

CALL FOR PAPERS

FRIEDRICH MAX MÜLLER AND THE ROLE OF PHILOLOGY IN VICTORIAN THOUGHT

An International Conference at the German Historical Institute, London, 16-18 April 2015

Collaborating institutions:

**Centre for Anglo-German Cultural Relations, Queen Mary University of London
English Goethe Society
German Historical Institute, London**

Description:

Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) was one of the most well known academics in Victorian Britain. His popular writings enjoyed a wide readership and acclaim. His public lectures were sell-out events. He was a prominent figure in the popularisation of evolutionary thinking before Darwin. His theories regarding the origins and development of language served to create a public fascination with the past, with legend and with myth. His public role in the contexts of imperialism and British understanding of the cultures of the Indian subcontinent brought him notoriety. Good-looking, witty and gifted, Max Müller was, for many outside academe, the embodiment of the German Professor and a forerunner of today's media-savvy academic.

Max Müller's scholarship is often seen as an important contribution to Victorian knowledge. When studied today, Max Müller's works offer remarkable insights into the preoccupations and parameters of Victorian intellectual life. His translation of ancient Sanskrit scripts was inherently ground-breaking and monumental. His work was absorbed not just by academics but also by an influential cross-section of the Victorian elite. His findings helped raise the profile of so-called 'Oriental' cultures in Britain, as well as inspiring interest in philology, a discipline that enjoyed a peculiar popularity and strategic position in Victorian Britain. Max Müller's contribution to the development of philology intellectually and through personal intervention was significant. Yet his influence can only be understood through an interdisciplinary lens. Philology intersected with theology and with the academic study of religion, key areas of sensitive importance in Victorian Britain. It also overlapped with literary scholarship, philosophy, anthropology, and evolutionary thinking in the natural sciences. The first President of the English Goethe Society, Max Müller actively fostered interdisciplinary discourse. Seen broadly, his scholarship made an important contribution to the dissemination of German-style historicism in Victorian intellectual life.

Historically, Max Müller's personal life is highly significant. Through his father, the Romantic poet Wilhelm Müller, and through his studies Max Müller was on personal terms with the leading German intellectuals of the time. Identified by the Prussian Ambassador, Bunsen, as an important catalyst of intellectual exchange, Max Müller came to occupy a position of significance in Anglo-German cultural relations and Victorian life in general, even if his position as a German-born Professor at Oxford carried with it challenges of integration and cultural acceptance. He corresponded widely with prominent and important figures, including Charles Darwin and William Gladstone, and became a favourite guest of Queen Victoria. He was related by marriage to both J.A. Froude and Charles Kingsley. His scholarship and public engagement in imperial matters extended his impact abroad. His high profile campaigning for better understanding of Indian culture in Europe has left its mark: Goethe Institutes in India today are known as "Max Müller Bhavan."

Despite being credited with significance in many fields of Victorian intellectual and public life, Max Müller's life and work have not been subjected to sufficient scholarly attention. The relatively recent biography by Lourens P. van den Bosch (*Friedrich Max Müller: A Life Devoted to*

the Humanities, 2002) has provided an excellent overview that should now enable more detailed evaluations of Max Müller's contributions to many facets of intellectual life. By necessity, such evaluations must be biographical, historical and interdisciplinary. The proposed conference will therefore bring together academics from a range of disciplines. It seeks to recapture, and evaluate comprehensively and rigorously, Friedrich Max Müller's significance personally, intellectually, and publically.

CONFERENCE PANELS:

Contributions are sought relating to the following provision panel themes:

1. Introduction: biography; political and intellectual context; research questions;
2. Philology: Max Müller's position within philology; Max Müller and philology as a discipline in Britain in the nineteenth century;
3. Religion: Max Müller's religious position; his influence upon Victorian religious discourse and his founding of religious studies as an academic discipline in the United Kingdom;
4. Evolution: Max Müller and nineteenth-century thinking on evolution; Max Müller and Darwin;
5. Anthropology: Max Müller's influence upon nineteenth-century anthropology;
6. Myths: Max Müller's influence on the theory of myth;
7. Translation and Sanskrit studies: Max Müller and the craft of the translator; Max Müller's impact on Sanskrit research in Britain and internationally;
8. Imperialism; Max Müller's engagement with British imperialism and imperial policy; Max Müller and the history of British imperialism in India; Max Müller in relation to current debates about imperialism, intercultural relations and interreligious dialogue.

DISSEMINATION: The conference proceedings will be considered for publication in a special issue of the journal of the English Goethe Society (*Publications of the English Goethe Society*).

CONVENORS:

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Abstracts of 500 words should be sent to either of the conference convenors by 31 March 2014.