



Mathematisches Kolloquium

Breaking the myth of Albert Einstein

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With his extraordinary personality, his frankness and his somewhat extravagant allure for that time, Einstein shaped throughout his life the image that has gradually become that of the iconoclastic genius, eccentric, pacifist, atheist and committed.

By presenting him as a simple patent examiner discovering, alone, the two greatest theories of the twentieth century and as a pacifist firmly opposed to war, the innumerable biographies that have been devoted to him have given birth to the “myth of Albert Einstein”.

To perpetuate this myth, some biographers haven't hesitated to erase or to hide most of all the unknown and dark aspects of his character. Thus, they proposed to a wide audience, always eager for extraordinary and sensational, the image of the idealized scientist sticking his tongue out for the cameras. This talk aims at breaking the myth of Albert Einstein by analyzing, from archives and documents now available, a number of popular beliefs about it. This study highlights all the ambiguity of his personality at once modern and conservative, liberal and authoritarian, radical and opportunistic, Don Juan humanist, pacifist during peace-time but not during war-time, and who did not hesitate to renounce his own convictions for the benefit of his personal interests. This uncompromising portrait presents Einstein as he really was and not as we thought he was.

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