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GERMAN UNIFICATION IN A WORLD PERSPECTIVE

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Grußwort

A very warm welcome to all participants of our panel – I am sitting in the president's office of Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities in the Center of Berlin, where we thought to meet in physical presence before the pandemic broke out.

As Historian of ancient Judaism and Christianity I feel prepared but not qualified to welcome all of you to a discussion on “German Unification in a world perspective”: The separation of two different kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the political and religious struggle between the North and the South, and the question of reunification in the global perspective of the ancient Near East has been my daily bread since I left the walled City of West-Berlin to study at some West-German and some foreign Universities in the 80ies of the last century. Larger parts of the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament, are coined by the question of re-unification of two separated parts of one country – and critical historians of the biblical world and ancient near east have discussed in the last decades whether one can really speak about a re-unification of a divided unity or one has to acknowledge the temporal cohabitation of two different countries under certain political circumstances.

But two biblical kingdoms are far away from our subject today, German Unification – and I feel definitely not an expert on the question of this evening's panel, but I am extremely happy to be one of the two hosts together with the American Academy and Daniel Benjamin. I am extremely happy because the topic matters, matters for the institution I am the President of: The Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities is to a certain extent a wonderful paradigm for what happened during the German unification. Or perhaps better for what could happen in those days: In contrast to the overall political structure the East German Institution was not simply included in a West German institution, but both were liquidated (“abgewickelt”, as one used to say in those days). The very young Academy of Sciences in West-Berlin was closed down as an elitist institution by a state government supported by Socialdemocrats and Green Party, and the German Democratic Republic's Academy of Sciences and Humanities was closed down by the State Parliament of the State of Berlin after the Re-Unification. Then a group nominated by a Program Committee constituted by the State Government elected the first members of a new Academy (by the way: chaired by a Hebrew Bible Scholar) – our Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, which was opened on the 27th of March, 1993. Only six corresponding members of the GDR-Academy (and one of them living in West-Berlin) were reelected as part of the 48 Founding Members of BBAW. Eight members of the 48 spend their lives before 1989 in the former GDR, but were for certain reasons not elected members of the GDR-Academy. To make the long story following a very short one: BBAW functioned as a kind of laboratory of the German Unification.

Why I've presented the Pre-History of our Academy and her History in such a length and detail? Because my impression as a contemporary of German Re-Unification and President of an institution deeply linked to that process is, that the single term “Unification” covers a lot of different stories in Europe and in both Germanies and the idea to widen it up to a World Perspective will help to identify more of these different stories in the quite familiar master narrative.