



International Balzan Foundation

Press Release - 1 July 2022

Balzan Prizes 2021 Awarded in Bern

*750,000 Swiss Francs (approx. €740,000, \$780,000, GBP 640,000) for each of the four subjects.
Prizewinners must allocate half of the amount to research projects*

Bern, 1 July 2022 - Today, During the Awards Ceremony at the Federal Palace in Berne, this year's **Balzan Prizes** were presented to:

- **Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly Buccellati** for Art and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East,
- **Alessandra Buonanno and Thibault Damour** for Gravitation: Physical and Astrophysical Aspects,
- **Saul Friedländer** for Holocaust and Genocide Studies,
- **Jeffrey Gordon** for Microbiome in Health and Disease.

In the presence of the President of the National Council of the Swiss Confederation **Irène Kälin**, the parchments were presented to the 2021 Prizewinners; the Presidents of the Balzan Foundation "Prize" and "Fund", **Alberto Quadrio Curzio** and **Gisèle Girgis-Musy**, delivered the official speeches.

In accordance with the ceremony's usual formalities, each Prizewinner gave a speech of acceptance and thanks after being introduced by the Chairman of the General Prize Committee, **Luciano Maiani**.

According to established tradition reflecting the Italo-Swiss nature of the International Balzan Foundation, the Awards Ceremony takes place in alternate years in Rome, in the presence of the President of the Italian Republic, and in Bern, in the presence of a Representative of the Federal Council or of the National Council of the Swiss Confederation.

The following citations were given for the Prizes:

- **Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly Buccellati**: *“For their achievements in the study of Hurrian culture and for highlighting its importance as the foundation of a great urban civilization, among the most flourishing in the ancient Near East in the third millennium BCE; for promoting a digital approach to the study of archaeology; for enhancing theoretical reflection on the nature of this discipline”*.
- **Alessandra Buonanno and Thibault Damour**: *“For their leadership in the prediction of the gravitational-wave signals produced when compact objects like neutron stars and black holes spiral together and eventually merge. Their work was instrumental in the detection of gravitational waves, providing an extremely accurate confirmation of general relativity as the theory of gravitation, and allowing the LIGO and Virgo detectors to promote a type of astronomy which uses gravitational waves as new, powerful messengers of the universe”*.
- **Saul Friedländer**: *“For his unparalleled impact on the development of Holocaust Studies. For his masterpiece, an integrated history of the persecution and extermination of European Jews. For creating a historical narrative that expresses the unspeakable, intertwining scholarly analysis with the disruptive voices of the victims, perpetrators and bystanders”*.
- **Jeffrey Gordon**: *“For founding the field of human microbiome research and revolutionizing our understanding of its roles in health and disease, including in our nutritional status”*.

The International Balzan Foundation awarded **750,000 Swiss Francs** (approx. EUR 740,000; USD 780,000; GBP 640,000) for each prize, a figure which places the Balzan Prize amongst the largest prize funds in the world of Science and Culture. The winners are each required to allocate half of their prize money to funding research projects carried out by young scholars or scientists in their respective fields.

The Ceremony was preceded, on Thursday 30 June, by the Balzan Prizewinners Interdisciplinary Forum, a public event dedicated to the Balzan Prize subject areas for the current year, with the Prizewinners playing the prominent role.