

## WORKSHOP

# Reincarnation and Personal Identity in the Middle East

Vienna, November 30<sup>th</sup>–December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017

Several religious communities in the Middle East such as the Alawis or the Druze believe in the transmigration of (human) souls. Apart from the dogmatic assertion that 'souls migrate from body to body,' in all of these communities transmigration also comes to light in the form of 'empirical cases' of reincarnation: people tell stories about children who speak about their past life in a different family.

If in many cases such children are eventually recognized as the reincarnation of a concrete individual which passed away some time ago (almost always because of some 'untimely,' unexpected, and/or violent event of death), the processes of social recognition and plot development therefore required are not only potentially rife with conflicts, but also touch upon the question of what constitutes a full human being.

Thus, both from an anthropological and an emic point of view, many substantial questions arise: To which family does the reborn child 'really' belong, to the 'old' one or the 'new' one? How is the child supposed to be treated, as a child or as an adult? To what extent does reincarnation entail legal and familial obligations, financial benefits (e.g. inheritance), or restrictions (e.g. marriage)? Where do (un)desired elements in an individual life come from? What is the relation between personal responsibility and predetermination?

In this workshop, we wish to explore the epistemological frame in which reincarnation works and functions the way it does (e.g. local time and space conceptions; models of reality and viability). Specifically, we want to address the different relationships reincarnation cases establish and affect: between 'my' family and 'other' families; between 'my' ethnic-religious community and the 'others;' between 'my' gender and the 'others;' between 'my' age-group and other age-groups; between humans and animals (etc.).

The workshop seeks to address the following questions, but does not feel limited by them:

- Which terminology/vocabulary do people use when they speak about reincarnation? Are there specific proverbs which take up reincarnation?
- Script/\**Grammatik* of reincarnation-cases: Are there recurring *topoi* (e.g. finding hidden items or treasures; xenoglossy)?
- How do the discourses and concepts of the religious establishment differ from 'lay' discourses on reincarnation? In which respects do they influence each other?
- How could reincarnation be looked at from the perspective of the phenomenology of the lived body?
- How does reincarnation contribute to coping with critical life events and contingency?
- In what way does the concept of reincarnation foster internal group cohesion and interethnic relations?
- What if reincarnation cases 'fail,' i.e. do not lead to 'closure'?

## **Organizational Matters**

### **Workshop Venue**

The workshop will take place in the *Dachpavillon* of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Ignaz Seipel-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna ([www.oeaw.ac.at](http://www.oeaw.ac.at))

### **Contact**

#### **Dr. Gebhard Fartacek**

Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW)  
Phonogrammarchiv – Institute for Audiovisual Research and Documentation  
A-1010 Wien, Liebiggasse 5  
Tel.: +43 1 4277 29611  
[gebhard.fartacek@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:gebhard.fartacek@oeaw.ac.at)  
[www.taqammus.at](http://www.taqammus.at)

#### **Dr. Lorenz Nigst**

Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW)  
Phonogrammarchiv – Institute for Audiovisual Research and Documentation  
A-1010 Wien, Liebiggasse 5  
Tel.: +43 1 4277 29618  
[lorenz.nigst@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:lorenz.nigst@oeaw.ac.at)  
[www.taqammus.at](http://www.taqammus.at)