



## **Academia Europaea The Academy of Europe**



Presentation of the Academia Europaea Erasmus Medal

On Wednesday 23 October, 2019, at the *Atenau of Barcelona*

The Academia Europaea are pleased to award an  
Erasmus Medal to the internationally renowned  
Professor (emeritus) of English and Literary Studies at the University of Konstanz

**Professor Aleida Assmann MAE**

The medal is awarded on the recommendation of an independent search committee of the Council, to a member, who has maintained over a sustained period, the highest level of international scholarship and recognition by peers.

Professor Assmann will also give the 2019 Heinz-Nixdorf Erasmus Lecture entitled:

**Re-imagining the Nation: Memory, Identity and the Emotions**

Sponsored by

 **Heinz Nixdorf Stiftung**

The laudation will be given by Professor Vladimir Biti MAE, University of Vienna  
Chair of the AE Section Literary and Theatrical Studies

**Professor i. R. Dr. Dr. h.c. Aleida Assmann MAE**



AFFILIATION: Professor (emeritus) of English and Literary Studies at the University of Konstanz.

LINK TO WEBPAGE: <https://www.litwiss.uni-konstanz.de/anglistikamerikanistik/personen/personen-a-z/prof-i-r-dr-dr-hc-aleida-assmann/>

TITLE OF PRESENTATION: Re-imagining the Nation: Memory, Identity and the Emotions

**ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION:**

For the last decades, intellectuals in the humanities have opted for transnational relations, memories, identities. Our normative emphasis was progressive, leftist and cosmopolitan. Any engagement with the nation was suspected to wittingly or unwittingly promote 'nationalism'. In our liberal thinking, we have forgotten the nation, but illiberal thinkers and movements have not. The indifference of intellectuals concerning the nation had detrimental effects. The extreme right had an easy chance to pick up the empty container of the nation to fill it with its own values, images, emotions and promises. I hope to show that a serious and critical engagement with the concept of the nation is an important and urgent task for the humanities today.

**AWARD NOTE:**

The nominee has provided a highly influential inter and transdisciplinary elaboration of the concept of "cultural memory", establishing it as a paradigm in the field of cultural studies, as well as in public debates. Next to this, she carried out the work of far-reaching impact, which presents collective memory as a requirement for the formation of the identity of religious and political communities.

In addition to specialist publications in her disciplinary fields, Aleida Assmann has presented the work of a lifetime which, under the title of "cultural memory", has become a new paradigm well beyond her own field and country. Along with her husband, she initiated the interdisciplinary working circle "Archaeology of literary communication", which analyzed written traditions as the most important instrument of anthropological self-investigation. In her works, she demonstrates an uncommonly extensive knowledge of the literature reaching well beyond the limits of her own specialism, a knowledge which in her painstakingly written and easily understandable texts surprises and illuminates the reader time after time. Special attention is given to media and the material conditions of tradition, as well as to buildings, works of art, music and film.

Among other works, it was in *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge University Press, New York 2011; English translation of *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (C.H. Beck, München 1999) – of which several editions and translations have appeared – that Aleida Assmann offered a fundamental clarification of how such a concept should be distinguished from other forms, not only of individual memory, and of how it could profitably be used scientifically. In this way she differentiates the cultural memory from the social memory of a generation or the communicative memory of people living together. The former functions as a potential of received though often forgotten traditions, the latter as the conscious actualisation of collective foundations of meaning and also as a result of plans for the future.

Unlike almost every other work on collective memory, Aleida Assmann's work does not neglect the complementary phenomenon of oblivion (*Formen des Vergessens*. Wallstein, Göttingen 2016). In her study *Shadows of Trauma. Memory and Politics of Postwar Identity* (Fordham, New York 2016, English translation of *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, C.H. Beck, München 2006) she cautions that the "ethical turn" of the culture of memory finds its origins in the historiographical preoccupation with the Holocaust and in what is called *Vergangenheitspolitik* in Germany. With this background and a finely balanced sense of judgment, she has taken part in public debates, pleading the case for "dialogical remembrance", in particular on the occasion of commemoration events.

## BIOGRAPHY:

### **Academic Background**

1966-1972 Studies of English Literature and Egyptology at the Universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen

1972 M. A. (with honours) in English Literature and Egyptology

1968-1975 Participation in archaeological excavations in Upper Egypt (Gurna, Luxor) together with Jan Assmann, working on minor findings, reconstruction of the decoration of floral tomb ceilings

1977 PhD in English Literature (Heidelberg) and Egyptology (Tübingen), (summa cum laude)

1973-1978 Teaching Assignment at the English Department at the University of Heidelberg

1978-1981 Teaching Assignment at the English Department at the University of Mannheim

1992 Habilitation at the New Philological Department at the University of Heidelberg

1993 Appointment to the Chair for English Literature at the University of Konstanz

2007 Appointment to the Chair at the German Department at Yale University (declined)

### **Fellowships and Guest Lectures**

1992-1993 Fellow at the Institute for Cultural Studies ('Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut') in Essen

1995 March Visiting scholar at the 'Getty Center' in Santa Monica, California

1995 April-July Fellow at the 'Center for Interdisciplinary Research' (ZIF) at the University of Bielefeld; cooperation with Prof. Dr. Jörn Rüsen in the research group 'Historische Sinnbildung'

1998-1999 Fellow at the 'Institute for Advanced Study' in Berlin ('Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin')

2000 October Visiting scholar at Rice University, Texas

2001 Feb.-May Visiting professor at Princeton University, New Jersey

2002 Jan.-April Visiting professor at Yale University, Connecticut

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2005 Jan.-April Visiting professor at Yale University, Connecticut

2005 May-July Fellow at the 'Aby-Warburg-Haus' in Hamburg

2005 June 'Sir Peter Ustinov Visiting Professorship' at the University of Vienna

2007 April-May Visiting professor at the University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought

2007 June Fellow at the 'International Research Center for Cultural Studies' (IFK) in Vienna

2013 Nov.- Fellow at the IKKM ('Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnik und Medien')

2014 Feb. Medienphilosophie' in Weimar

### **Honours, Awards and Memberships in Scientific Academies**

since 1998 Member of the 'Geisteswissenschaftliche Klasse der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften'

since 1999 Corresponding member of the 'Philologisch-Historische Klasse der Göttinger Akademie der Wissenschaften'

1999 'Philip-Morris-Foundation' Research Award for the Humanities since 2001 Corresponding

The Award is sponsored by the Heinz-Nixdorf Stiftung



1. Heinz Nixdorf Stiftung is - together with Stiftung Westfalen - one of two non profit foundations, which have been established from the assets of the estate of the entrepreneur Heinz Nixdorf, who died in 1986. The foundation promotes the following purposes:
  - a) the (advanced) professional education, especially in the field of modern technology,
  - b) the sciences in respect of research and teaching, especially in the field of information technology,
  - c) the liberal and democratic governmental system, especially the „Soziale Marktwirtschaft“,
  - d) public health,
  - e) sports.

The foundation realizes its purposes primarily in cooperation with other non profit institutions.

2. Heinz Nixdorf Stiftung promotes among others the Heinz Nixdorf MuseumsForum in Paderborn. This is a non profit institution combining in a unique way the classic historic dimension of a museum with the current and future-oriented topics of a forum.

Heinz Nixdorf MuseumsForum is the largest computer museum of the world.

Further information about the Heinz-Nixdorf Stiftung can be found at:

<http://www.heinz-nixdorf-stiftung.de>