

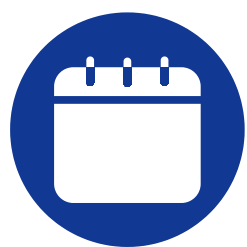
DR. ESZTER SPÄT

FRAUDS, SUBALTERN REBELS, OR SOURCES OF BATINÎ KNOWLEDGE: YEZIDI SEERS IN POST-SADDAM IRAQ

After decades of decline, the Iraqi Yezidi community has experienced a veritable renaissance of seers since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Kocheks, or seers, are individuals who possess—or are possessed by—a *delil*, a spiritual guide from the *batinî* or the heavenly, “hidden” world. Acting through their *delils*, seers channel esoteric knowledge. They offer moral exhortations, provide divinations for everyday concerns, and deliver prophetic revelations. The activities of seers, as well as the discourse surrounding their “authenticity,” shed light not only on the shifting concerns of a community undergoing transformation, but also on power struggles within Yezidi society—reflecting internal rivalries over both spiritual and material resources. Occupying a grey zone between central and peripheral possession, Yezidi seers are regarded by some as upholders of traditional morality, while others see them as morally transgressive. Following a brief introduction to the institution of seers, their typical “career” trajectory, and their role in contemporary Yezidi life, this talk analyzes perceptions of seers through the lens of the tension between “routinized” and “acquired” charisma. It also explores how becoming a seer can function as a means of agency for those traditionally marginalized—commoners, the poor, and women, or various intersections thereof.



Eszter Spät is a scholar of religious minorities and popular religious practices in the Middle East. Her research centers on the oral religious tradition of the Yezidis of Iraq, examining how its ongoing scripturalization is reshaping the content and structure of Yezidi religion, as well as traditional religio-social hierarchies and institutions. She has conducted extensive fieldwork among Yezidi communities in Northern Iraq, as well as their Christian and Muslim neighbors. In addition to two monographs and numerous scholarly articles, she has produced the documentary *Following the Peacock*. Alongside her academic work, she has also worked as a journalist, covering the 2003 Iraq War and other issues in Iraqi Kurdistan.



Date:
Tuesday - 21 October, 2025



Time:
6.15 - 7.45 PM

**Location: Big Seminar room,
Hartmannstr. 14, Building D1, Erlangen**

Link for virtual attendance: <https://fau.zoom-x.de/j/62556506187>



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