

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

17 November 2017 – 7 January 2018

For this year's Christmas exhibition the Museum der Kulturen Basel turns to the Star of Bethlehem and its varied forms of presentation, and raises the question whether the famous Christmas Star actually ever existed.

Wherever people celebrate Christmas, the Star of Bethlehem is omnipresent, adorning Christmas trees, cribs, houses and streets, not to mention Christmas cards, pastries, and cookies moulded in the shape of stars, making it the most frequently represented celestial body in the Christian world.

Based on a brief mention in the Gospel According to Matthew, humans have been concerned with the star's existence and significance for the last two thousand years. It serves as a source of inspiration, is immortalized in works of art as well as on items of daily use, features in tales and stories, and has been investigated by untold scholars from countless disciplines. The exhibition "The Star of Bethlehem" at the Museum der Kulturen Basel offers a select choice of popular representations from the museum's collections.

For a large number of people the Star is something very real, providing guidance and orientation in life – just as it did for the shepherds and the Magi in the Christmas story. Its bright rays bring light into the darkness, like a beacon of hope. It has become a symbol for everything we deem heavenly, immortal, good, exceptional and precious.

At the same time, astrologers, astronomers, theologians and historians are still debating whether the Star of Bethlehem reflects a true historical event. Equally unanswered remains the question which phenomenon the Christmas Star could be referring to. Was it a comet, maybe even Halley's Comet? Or are we possibly dealing with an exceptionally complex constellation of celestial bodies? The exhibition curated by Alexander Brust provides insight into various issues on the subject, past and current.

The roughly ninety objects on show in the Hedy Keller Gallery are arranged in the shape of a giant star with a curved tail. The Star of Bethlehem shines in the Mexican nativity scene just as it does in all other exhibited cribs, postcards, children's books and reverse glass paintings, varying in shape from object to object.

Particularly diverse are the artistic interpretations to be found in the roughly forty nativity scenes from Europe and the Americas displayed in the exhibition. The range includes five-pointed, six-pointed, even eight-pointed stars, comets or falling stars, radiant stars as well as baroque crochet stars. Occasionally the Star is shown shining directly above the stable, usually it is featured sparkling in the night-sky background.

What impact heavenly bodies can have on us humans and what significance we grant them in general is subject of the exhibition "Sun, Moon and Stars" next door, and certainly worth a visit.

You can download photos from the show at our website:
http://www.mkb.ch/de/Informationen_Services/Mediendienste.html