



PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

SUMMER TERM 2025

The second half of the annual theme “Body and Religion” focuses on literature and the visual arts. Three lectures and a reading will deal with aesthetic conceptions of the body between religion and politics. The Hans Blumenberg Professorship will also explore the relationship between the body and religion: ethnologist Deborah Kapchan, who is Professor of Performance Studies at New York University Tisch School of the Arts, will be a guest in Münster in the 2025 summer term, when she will talk about her research on rituals of spirit possession in Morocco.

LECTURE SERIES AND READING

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.

Reading

With Mathias Énard

May 2025 (exact date to be determined)

Lecture in English

Planetary bodies:

Religion and medicine in medieval anatomical images

Taylor McCall

Tuesday, 6 May 2025

Lecture

Martyrized, staged, sacralized – perspectives from art history on the body in the early modern period

Eva Krems, Jens Niebaum

Tuesday, 24 June 2025

Lecture

Dangerous words – the rhetoric of the body in the work of Boccaccio and Montaigne

Pia Doering, Karin Westerwelle

Tuesday, 8 July 2025

HANS BLUMENBERG PROFESSORSHIP

Deborah Kapchan

Ethnologist and Professor of Performance Studies at New York University Tisch School of the Arts

The ethnologist Deborah Kapchan will be Hans Blumenberg Professor at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” in 2025. Her work is located at the intersection of gender studies, ethnomusicology, performance and sound studies. The musical performances that she studies in Morocco and the Francophone diaspora belong to rituals of spirit possession that see people become temporary mediums of spirits and fall into a state of trance. Thus, Kapchan’s work focuses centrally on the themes of “embodiment” and “disembodiment” within trance and other religious rituals. Her diverse publications include several monographs and anthologies, as well as an anthology of modern Moroccan poetry. Kapchan is currently working on a kind of “poetic auto-ethnography” in which she reflects on her 30 years of research on, and participation in, Sufi trance rituals in Morocco.

Lecture in English

Face to face with the spirits:

Paradox and the anthropology of the esoteric

Deborah Kapchan

Tuesday, 3 June 2025

BODY AND RELIGION



BODY AND RELIGION

The body is both an object and an expression of religious ideas in the religions of the world. “Body and Religion” is precisely what the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” is focusing on in its annual theme for 2024/2025. Whether healing and purification rituals, asceticism and fasting, head coverings and tattoos, or rituals practised on the dead body – religious ideas about people, gods, and the worlds beyond have been reflected in the treatment of the human body across epochs and cultures. The lines of tradition range 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 facilitate discussion between researchers and citizens. Planned are lecture, film and discussion evenings, a walk and talk through the exhibition, guided tours, a dance workshop, and readings. The Hans Blumenberg Professorship is also focusing on the relationship between the body and religion.

The body has always been an integral part of religious rituals and practices. This is demonstrated by the Cluster of Excellence’s interreligious, cross-epochal and interdisciplinary research on the diverse relationships between the body and religious ideas of the body in the past and present.

At the same time, people express religious ideas through the body: while a person’s spirit, beliefs and thoughts are invisible, the material body can become their visible manifestation. Religious ideas and affiliations are expressed through head coverings, jewellery and tattoos. The body thus becomes the site of religious experience for individuals, while also acting as a surface for religion to present itself and as a seismograph of how it changes.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

WINTER TERM 2024/2025

The first half of the annual theme is centred around the exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present”, which can be seen in the Archaeological Museum and the Bible Museum of the University of Münster from 25 October 2024 to 26 February 2025. Using a wide range of exhibits such as sculptures, paintings, coins, clothing and jewellery, photographs and films from numerous regions of the world, the exhibition shows the complex relationship between religion and the body in the past and present.

Important exhibits are presented, for example from the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, the Kunsthistorische Museum in Vienna, the Fundação Pierre Verger in Salvador, and museums in the region.

The exhibits range from ancient representations of the body such as the statue of the ancient Egyptian God’s Wife Ahmose-Nefertari and the statuette of the Roman god Hermaphroditos, to ritual objects such as a nail fetish from the Congo and a Jewish Levite jug. Also on display are replicas of famous pieces such as the death mask of the Unknown Woman of the Seine and modern photographs of trance rituals in Brazil. The exhibition also includes films such as the animated film “The public swimming pool between bikini and burkini”, which is about religion and the body in public spaces, as well as a multimedia installation with interview films on the subject of religious head coverings. The accompanying programme discusses themes and objects from the exhibition, and addresses current social questions about the body and religion.

BEGINNING OF THE ANNUAL THEME

Exhibition opening

“Body. Cult. Religion. Perspectives from antiquity to the present” at the Archaeological Museum and the Bible Museum of the University of Münster
Friday, 25 October 2024, 6 pm

PROGRAMME FOR THE EXHIBITION

Guided tours

**A look behind the scenes:
walking through the exhibition with the curators**
Sunday, 10 November 2024, 2 pm
Sunday, 8 December 2024, 2 pm
Sunday, 26 January 2025, 2 pm

Dance workshop

Moving realities
Friday to Saturday, 15 – 16 November 2024

Walk and talk through the exhibition

Body and religion in the museum
Friday, 10 January 2025, 4 pm

Film evening

„Drugs & Prayers“ (India 2009)
Followed by a discussion with ethnologist Helene Basu, who produced the film at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”
Tuesday, 28 January 2025, 6.15 pm

PANELS AND LECTURES ON THE EXHIBITION

Lecture in English

Corpses as instruments of well-being: Jeremy Bentham’s Auto-Icon and the status of dead bodies
Michael Quinn
Tuesday, 29 October 2024, 6.15 pm

Panel discussion

Crossing the boundaries of body and mind
Tuesday, 12 November 2024, 6.15 pm

Panel discussion

Religions make clothes
Tuesday, 21 January 2025, 6.15 pm

Finissage

Exhibition “Body. Cult. Religion: Perspectives from antiquity to the present” at the Archaeological Museum and the Bible Museum of the University of Münster
Wednesday, 26 February 2025, 6 pm

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 transepochal 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 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.

ORGANIZER AND ORGANIZATION

Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

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Current Information on
the programme of the
annual theme 2024/2025