

Foreword: Special issue “Colloquium in honor of Angelika Berlejung’s 65th birthday”

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This special issue of Diffusion Fundamentals has been published to mark the academic colloquium held in honour of Angelika Berlejung’s 65th birthday on 2 February 2026 at the University of Leipzig. As professor of the history and religious history of Israel and its surroundings, Angelika Berlejung has conducted extensive research on diffusion phenomena in the ancient Near East. In particular, she has focused on the diverse exchange processes between the Levant (modern-day Lebanon, Syria, Israel/Palestine and Jordan) and Mesopotamia (modern-day Iran and Iraq) during the 1st millennium BCE, as well as the driving forces behind them. Key areas of her work include reconstructing migration processes between Israel/Palestine and Babylonia, and studying phenomena such as multiculturalism and multilingualism in the Iron Age Levant. Furthermore, Angelika Berlejung has examined the relationships and cultural interactions between Syria-Palestine, Egypt and the wider Mediterranean region, taking the production, distribution and use of small archaeological artefacts such as amulets as an example [1–4]. These research achievements and significant milestones provide a fitting occasion for this special issue of Diffusion Fundamentals to be published in her honor.

Angelika Berlejung completed her studies in Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Protestant Theology, focusing on Hebrew Bible Studies, and earned her Ph.D. from Heidelberg University in 1997. Her dissertation, which examined the production and use of cult images in the ancient Near East, was awarded the Ruprecht Karl Prize. She was appointed to the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) in 1999 and to the University of Leipzig in 2004. She has since been teaching and conducting research in Leipzig on the history and religious history of the ancient Levant, ancient Near Eastern iconography, Semitic epigraphy, Palestinian archaeology and cultural anthropology. Since 2007, she has served as co-director of several archaeological excavation projects in Israel, including Qubur al-Walayida, Ashdod-Yam and Tell el-Badawiya/Hannathon. Since 2015, she has served as co-director, alongside Aren Maeir of Bar-Ilan University in Israel, of the Max Planck Society's Minerva Research Centre's Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times (RIAB) project. In 2017, she was elected a full member of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities (SAW) [5], where she sits on several commissions and scientific advisory boards for the Academy's research projects. From 2020 to 2023, she was supported by the Volkswagen funding initiative Opus Magnum for a project on votive offerings in the ancient Near East and the ancient Mediterranean.

This special issue of Diffusion Fundamentals opens with three introductory remarks by Roderich Barth (Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Professor of Systematic Theology, Leipzig University, Germany), Omer Sergi (Professor of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University, Israel), and Jörg Kärger (Professor Emeritus of Experimental Physics, Leipzig University and Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig, Germany). Furthermore, this issue features the lecture by Hans-Peter Mathys (Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, University of Basel, Switzerland) on the relations between the two coastal cities of Sidon and Tyre in ancient Lebanon, which was delivered on the occasion of the ceremony on February 2, 2026.

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