

## Press release

### **Demons: Spirituality – Manifestation – Materiality**

**The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” will be dealing in the 2024/25 winter term with demons in history, art and literature – Public lecture series starting on Tuesday, 22 October 2024**

**Münster, 15 October 2024 (exc)** Demons – according to researchers, these elusive beings, neither human nor divine, can be found in history, art and literature from antiquity to the present, and express the relationship between humans and the supernatural. Literary scholar Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf from the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” explains: “Demons have always been considered highly dangerous, but in certain circumstances or on certain occasions they could also appear benevolent, and they have been portrayed in this dual way in everyday, literary and artistic contexts. Even though the modern period often understands demons metaphorically, they have lost none of their fascination in art and literature”. How the idea of demons has changed over the centuries is the subject of an interdisciplinary, six-part public lecture series run by the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” in the 2024/25 winter term, and entitled “Demons: Spirituality – Manifestation – Materiality”. The lectures will be held in lecture theatre JO 1, Johannisstraße 4, 48143 Münster, from 6 to 8 pm. The series is organized by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, historian Ulrike Ludwig, and art historian Eva Krems, who are also conducting joint research at the Cluster of Excellence in the project “Demons: Medialities between literature and art, religion and politics”.

From October 2024 to January 2025, six lecturers from the fields of literary studies, history, and art history will adopt an interdisciplinary approach to explore how people have dealt with the belief in the existence of demons in their respective cultural media, for example in stories of relationships that people enter into with devils, demons, fairies and witches, in the dramaturgical staging of the demonic in the theatre, and in examples of late medieval architecture.

As Ulrike Ludwig explains, demons were considered intermediaries between gods and humans in ancient times. They represented the link between reality and the supernatural world. In the Middle Ages, demons then served as anchor points for thinking about the origin of evil and its status in the world. Ludwig says: “During this period, demons often have something to offer: fables and fairy tales repeatedly tell of people who make a pact with the devil to gain an advantage, and natural philosophers attributed to demons an almost complete knowledge of nature”. After the belief in demons declined with the emergence of modern science in the early modern period, there emerged more abstract notions of the demonic, as well as the idea of the demonic human. According to art historian Eva Krems, it is astonishing how present the demonic still is today, especially in visual media: “Demons may be elusive entities, but we can find pictorial manifestations of them time and again, be it in Romanesque building ornamentation or in popular culture”. The lectures explore the overarching question of how the respective representations of the demonic reflect historical ideas about the nature of the human being.

The series will open on Tuesday, 22 October 2024 with a lecture by literary scholar Silvia Reuvekamp (Münster). She will explore the overarching interests of literature, religion, politics and law in dealing with demons. On 5 November 2024, art historian Stefan Bürger (Würzburg) will discuss whether architecture can embody the demonic, and in doing so reflects on iconic architecture around/after 1500. The lecture by literary scholar Tobias Bulang (Heidelberg) on 19 November 2024 will deal with the controversial idea in early modern witchcraft discourse of humans transforming into animals, as well as the demonic helper in animal form that accompanies witches and wizards. Religious historian Jan Machielsen (Cardiff) will give a lecture in English on 3 December 2024 on the corporeality and origins of the European witch hunt. On 17 December 2024, historian Rita Voltmer (Trier) will trace the ambivalences and historical contexts of the corporeality of devils and witches on the stage, and investigate their (lack of?) presence on German theatre stages. The final lecture will be given on 14 January 2025 by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Münster), who will discuss demons in modern and contemporary literature. (pie/vvm)

**The lecture series “Demons: Spirituality – Manifestation – Materiality” will take place on 22 October, 5 November, 19 November, 3 December, 17 December, and 14 January, each from 6–8 pm**

Lecture theatre JO 1, Johannisstraße 4, 48143 Münster

Further information about the lecture series: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/aktuelles/schwerpunkte/daemonen.shtml>

**In attachment:** Flyer for the lecture series “Demons: Spirituality – Manifestation – Materiality”

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**The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster** 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 transepochnal 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.