

Press release

Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present

As part of its annual theme “Body and Religion”, the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” is organizing an exhibition on the body in the world’s religions from antiquity to the present – Opening in the Archaeological Museum and Bible Museum of the University of Münster on 25 October 2024 – Important exhibits on religious practices and ideas from Paris, Vienna and Berlin

Münster, 10 September 2024 (exc) The body has always been part of the practices and ideas of the world’s religions. This is shown by the exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present”, which the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” at the University of Münster is organizing in the Archaeological Museum and the Bible Museum at the University from 25 October 2024 to 26 February 2025. “The human body has played an important role in religious practices throughout the ages and across cultures”, explains Egyptologist Angelika Lohwasser, who is organizing the exhibition together with the directors of the museums, archaeologist Achim Lichtenberger and theologian Holger Strutwolf. “Examples include asceticism and fasting, initiation rites and purification rituals, as well as practices involving the dead body. They can already be found in ancient polytheistic religions, and are still visible today in Judaism, Christianity and Islam”. The exhibition features important exhibits from the Louvre in Paris, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Kunsthistorisches Museum 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 other films about religious clothing.

The exhibition draws on the findings of the Cluster of Excellence’s cross-epochal, interreligious and interdisciplinary research on the relationship between religion and the body. It is part of the Cluster of Excellence’s 2024/2025 annual theme “Body and Religion”, which presents current research in an extensive annual programme and provides space for discussion between researchers and the general public. Events planned are a lecture, film and discussion evenings, an opportunity to “walk and talk”, guided tours, a dance workshop, and readings. “The exhibition illustrates the ideas of the annual theme through a variety of exhibits from numerous regions of the world”, says archaeologist Achim Lichtenberger. “It shows how religious traditions shape and influence the human body. The body can serve as a screen for the projection of religious ideas, and be modified through ritual practices, clothing, jewellery and tattoos. Such modifications of the body can serve to achieve spiritual experiences or to signal religious belonging”.

“Divine figures” and “Rituals of life”

The exhibition is divided into seven thematic areas, as theologian Holger Strutwolf explains. The Archaeological Museum is hosting the thematic areas “Divine figures”, “Gender roles?”, “Religion and healing”, and “After death”, which deal with the bodily representation of the divine, the handling of gender roles, religious healing rituals, and the treatment of the dead body in past and present religions. The Bible Museum is hosting “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. (fbu/vvm)

Note: To mark the start of the “Body and Religion” annual theme, the Cluster of Excellence’s exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present” will open in the Fürstenberghaus of the University of Münster, Room F2 (Domplatz 20-22, 48143 Münster), on 25 October 2024 at 6 pm. Interested parties are then invited to view the exhibition in the Archaeological Museum and the Bible Museum at the University of Münster. (*The media will be able to take a preliminary tour of the exhibition on this day. The invitation will follow in October*).

Caption: Posters for the exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present” (Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”/nur design/Stefan Matlik); exhibition organizers Achim Lichtenberger (Archaeology), Angelika Lohwasser (Egyptology), and Holger Strutwolf (Theology) with the exhibition posters and the poster for the annual theme “Body and Religion” at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” (Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”/Michael Möller)

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The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” 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.