

Europe in the Middle East - the Middle East in Europe

“Europe in the Middle East - the Middle East in Europe” (EUME) is a multi-disciplinary research program at the Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien. EUME seeks to rethink key concepts and premises that link and divide Europe and the Middle East. Within the framework of five research fields in the disciplines of Literature, Political Philosophy, Urban History, Philology-cum-Late Antiquity, and Islamic Studies, the program attempts to recollect the legacies of Europe in the Middle East and of the Middle East in Europe in an inclusive way that aims to do justice to their entanglements. The program creates a platform that rests upon the idea of “learning communities” (Wolf Lepenies) and the principle of ‘research with, rather than research on’. It allows for the invitation of 10 post-doctoral researchers every year, the organization of annual summer academies, workshops, regular seminars and lectures that strengthen and modify existing research groups and contexts in Germany, beyond academic circles.

The program draws on the international expertise of scholars in and outside of Germany and is embedded in university and extra-university research institutions in Berlin. EUME was initiated in 2006 by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and builds upon the previous work of the Working Group Modernity and Islam (1996-2006). EUME supports and rests upon five interconnected research fields:

- *Cities Compared: Urban Change in the Mediterranean and Adjacent Regions* – directed by Ulrike Freitag and Nora Lafi (both Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin) – contributes to the debate on cosmopolitanism and civil society from the historical experience of conviviality and socio-cultural, ethnic, and religious differences in the cities around the Mediterranean.
- *Islamic Discourse Contested: Middle Eastern and European Perspectives* – directed by Gudrun Krämer (Institut für Islamwissenschaften, Freie Universität Berlin) – analyzes modern Middle Eastern thought and discourses in the framework of theories of multiple or reflexive modernities;
- *Perspectives on the Qur'an: Negotiating Different Views of a Shared History* - directed by Angelika Neuwirth (Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik, Freie Universität Berlin) and Stefan Wild (Universität Bonn) - situates the foundational text of Islam within the religious landscape of Late Antiquity and combines a historicization of its genesis with its reception and perception in Europe and the Middle East;
- *Travelling Traditions: Comparative Perspectives on Near Eastern Literatures* – directed by Friederike Pannewick (Centrum für Nah- und Mitteloststudien/Arabistik, Philipps-Universität Marburg) and Samah Selim (Rutgers University) - reassesses literary entanglements and processes of canonization between Europe and the Middle East.

- *Tradition and the Critique of Modernity: Secularism, Fundamentalism and Religion from Middle Eastern Perspectives* – directed by Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin (Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva) tries to rethink key concepts of Modernity like secularity, tradition, or religion in the context of the experiences, interpretations, and critiques of Jews, Arabs, and Muslims in the Middle East and in Europe.

All five research fields contribute to our knowledge of Middle Eastern cultures and societies and their relations to Europe. At the same time they attempt to re-center the significance of academic disciplines for the study of non-European contexts, in this case the Middle East. EUME thus supports historical-critical philology, rigorous engagement with the literatures of the Middle East and their histories, the social history of cities and the study of Middle Eastern political and philosophical thought (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and secular) as central fields of research not only for area or cultural studies, but also for Europe and the academic disciplines.

EUME explores Modernity as a historical space and conceptual frame – not as a particular national or European realm, but as a reflexive modernity, as an uneven, polyphonic terrain in which people, ideas, and discourses moved and were assimilated, contested, displaced, reshaped, or redeployed in a variety of ways in Europe as well as in the Middle East. The program puts forward three programmatic ideas:

- 1) support for research that demonstrates the infinitely rich and complex historical legacies between Europe and the Middle East;
- 2) a re-examination of genealogical notions of ‘mythical beginnings’, ‘origins’, and ‘purity’ in relation to culture and society; and
- 3) an attempt to contribute to the rethinking of key concepts of a common Modernity in light of today’s perspective on cultural, social, and political entanglements; entanglements that supersede rigid identity discourses, national, cultural, or regional canons, and epistemologies established in the world of the nineteenth century.

Organization and Scholarly Program

‘Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East’ is carried out under the responsibility of a Kollegium formed by the representatives of the research fields. The Kollegium currently consists of the following persons:

- Prof. Dr. Ulrike Freitag (Director of the Zentrum Moderner Orient)
- Prof. Dr. Cilja Harders (Otto-Suhr-Institut für Politikwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Prof. Dr. Gudrun Krämer (Institut für Islamwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Nora Lafi, Ph.D. (Zentrum Moderner Orient)
- Prof. Dr. Angelika Neuwirth (Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Prof. Dr. Friederike Pannewick (Centrum für Nah- und Mitteloststudien/Arabistik, Philipps-Universität Marburg)
- Prof. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Ph.D. (Lecturer of Jewish History, Ben-Gurion University, Beer Sheva)
- Prof. Samah Selim, Ph.D. (Rutgers University, New Jersey)

- Dr. Stefan Weber (Direktor, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin)
- Prof. Dr. em. Stefan Wild (Islamwissenschaft, Universität Bonn)

Instruments

The scholarly program of EUME provides for the following instruments: 1) a fellowship program, 2) a joint Berlin Seminar, 3) workshops, 4) summer academies, and 5) invited lectures and support for publications resulting from the project.

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