



FRIENDS of the AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE in TURKEY



LECTURE on ZOOM – on Thu., June 10, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. Istanbul time.



**‘Oriental Refugees’:  
An Academical Geographical History**

by

**Dr. Zehra Tonbul**

In a letter to Ernst Kühnel (1882-1964), then the director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, dating to 19 February 1939, art historian Ernst Diez (1878-1961) refers to the German academicians of Oriental art history in the United States as ‘Oriental refugees’. The term conveys a feeling of displacement in the United States of 1930’s, in part due to the political circumstances of these scholars, but also due to a real and figurative distance to the geographies and premises of the scholarship.

This talk will present the term as signficatory of an academic history through the obligatory journeys of these scholars across political and academic borders, from Germany and Austria to the United States and to Iran and Turkey. It will trace this history back from 1946 Istanbul, the lieu and instance of the convergence of the biographical journeys of Ernst Diez and Ernst Herzfeld (1879-1948), famed archaeologist of Persepolis, where Diez was teaching art history at Istanbul University and Herzfeld was on a revisit after his retirement from the United States in view of settling. Istanbul materialized as the lieu of revisiting the scholarship, a nostos for a pioneering generation of scholars of Oriental art and archaeology. This crossing nonetheless marks a final confrontation- with nationalist criticisms against Diez’s book on Turkish art and Herzfeld ‘s feelings of estrangement in view of change and ‘Halil or a Halil’ missing.

**Zehra Tonbul** is Ass. Prof. of History and Theory of Architecture at Istinye University, Istanbul. Her research focuses on turn of the century intellectual history and modernism studies from the point of view of art and architecture; it covers topics of Islamic and Oriental art historiography, world histories and the relation between natural sciences and the humanities. She has completed her doctoral thesis in 2018 at Bogazici University of Istanbul and with co-mentorship of the Department of Art History at the University of Vienna, with a thesis entitled ‘The Art Historiographical Odyssey of Ernst Diez (1878-1961)’. Her thesis was supported by Turkish Cultural Foundation and American Research Institute in Turkey. She has an undergraduate degree in Architecture from Istanbul Technical University and an M.Phil. degree in History and Philosophy of Architecture from the University of Cambridge.

**Image:**

Photograph from Ernst Diez’s Expedition with Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer through Khorasan in 1913. Through the Khorasan Steppe towards Afghan Border, May 1913, Source: Hans-Ulrich Seidt, *Berlin, Kabul, Moskau. Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer und Deutschlands Geopolitik*. 2002. München: Universitas Verlag.

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