



## Press Release No. 85/2017

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## Balzan Prize 2017 awarded to Aleida and Jan Assmann

### Konstanz couple share international research accolade

**Professor Aleida Assmann, professor emeritus of English literature and literary studies at the University of Konstanz, and Professor Jan Assmann, honorary professor at the University of Konstanz and professor emeritus at the Institut für Ägyptologie at the University of Heidelberg, have been awarded the prestigious and well-endowed Balzan Prize 2017 for their work in the category “Collective Memory”. As the International Balzan Prize Foundation communicated on 11 September 2017, the accolade, which comes with prize money of 750,000 Swiss Francs (about 660,000 euros), recognises the couple’s shared interdisciplinary work on the concept of “cultural memory”.**

In his statement, Professor Thomas Maissen, director of the Institut Historique Allemand in Paris and professor of modern history at the University of Heidelberg, emphasised Aleida and Jan Assmann’s extraordinary work for “the rich and decades-long debate about very different historical realities and models that turned out to complement one another in the most exquisite manner; and for two academic oeuvres reinterpreting the idea of collective memory as a pre-requisite for the emergence of religious and political identity and community”.

Every year since 1957, the International Balzan Prize Foundation, which has offices in Zurich and Milan, has recognised outstanding researchers in the humanities and natural sciences. The aim of the Balzan Prize is to promote culture, the sciences as well as the most meritorious initiatives in the cause of humanity, peace and fraternity among peoples throughout the world, independent of nationality and religion. Four awards are made in annually changing disciplines, which currently include the humanities and social sciences, art, physics, mathematics, the natural sciences and medicine. The prize will be awarded on Friday, 17 November 2017 in the Nationalratssaal in Bern, Switzerland, in the presence of Doris Leuthard, President of the Swiss Confederation. The laureates are obliged to spend half of the prize money to finance research projects.

Aleida Assmann studied English and Egyptology at the Universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen and was professor of English literature and literary studies at the University of Konstanz from 1993 until 2014. Her research interests include: generations in literature and society, the history of memory in post-World War Two Germany, memory research and theories of memory in cultural studies, the history of reading and writing, concepts of man - historical anthropology.

Jan Assmann was professor of Egyptology at the University of Heidelberg from 1976 until 2013 and has been an honorary professor of cultural studies and theory of religion at the University of Konstanz since 2005. His research priorities are: Egyptian religion and literature in theoretical and comparative terms, cultural theory, religious studies as well as the reception of Egypt in European intellectual history.

Over the course of their careers, both scientists have been awarded numerous prizes for their research. They are members of various national and international science academies; Jan Assmann is also a member of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

**Facts:**

- The Balzan Prize 2017 is awarded to Aleida and Jan Assmann in the category “Collective Memory”.
- The prize money is 750,000 Swiss Francs (about 660,000 euros).
- The award ceremony will take place on Friday, 17 November 2017 in the Nationalratssaal in Bern, Switzerland.
- All laureates must spend half of the prize money to finance research projects.
- Former laureates include the historian Professor Arno Borst from the University of Konstanz, who received the Balzan Prize in 1996.

**Note to editors:**

You can download a photo here:

<http://bit.ly/2h0Nw9K>

**Caption:** Professor Aleida Assmann and Professor Jan Assmann

**Photo:** Corinna Assmann

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