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Iranian Archaeologist Combines Archeology with Feminist Commitment

As of the winter semester 2014/15, Prof. Dr. Leila Papoli Yazdi, an Iranian archaeologist, will be the Dahlem International Network Professor for Gender Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. In her research, Yazdi, 36, focuses on Iranian gender history and body history from antiquity to the present day as well as art historical themes. She publishes her findings in conventional academic journals and also presents them through performances or exhibitions with political and humanitarian objectives. When more than 30,000 people died after the earthquake in Bam in 2003, she drew on her various methods to draw attention to the suffering.

Because of her feminist position, Leila Papoli Yazdi had to give up her job as a professor of archaeology at a research university in Iran, Ali Ibn Sina University of Hamadan, a position she had held from 2005 to 2011. She then taught at the smaller University of Neishabur. Since 2012 she has been working at the Institute for Near Eastern Archaeology, Freie Universität Berlin, as a Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. In her current research project, Yazdi is studying the female body as an object of political propaganda for the period of time ranging from the Sassanian period in Persia (i.e., from the 3rd to the 6th century AD) to the present. As part of her visiting professorship, she will hold an inaugural lecture on October 21, 2014, entitled "My Body, A Female One, and Not Dressed in Black: An Iranian Archaeologist Abroad." During the semester she will teach a seminar on gender politics in archaeology in the Middle East.

Gender equality and the promotion of gender research have been firmly anchored at Freie Universität for more than three decades. They are also a central component of the university's development strategy, which was successful in both phases of the German government's Excellence Initiative for universities, most recently in 2012. Since 2013, as part of the implementation of the university's development concept, the visiting professorship, the Dahlem International Network Professorship for Gender Studies, has been awarded annually to an outstanding scholar in the field of gender studies. The visiting professorship supports activities directed toward enhancing the international orientation of gender research at Freie Universität. During the 2013/14 winter semester, the first chair holder was the Canadian political scientist and expert on Latin America, Prof. Dr. Verónica Schild from Western University London, Ontario.

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