bodies in the present, as well as contributions on asceticism from the sociology of culture and on the idea of the unity of the body in Christianity and Buddhism. (vwm/fbu)

Note: Conference held by the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”, “Körperbilder und Körperpraktiken in den Religionen der Welt”, Hörsaalgebäude | Johannisstraße 4 | 48143 Münster, 13–15 November 2023

Monday, 13 November 2023, 7–8 p.m., keynote lecture: “Gott und Körper – einige ungewöhnte Perspektiven aus der jüdisch-christlichen Tradition”, Prof. Dr. Christoph Marksches, president of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities

Caption: Poster for the conference „Körperbilder und Körperpraktiken in den Religionen der Welt (Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”); Prof. Dr. Angelika Lohwasser (private)

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The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation” has been investigating since 2007 the complex relationship between religion and politics across eras and cultures. The 140 researchers from 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences focus in the funding phase (2019 to 2025) on the “dynamics of tradition and innovation”. They analyze in transepochal studies ranging from antiquity to the present day the conditions and factors that make religion an engine of political and social change. The focus of interest is on Europe and the Mediterranean region, as well as on their entanglements with the Near East, Africa, North and Latin America. 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.