

DAAD Newsletter 1-2011

“Studies on Egypt and the Middle East in Berlin”

A joint lectures-series, organized by DAAD, DAI and the Liaison Office of Freie Universität Berlin, tries to overcome local and disciplinary boundaries

In September 2010, the Liaison Office of Freie Universität Berlin started a series of lectures, under the title “Studies on Egypt and the Middle East in Berlin”, in cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service and the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo; four eminent scholars from Freie Universität Berlin presented their research in Cairo.

In the kick-off lecture, Professor Brigitta Schütt, newly elected Vice President of Freie Universität, gave an introduction into the excellence cluster TOPOI, which is an interdisciplinary research association comprising more than 300 scientists and focusing on the transformation of space and knowledge in ancient civilizations. As a matter of fact, the Near East and Egypt do hold a crucial place in this cluster. Brian Becker and Jonas Berking presented their research on historic examples of water supply with an analysis of two irrigation systems in Sudan and the Levant. The geoscientists also tested the possibility of applying these ancient systems in the present.

In the second lecture, Professor Jochem Kahl, who holds the Chair in Egyptology at Freie Universität, presented the DFG-sponsored Asyut Project. More than 28 researchers discover each year during the summer months the secrets at the necropolis of *Gebal Asyut al-Gharbi*. The project reaches far beyond the interest of classical archeology as it explores the mountains relicts from the time of the Old Kingdom till the Mameluks. It is also an outstanding example of cooperation between the Southern Egyptian University of Sohag, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz and Freie Universität Berlin.

Switching a little bit closer to modern times, Professor Ulrike Freitag, director of the Zentrum Moderner Orient, spoke on 22th of November on the premises of DAI. She presented her research on Jeddah and the city’s cosmopolitan character in the 19th century. As a historian, U. Freitag focused on Arabic manuscripts and photo documents. Her lecture was also a glimpse to the decline and eventual revival of port cities all over the Arab world, such as Egypt’s Alexandria. For many in the audience, the preceding presentation of the ZMO opened the doors to another Near East research center in Berlin.



The fourth lecture was part of the Winterschool *Zukunftphilologie* and was organized in cooperation with the Berlin based *Forum für Transregionale Studien*. Sabine Schülting, Professor of English Philology, presented the travel logs of Henry Blunt, an Englishman travelling in the 17th century through the Ottoman Empire. His sensitive descriptions of

Cairo, set in context with the social situation in England at this time, reminded many in the audience of their own intercultural encounter between Germany and Egypt, thus leaving a lasting memory till the next lecture-series will start after New Year.

Each Lecture was attended by 40-60 people: Egyptian and European scholars and students, representatives of foreign institutions and the interested public. The Series of lectures or *Ringvorlesung* was a new experience, bringing Freie Universität's faculty closer to Cairo, and the DAAD and the DAI's audience closer together. It was also an experience to bridge, or even overcome, what might appear as "disciplinary boundaries". What the Earth Scientist, Egyptologists, Historians and Philologists presented here does raise similar questions about Egypt's past and present. Among other reasons, because their work is not exclusively confined to libraries and museums, but extends to a rich field work.

Florian Kohstall

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