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Religious Minorities, Sacred Space and Heritage in Transition in the Middle East

The Cultural Heritage Studies Program, Central European University and Institute for the Study of Religions/Modern Turkish Studies, Leipzig University

23 - 24 April 2021 (15.00 – 18.15, CET)

Organizers: Eszter Spät, Central European University & Benjamin Raßbach, Leipzig University



Sacred space, whether materialized in the form of man-made structures or in natural sites plays a pivotal role in the religio-cultural heritage of all religious communities in the Middle East. Places considered imbued by the divine in one way or another have traditionally functioned as the centers of ritual and spiritual life. As such, they contributed to the formation and preservation of group identity and communal memory, especially among religious minorities who may have had only limited capacity of publicly expressing/affirming their religious heritage. Some sacred space may be shared between different religious groups, often leading to syncretic practices

and creating an intricate network of social ties. In other cases, such spots may be(come) the sites of inter- and intra-communal contestation and power-struggle, highlighting the complex relation between different religious communities, ethnic groups and social segments.

The way sacred space is used and conceptualized has never been static, despite claims to tradition, but reflects the various internal and external challenges encountered by the different faith groups

and the strategies employed to cope with them. Social and cultural transformation, urbanization, political upheavals, persecution, forced migration and diasporization all impact the way sacred space is imagined, (re-)created, shared or appropriated by the various communities all over the Middle East and in the Western diaspora.

This online workshop aims to bring together experts studying different aspects of sacred space as religious heritage in the Middle East, talking about their research in the cyber space at a time when sharing physical space is not possible.

Schedule

23 April, Friday

15.00 Markus Dreßler (Leipzig University): Welcome and Introduction

15.15 – 16.45: Yezidi Sacred Space, Identity and Heritage

Sebastian Maisel (Leipzig University): Reversing Trends of Religious Appropriation: The Reclaiming of Religious Space for the Ezidi Community

Benjamin Raßbach (Leipzig University): Yezidi Sacred Space – Kurdish Nationalist Approaches and Religious Revival

Eszter Spät (Central European University): Sheikh Mend Should also Have a Shrine! Yezidi Sacred Space, Displacement and Identity

16.45 – 17.15 Coffee break

17.15 – 18.15: Sacred Sites, Secular Lives

Ahmet Kerim Gültekin (Leipzig University): Kurdish Alevi Sacred Places (*Jiars*) and the Contemporary Environmental Struggles in Dersim.

Edith Szanto (University of Alabama): The Making of Shi'ite Sacred Space in Syria

23 April, Friday

15.00 – 16.30: Sharing, Contesting, Reclaiming

Laila Prager (University of Hamburg): Challenging Alawite Pilgrimage Sites in Turkey: Interreligious *battlefields* for authenticity and territoriality

Mustafa Diktaş (New Europe College, Bucharest): Mar Jiryas Al Batiyeh: A Shared Shrine in Lebanon

Çiçek İlengiz (MPI for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen): Political and Spiritual Legacies of Sharing Love: The Love-Pilgrimage of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207-1273)

16.30 – 17.00 Coffee break

17.00 – 18.00: Sacred Space Reconfigured

Christine Robins (University of Exeter): Configuring Sacred Space in Diaspora: The Case of the Sabian Mandaean

Robert Langer (Bundeswehr University München): Zoroastrian Shrines in Iran: Between Ancient Roots and Modern Functionality

To register as listener please visit:

<https://ceu-edu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYsdOyvrTwjGNHXiQuFzQBJFciTcCXMJPax>