

Press release

Next week sees the opening of the exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion.”

To mark the start of the annual theme “Body and Religion”, the exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present” opens at the University of Münster’s Archaeological Museum and Bible Museum on 25 October 2024 – New annual theme at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” presents research on the body and notions of the body in the religions of the world – Annual programme with panel discussions, readings, lectures, “walks and talks”, guided tours, and films

Münster, 14 October 2024 (exc) To mark the start of the annual theme “Body and Religion”, the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” is opening the interdisciplinary exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present” at the University of Münster’s Archaeological Museum and Bible Museum on 25 October 2024. “The exhibition views the human body as both object and expression of religious ideas”, explains Egyptologist Prof. Dr. Angelika Lohwasser, who is coordinating the annual theme and organizing the exhibition with the museum directors, as well as with archaeologist Prof. Dr. Achim Lichtenberger and theologian Prof. Dr. Holger Strutwolf from the Cluster of Excellence. “Whether healing and purification rituals, asceticism and fasting, head coverings and tattoos, or practices involving the dead body – religious ideas about people, gods and otherworldly realms are reflected in our treatment of the human body across epochs and cultures”.

As archaeologist Prof. Dr. Achim Lichtenberger explains, the exhibition presents important exhibits from, for example, the Louvre in Paris, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the Fundação Pierre Verger in Salvador, and museums in the region. The objects range from the ancient statuette of the Roman god Hermaphroditus and ritual objects such as a nail fetish from the Congo, to replicas of famous pieces such as the death mask of the Unknown Woman of the Seine, as well as animated and documentary films about religious clothing. With the exhibition, the annual theme presents an extensive programme of lectures, panel discussions, films, guided tours, readings, and talks on current research in the Cluster of Excellence, and provides researchers and the general public with a space for discussion.

The exhibition and the annual theme will be officially opened in the Fürstenberghaus, Room F2 (Domplatz 20–22, 48143 Münster), on 25 October 2024 at 6 pm. Welcome addresses will be given by the rector of the University of Münster, Prof. Dr. Johannes Wessels, the mayor of the city of Münster, Angela Stähler, the speaker of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”, Prof. Dr. Michael Seewald, and the exhibition organizers. **The media can have a preview tour of the exhibition on 24 October at 11:00 am. Registration at religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de**

“The exhibition explores how religious practices and traditions shape and influence the human body”, explains archaeologist Achim Lichtenberger. “While a person’s spirit, faith and thoughts are invisible, the material body can become their visible manifestation. The exhibition is accompanied by a diverse programme of events during the annual theme that offer the general public further insights into the relationships between the body and religious ideas about the body in the past and present”. Guided tours of the exhibition with the curators, “walks and talks”, as well as panel discussions, lectures and films – these invite visitors to think about and discuss issues covered by the exhibition and their presentation in a museum, as well as current issues to do with body and spirituality, and religious clothing in the public space.

The exhibition is divided into seven thematic areas, as theologian Holger Strutwolf explains. The Archaeological Museum is presenting the areas “Divine figures”, “Gender roles?”, “Religion and healing”, and “After death”, which deal with the bodily representation of the divine, the treatment of gender roles, religious healing rituals, and the treatment of the dead body in past and present religions. The Bible Museum is covering the areas “Rituals of life”, “Purity for mind and body” and “Disembodiment”, these dealing with initiation rituals, purification rites and the relationship between mind and body in the world’s religions.

The body in literature and the visual arts – programme in the summer term of 2025

The second half of the annual theme will look at the body from a new perspective: researchers from the Cluster of Excellence and international guests will explore the aesthetic conceptions of the body in literature and the visual arts in lectures and readings during the summer term of 2025. “Ideas about the human body are not naturally given; rather, they are historical, social and cultural constructs”, explains art historian Eva Krems. “Religious rituals and ideas, legal and political regulations, 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 conflictual or violent interplay between individual and society – be it in the form of martyred and sacralized bodies, in deformed or beautiful, flawless bodies”. The Hans Blumenberg Professorship of the Cluster of Excellence will also explore the relationship between the body and religion: Deborah Kapchan, anthropologist and professor of performance studies at New York University Tisch School of the Arts, will be a guest in Münster in the 2025 summer term, and will talk about her research on rituals of spirit possession in Morocco. (fbu/vvm)

Opening of the exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present” to mark the start of the “Body and Religion” annual theme: 25 October 2024, 6 pm

Fürstenberghaus, University of Münster, Room F2, Domplatz 20–22, 48143 Münster

Pre-opening tour of the exhibition for journalists on 24 October 2024 at 11:00 am with Egyptologist Prof. Dr. Angelika Lohwasser and sociologist of religion Ines Michalowski (Deputy Speaker of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”)

Registration at religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de

Further information on the exhibition and the accompanying programme: <https://www.uni->

[muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/aktuelles/schwerpunkte/ausstellung_koerper.shtml](https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/aktuelles/schwerpunkte/ausstellung_koerper.shtml)

Further information on the “Body and Religion” annual theme: https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/aktuelles/themenjahr/koerper_und_religion/index.shtml

University of Münster Archaeological Museum

Domplatz 20–22, 48143 Münster

Opening hours: Tue to Sun 10 am–6 pm | public holidays 10 am–6 pm | 2nd Fri of the month 10 am–midnight

University of Münster Bible Museum

Pferdegasse 1, 48143 Münster

Opening hours: Tue to Sun 10 am–6 pm | 2nd Fri of the month 10 am–10 pm

Admission prices: €6 / €3 reduced

Groups of 10 or more: €4 per person

Free admission: University of Münster students, as well as children and young people under 18

Queries about guided tours: koerperausstellung@uni-muenster.de | Guided tours: €40

Images: Poster for the 2024/2025 annual theme “Body and Religion” at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” (Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”/Stefan Matlik)

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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.