

# Oriental Societies & societal self-assertion

Associations, Funds and Societies for the  
Archaeological Exploration of the 'Ancient Near East'



an International Workshop  
hosted by the

DFG Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe 2615  
**Rethinking – Governance  
in the Ancient Near East**



– Programme –

# Oriental Societies & societal self-assertion

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*Thomas L. Gertzen (Berlin) & Olaf Matthes (Hamburg)*

With the rapid rise in the economic importance of the bourgeoisie beginning ca 1870, Europe and America witnessed the creation of private associations, funds, and societies to finance archaeological expeditions in the **'Lands of the Bible'**, complementing state-run institutions such as universities, museums, and academies of sciences and the humanities.

Research into the history of the ancient Near East, from the start, served **to reflect 'Western' self-perception** and provided the foundation for the **projection of Weltanschauung**. Against the background of increasing professionalization of archaeological disciplines, the learned societies also enabled laypersons, amateurs, and dilettantes to participate in scholarly debate and to promulgate certain frames of what was perceived as the 'Ancient Orient'.

Behind the movement lay different motivations but also respective 'national' cultures in academia. In fact, while economic and strategic interests during this **'Age of Empire'** played a pivotal role, the historian should not be blind to the other factors. Given the central importance of the ancient Near East as the 'cradle' of no less than three world religions as well as the **earliest states**, even empires, in world history, it became a matter of prestige for European and other 'Western' nations to fill their **museums** with objects from that distant past, which were related to the origins of their 'own' culture – as they perceived it.

Furthermore, the exotic appeal of 'the Orient' must not be forgotten, for it served as means of self-affirmation in contrast to **the Oriental 'other'**, legitimizing the colonial exploitation and **semantics** of a 'white man's burden' or a civilizing 'mission', but also defining a cultural responsibility. After the many upheavals caused by World War I, new forms of associations evolved to compensate for the loss of state-funding but also **to remedy the loss of, until then, firmly established worldviews**.

A systematic and transnational study of these associations – such as *Palestine Exploration Fund* (founded 1865), *Deutscher Palästina-Verein* (1877), *Egypt Exploration Society* (1882), *Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft* (1898), *American Schools of Oriental Research* (1900), *Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth* (1923), *Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap* (1933) – remains a desideratum.

The workshop will bring together – for the first time – historians and archaeologists, along with representatives of other disciplines from different countries, to engage in a truly interdisciplinary discourse, focusing on Oriental Societies as a means of societal self-assertion.

The workshop will take place **23.–25. February 2022** as an online event via Zoom. Scholars and Researchers interested in taking part, might register under the following link:

<https://eveeno.com/175797262>

For questions or special requests you might contact registration under this E-Mail-address:

[workshop-oriental-societies@gmx.de](mailto:workshop-oriental-societies@gmx.de)

Both also apply to the key-note lecture by Christoph Jahr on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup>, for which a separate Zoom-link will be provided.

### Wednesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>

**14:15 h** Greetings  
EVA CANCIK-KIRSCHBAUM, DFG-Kollegforschungsgruppe 2615  
„Rethinking Oriental Despotism”

**14:30 h** Introduction  
THOMAS L. GERTZEN & OLAF MATTHES

**15:00 h** **Coffee break**

#### **Panel 1: The many facets of an intricate topic**

**15:15 h** Between passion for antiquities and science - European aristocracy and archaeology  
LARS PETERSEN (Karlsruhe)

**15:45 h** Rise and Fall of the Società Asiatica Italiana  
MARCO BONECHI (Rome)

**16:15 h** The Many Faces of the Palestine Exploration Fund: Hidden and not-so hidden agendas at work in a learned society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century  
FELICITY COBBING (London)

**16:45 h** *Discussion*

**18:00 h** **Keynote lecture:**

## **Europa und der Orient**

Bürgerliche Gelehrsamkeit und imperiales  
Sendungsbewusstsein im langen 19. Jahrhundert

CHRISTOPH JAHR  
(Humboldt Universität Berlin)

## Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup>

### Panel 2: Discovering the 'lands of the Bible' – A vast area of research

**10:00 h** The Assyrian Exploration Fund and the early exploration of ancient Mesopotamia

STEFANIA ERMIDORO (Venice)

**10:30 h** Case studies in popularizing the Ancient Near East in the Netherlands: The Sichem Committee, Ex Oriente Lux

SEBASTIAAN BERNTSEN (Leiden)

**11:00 h** *Discussion*

### 11:15 h Coffee break

**11:30 h** Oriental Societies and Hittite studies in Victorian England: Tracing the history of an entangled relationship

SILVIA ALAURA (Rome)

**12:00 h** Babylon Society as a Japanese Private Association in the Early Twentieth Century

REIKO MAEJIMA (Vienna)

**12:30 h** *Discussion*

### 12:45 h Lunch break

### Panel 3: Eternal Egypt?

**14:30 h** The Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth in Brussels: Neutral little Belgium as the nucleus of Egyptology in the 1920–1940s.

JEAN-MICHEL BRUFFAERTS (Bruxelles)

MARLEEN DE MEYER (Leuven & Cairo)

JAN VANDERSMISSEN (Ghent)

**15:00 h** Fundraising for Amarna: Evidence from the EES archive

STEPHANIE BOONSTRA (London)

**15:30 h** *Discussion*

### 15:45 h Coffee break

### Panel 4: Issues and '-isms'

**16:00 h** "The Aryan Orient": The Research Institute for East and Orient in Vienna 1916–1923

PETER ROHRBACHER (Vienna)

**16:15 h** Jews excavating in Egypt? – An Archaeological Endeavour of the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens

THOMAS L. GERTZEN (Berlin)

16:45 h *Discussion*

## Friday, February 25<sup>th</sup>

### Panel 5: **Stocktaking and Absences**

10:00 h Hungarian archaeological presence (and absence) in Egypt before World War I  
KATALIN KÓTHAY (Budapest)

10:30 h Bohemian absences  
HANA NAVRATILOVA (Reading/Oxford)

11:00 h *Discussion*

11:15 h **Coffee break**

11:30 h The Netherlands Institute for the Near East: the early years  
WILLEMIJN WAAL (Leiden)

12:00 h Overview of societies and initiatives in the Netherlands in the 20<sup>th</sup> century  
CAROLIEN VAN ZOEST (Leiden)

12:30 h *Discussion*

12:45 h **Lunch break**

14:30 h The German Orient Society as an early example of a public-private partnership  
OLAF MATTHES (Hamburg)

15:00 h **Looking back – closing discussion**

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To enable speakers and participants to continue exchange and discussions beyond coffee- and lunchbreaks and after the Workshop, comments, suggestions, links and literature maybe 'posted' on our padlet: <https://de.padlet.com/workshoporientalsocieties/tdk6kadt1luz1jpy>