



# The Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS)

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF IRAQ  
SULAIMANI

# IRIS

Institute of  
Regional and  
International Studies

## About IRIS

The Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) is an independent research center based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Through multidisciplinary research, strategic partnerships, and open dialogue events among experts and influential public leaders, IRIS examines the most complex issues facing the KRI, Iraq and the Middle East. The Institute's main focus areas include but are not limited to: energy, governance, gender, water resource management and cultural heritage preservation.

IRIS is housed at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), Iraq's only independent, not-for-profit, American-style institution of higher learning. AUIS' student body counts upward of 1,200 students from across Iraq, all of whom meet the requirements of or have graduated from its accredited Academic Preparatory Program (APP). IRIS's location within AUIS and at the heart of the KRI offers experts – scholars, analysts, journalists, practitioners – and institutions access to areas of interest and a safe space in an otherwise unstable region, making it an attractive, unique place to conduct research or engage in discussion.

## IRIS Director, Christine van den Toorn

Christine van den Toorn joined IRIS as the Director in December, 2014. Ms. van den Toorn has over a decade of academic and professional experience in the Middle East, six of which have been spent in the KRI. She has conducted fieldwork all over the Region, with a particular focus on disputed territories in Ninewa, Diyala and Salahaddin, and has published articles and reports in leading publications like Iraq Oil Report, Inside Iraqi Politics, Daily Beast and Niqash, as well as delivered talks on her research. Ms. van den Toorn has also conducted baseline reports and social impact assessments for international oil companies operating in the area, working with teams of student researchers from AUIS. She served in the United States Peace Corps in Morocco and holds an MA in Middle East History from the University of Virginia, and taught the subject at AUIS for 4 years. She speaks Arabic and French.



## IRIS Coordinator, Zeina Najjar

Zeina Najjar joined IRIS as the Coordinator in December, 2014. She has worked as a communications professional in Lebanon, the UK, and Denmark and has over 5 years of experience as an interpreter for top media outlets and international organizations including the Financial Times, the International Crisis Group, and the UNDP. She speaks fluent English, French, and Arabic. Ms. Najjar holds an undergraduate degree in Management and Political Science from the American University of Beirut, and obtained an MSc in Media and Communications with Distinction at the London School of Economics.



*IRIS has engaged in a wide range of academic and policy events and projects focusing on key issues in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, and the Middle East by involving students, the local and regional community, as well as prominent international figures. Below is a sampling of initiatives from the past year.*

## EVENTS

### Third Annual Sulaimani Forum

The Sulaimani Forum is IRIS' signature event at AUIS. Over the course of two days, scholars, experts, and policymakers convene to discuss the region's most pressing issues, current trends and points of conflict.

This year's Forum, **"Fertile Crescent in Turmoil: Challenges and Opportunities"**, was held on March 11 and 12, 2015 and convened at a pivotal time, amidst upheaval not seen before in the modern history of the Middle East. Focusing on Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, seven panels examined causes and solutions for the profound challenges facing the region through dialogue about the nation-state and governance, re-aligning geopolitical alliances, energy, finance and the humanitarian crisis. There was a particular focus on the war against ISIS and its short and long term implications for Iraq and the region. Participants included most high-level officials from the central government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), including the speaker of Iraqi Parliament **Salim Jabbouri**, the speaker of the KRG Parliament **Youssef Mohammad Sadiq**, Iraqi Minister of Higher Education **Hussain al-Shahristani**, as well as keynote speaker at the Forum and Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs **Ibrahim al-Jaafari**. The Forum was also attended by international figures and dignitaries like U.S. Ambassador to Iraq **Stuart Jones**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State **Brett McGurk**, and former CIA Director and Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Iraq General **David Petraeus**. **Vitaly Naumkin** of the Oriental Studies Institute in Russia and **Kenneth Pollack** of the Brookings Institution in Washington were in attendance, as well as **Randa Slim** of the Middle East Institute, **Hayder Al-Khoei** of Chatham House, **Joseph Bahout** of the Carnegie Endowment in Washington, and **Michael Knights** of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The leading journalists covering the Middle East were also participants: NPR's **Deborah Amos**, Washington Post's **Liz Sly**, **Jane Arraf** of Al Jazeera, the Economist's **Amberin Zaman**, and **Cengiz Çandar** of Hurriyet, among others.



# Third Annual Sulaimani Forum

## Roundtable on the IDP Crisis in the KRI: Registration, Protection & Access to Services

*AUIS and IRIS are committed to addressing the IDP and refugees crisis in the KRI and Iraq, particularly with regard to educational opportunities and policy recommendations.*

On April 26, 2015, IRIS hosted a roundtable discussion on **“The IDP Crisis in Sulaimani Governorate”**, focusing on the issue of registration and legal status, as well as its impact on protection and access to services. This closed roundtable convened representatives from international humanitarian organizations, local and international NGOs, the GOI (Government of Iraq) and KRG, as well as selected representatives from displaced populations. By bringing together such actors from different sectors, the event captured a robust range of angles and attitudes on the IDP crisis, allowing comprehensive, valuable insight and recommendations on the topics discussed. Several major problem areas were identified by participants of the roundtable. For example, a large number of IDPs are missing essential documentation, which limits their access to both legal services and basic needs such as food rations, increasing their vulnerability. The outcome of the roundtable discussion is a set of twelve recommendations addressing the above issues listed at the end of this report. A follow up event is being planned for the Fall semester.



## Roundtable Discussion on IDP Crisis

## First Annual Iraqi Cultural Heritage Symposium

*AUIS and IRIS are committed to documenting the destruction of cultural heritage in the KRI and Iraq, in addition to the preservation of remaining sites and digitization of manuscripts.*

On April 26, 2015, IRIS and the Department of Social Sciences at AUIS organized the First Annual Iraqi Cultural Heritage Symposium, **"Iraqi Cultural Heritage in Crisis: Strategies for the Future"**. The event brought together prominent scholars, policy makers, government officials, cultural professionals, and journalists from the Kurdistan Region, Iraq, and beyond to discuss the pressing issues relating to cultural heritage in Iraq. Notable guests included the head of the Iraqi National Museum **Ahmad Kamal**, the Director of UNESCO Iraq **Axel Plathe**, the Deputy-Secretary of the UN Assistance Mission Iraq (UNAMI) **Georgy Busztin**, and the Head of the Nasiriyah Museum, **Iqbal Kadhim Ajil**. AUIS professor **Tobin Hartnell**, an archaeologist and professor of social sciences at AUIS, moderated the panel discussions.

The conference was held at a pivotal time, as ISIS is systematically destroying the cultural heritage of northern Iraq. However, the recent openings of the Baghdad and Nasiriyah Museums highlight the positive role cultural heritage can play as an alternative to the extremist narrative. As cultural heritage management requires local, regional, national, and international collaboration to be successful, this symposium provided a platform for addressing these issues and build ever-closer cooperation between the most important stakeholders around the region and the world.





# Iraqi Cultural Heritage Symposium

## Lectures by Stuart Jones, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, and Jeannette Seppen, Dutch Ambassador to Iraq

*AUIS and IRIS are committed to hosting local, regional and international leaders to engage with students and faculty.*

This past winter and spring, 2015, IRIS hosted both U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Stuart Jones and Dutch Ambassador to Iraq, Jeannette Seppen, for talks and Q and A sessions with students about their countries' foreign policies. Ambassador Jones discussed U.S. support for Baghdad and the KRG in the war against ISIS, as well as economic and educational opportunities for students in the U.S. Ambassador Seppen's talk focused on the main aspects of the Netherlands' political model, as well as the pillars of its foreign policy: international rule of law and solidarity. Students and alumni of the foreign exchange program between AUIS and the University of Amsterdam as well as students on State Department programs IYLEP and MEPI were in attendance.



## Roundtable with Dr. Yezid Sayigh, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment

*AUIS and IRIS are committed to bringing in leading scholars and analysts to discuss pressing issues with students, faculty and local officials.*

On May 11, 2015, IRIS hosted Dr. Yezid Sayigh of the Carnegie Endowment's Middle East Center in Beirut, Lebanon to give a talk to AUIS students on **"Military, Civilians and the Middle East State"**. His lecture focused on the role Arab armies played during the Arab Spring and trends since the revolutions. Dr. Sayigh then moved on to discuss the Kurdistan Region and Iraq, and the the army, the state and the "social pact" between them. He opened the floor to questions from AUIS students, some of whom served in various capacities with the U.S., Iraqi and Peshmerga forces, as well as in local government. A lively discussion ensued about the rise of various non-state actors and armed groups and their political legitimacy, and the future of the Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi (popular mobilization forces), the Iraqi Army and Kurdish forces.



## Screenings and Exhibition to Mark World Refugee Day in Partnership with UNHCR

In celebration of World Refugee Day on June 20, 2015, IRIS co-hosted a photo exhibition, titled **“Ordinary Lives, Extraordinary Circumstances”**, and film screenings in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The photos and films featured refugees and displaced persons across the KRI. The inaugural reception was attended by members of the local and international community in Sulaimani. The Deputy Governor of Sulaimani HE **Sardar Qadir**, US Consul General the Honorable **Joseph Pennington**, AUIS faculty members **Bilal Wahab** and **Choman Hardi**, and UNHCR operations manager **Joseph Merkx**, all delivered speeches highlighting the challenges faced by both refugees and their host communities.



# World Refugee Day

## Panel Discussion on Iraq and the War against ISIS with the Stimson Center, Washington D.C.

*AUIS and IRIS are committed to partnering with leading institutes to conduct research, host scholars and hold joint events to engage in dialogue over pressing current issues, particularly geared at informing audiences abroad of the reality on the ground in Iraq.*

On July 31, 2015, IRIS co-hosted an event at the DC-based Stimson Center titled **“Threat of ISIS in Iraq: Views from the Ground”**. AUIS graduates from Iraq, the KRI, and disputed territories joined through video links and presented views from ‘on-the-ground’. The panel in DC featured **Christine van den Toorn**, Director of IRIS, **Bilal Wahab**, Director of the Center for Development and Natural Resources and Associate Professor at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, **Ellen Laipson**, President and CEO of the Stimson Center, and **Geneive Abdo**, a Fellow at the Stimson Center and Brookings Institution. Participants focused on the nature of the ISIS threat, and the related territorial, demographic and socio-economic consequences in post-ISIS areas and how they would shape the future of Iraq. Iraqi Ambassador to the U.S. Lukman Faily delivered impromptu closing remarks on how U.S. policy can facilitate Iraq’s path forward.



# FELLOWS

*IRIS Fellows are academics, experts, journalists, or advanced graduate students who are visiting the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) in order to conduct research or implement projects. The following are past and current IRIS 2015 fellows:*

## Ahmed Ali

Ahmed Ali, Director of the Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor (ISHM), Visiting Senior Fellow at the Washington-based Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC) and former Senior Iraq Research Analyst and Iraq Team Lead at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), is IRIS' Fall 2015 Fellow (August 2015 to January 2016). He will be co-producing bi-weekly reports with IRIS Director, Christine van den Toorn, on timely issues of relevance to Iraq.

## Mark DeWeaver

Dr. Mark DeWeaver, emerging-markets fund manager, independent economist, and co-manager of Quantarian Asia Hedge, which has invested in Thailand, Hong Kong/China, Taiwan, and Australia and is currently among the largest investors in the Iraq Stock Exchange, is a Non-Resident Fellow with IRIS. He is a regular contributor to Iraq Business News reports and conducts economic forecasting on Iraq. He is partnering with IRIS to do further qualitative and quantitative research for his work, for example through economic data available at the national statistics bureau in Sulaimani.

## Vera Mironova

Vera Mironova, Graduate Research Fellow at Harvard University and PhD candidate at the University of Maryland, conducted research as a Visiting Fellow with IRIS on how exposure to violence affects individual economic and political decision-making through frequent visits and observation in several IDP and refugee camps in summer 2015. Ms. Mironova also conducted an advanced workshop on behavioral economics with AUIS students. She remains a Non-Resident Fellow of IRIS.

## Geneive Abdo

Geneive Abdo, Resident Fellow at the Stimson Center and Non-Resident Fellow at the Brookings Institution, visited IRIS as a Fellow in May, 2015 to conduct research for her upcoming book with Oxford University Press on the evolution of Sunni-Shia dynamics in the Middle East since the Arab uprisings of 2011. Ms. Abdo also delivered a lecture to students on her work on Salafis on T

## Maria Fantappie

Maria Fantappie, Senior Iraq Analyst at the International Crisis Group (ICG) and PhD candidate at King's College London, taught a course in research methodology at AUIS and conducted research on attitudes among Kurdish youth during the 2014-2015 school year. Her findings were published in *Moyen Orient*, and will be featured in English by the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) shortly.

## Marie LaBrosse

Marie LaBrosse, poet, translator, and former AUIS faculty member, translates classical and contemporary Kurdish poetry, hosts readings with regional poets, and introduced the annual translation workshop at AUIS. She has been published in *The Iowa Review*, *Words Without Borders*, *The Fair Observer*, and *91st Meridian*. As a Non-Resident fellow, Ms. LaBrosse is working to compile and translate the complete works of a Kurdish poet hailing from Kirkuk. She will be starting a PhD in Kurdish Studies at the University of Exeter this year.



## PROJECTS & PARTNERSHIPS

*AUIS and IRIS are committed to partnering with governmental and non-government organizations and institutes to implement projects and conduct research.*

### Harvard Radcliffe Institute, "History Under the Sword"

On July 8-9, 2015, the Harvard Radcliffe Institute invited IRIS Director **Christine van den Toorn** to participate in an exploratory seminar, "**History under the Sword**" on documentation of the conflict, migration and cultural heritage destruction in Iraq. The conference was organized by Dr. **Harith Hassan**, Radcliffe Institute Fellow, and **Matt Schweitzer**, a student at the University of Chicago. The participants included leading Iraqi scholars such as Drs **Orit Bashkin** and **Fanar Haddad**, **Zuhair al Jezairy**, founder of Aswat al Iraq, **Hosham Dawood**, who founded IFPO in Erbil and **Abdel Munir al Hamdani**, Iraqi archaeologist and former director of antiquities in Nasiriyah.

Through a series of presentations, the group focused on development of a conceptual and methodological framework for analyzing this tragedy, as well as documenting and preserving heritage amidst the population. Participants published a paper on outcomes and steps forward, and the group is moving toward implementation of the plan: to develop a physical and online information base for collecting and presenting data relating to the ongoing displacement, movement, and disappearance of communities and populations across Iraq, to be made available for researchers, governments, and NGOs worldwide now implementing the documentation.

## Indiana University, Center for the Study of the Middle East

IRIS met with the head of the Center for the Study of the Middle East (CSME) at Indiana University, Dr Feisal Istrabadi, in Sulaimani last March and this past summer in Bloomington to plan for partnerships on governance that would train Iraqi and KRG mid-level local and provincial government officials as well as faculty and student exchanges.

## UN Women

IRIS partnered with UN Women in January and February, 2015 to conduct a research project aimed at measuring perceptions of harassment amongst women in the city of Sulaimani. The project is part of the United Nations' **"Safer Cities"** initiative, and hired and trained 8 carefully selected female students from AUIS to conduct surveys and focus group interviews. A methodology expert was flown in from Amman to train student researchers in data collection and analysis. A report of their findings and recommendations can be found on the IRIS website, and has been handed over to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to implement concrete measures in the city.

## Independent Media Center Kurdistan (IMCK) & Free Press Unlimited

IRIS partnered with the Independent Media Center in Kurdistan (IMCK), an affiliate of the Dutch NGO Free Press Unlimited, in April 2015 to conduct a project aimed at monitoring reporting on minority populations in print newspapers in the KRG and Iraq at large. Student researchers have monitored upward of 25 written media outlets on a daily basis for a duration of 3 months and a report on the state of minority reporting based on their findings is currently being compiled. The report will then serve as the basis for a manual created for journalists covering issues related to minority populations in Iraq.

## Syria Research & Evaluation Organization (SREO)

IRIS partnered with the Gaziantep-based Syria Research & Evaluation Organization (SREO) in June and July, 2015 in order to conduct an unprecedented transnational survey on the perceived living conditions of Syrian refugees across 3 cities in Turkey and 3 cities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as well as Iraqi IDPs in the KRI. The survey was administered to upwards of 1,300 respondents in 2 countries and the report is currently available on the IRIS website.

## CENTERS AT IRIS

By virtue of being based at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), part of IRIS' mission is to support the work of faculty members with a vision for developing research and resources at the University in their field of expertise. As such, several centers and programs have been recently launched or are in the process of being launched under the aegis of IRIS in the coming academic year.

### Center for Development and Natural Resources (CDNR), Dr. Bilal Wahab

The Center for Development and Natural Resources (CDNR) was launched in the Spring of 2015. The Center is well positioned to bring together representatives from, and create partnerships among, academics, policy makers, civil society and industry in Iraq and the KRI to engage in constructive discussion and analysis of questions pertaining to the energy sector, stability, and economic development. The Center will have two tracks. Through research and analysis, CDNR will become a resource on all topics regarding Iraq's oil, governance, and federalism. Second, through education and capacity development, CDNR will enhance the levels of expertise of government officials, Iraqi citizens and students to better understand and make decisions regarding oil governance in the country.

CDNR will have its inaugural event in November to bring relevant officials from the KRG and international experts together to develop and publish a sovereign wealth fund policy in the KRI. Over the 2015-2016 school year, CDNR will conduct a **'Cost-Benefit Analysis of an Independent Kurdish Energy Industry'**; hold an annual conference on **'Oil and Economic Development'**; as well as implement a **'Future Leaders Initiative'** to empower students interested in governance, politics, and the economic development of Iraq and the KRG to become leaders in their respective fields.

## Center for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS), Dr. Choman Hardi

AUIS is uniquely placed to become a leading institution in the region, ensuring that academic initiatives lead to improved gender relations and equal economic opportunity for young women. The Center for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) was launched in June, 2015 and will be a focal point for gender and development scholarship in the region, as well as a vector of social and economic change in the KRI, Iraq and the Middle East. The Center will focus on academic research and instruction, programs and trainings to promote economic opportunity, and community outreach. The ultimate aim of the initiatives is to empower young women through education so they will have equal access to the professional workforce.

CGDS will have its inaugural event in September, 2015 to bring together international and local scholars and practitioners, as well as representatives from the Yazidi community, in order to assess their needs and how to best address them, with particular attention to the plight of women who survived ISIS captivity.

## Center for Archeology and Cultural Heritage (CACH), Dr. Tobin Hartnell

The Center for Archeology and Cultural Heritage (CACH) aims to promote the study and preservation of cultural heritage in Iraq and the KRI. The Center held its first Annual Iraqi Cultural Heritage Symposium last April, 2015 and started its first excavation in August, 2015. There are several projects in the pipeline including the Topographical Mapping and Geophysical subsurface scanning of the area of Peshdar, the creation of a Virtual Museum of Sulaimani History, an environmental history of Sulaimani Province using Remote Sensing, and the establishment of a Digital Humanities Lab and a Virtual Museum of Kurdish Technology.

## Center for Water Resource Management, Dr. Maria Saldarriaga

The Center for Water Resource management aims to create a platform for increased regional cooperation on the pressing environmental issue of water resource management between riparian countries in the Middle East, with a special focus on those countries that share water resources with Iraq. While several meetings and initiatives are being held in and outside the region regarding water issues and biodiversity, very few take place in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which is at the heart of the water management crisis and home to a uniquely rich and gravely endangered biosphere. AUIS, through its faculty and strong relationship with NGOs dedicated to tackling water-related issues, is in a unique position to offer a space for this often contentious issue to be discussed.

This November 2015, the Center, in collaboration with Nature Iraq and the Kurdistan Botanical Foundation, will launch its inaugural event, **"Water Resources & Biodiversity in the Fertile Crescent"**. Over the course of two days of roundtable discussions and public panels, key water and biodiversity decision-makers and experts will have the opportunity to address the effects of regional management regimes and climate change on natural resources. The event, and the ensuing research and discussions, will be an opportunity to bring forth ideas on how to convert this source of tension in the region into a vehicle for promoting regional cooperation on many levels, but starting with the key issue water.

## Supporting Our Work

There are a number of ways to support the work of IRIS. Depending on the mandate and focus area of your organization, contributions can be made to any of the following activities and programs: support of a research program developed with and implemented through IRIS (for example on governance, education, or a “Future of Iraq project”); full or partial sponsorship of a particular initiative (one of the above research centers or conferences); establishment of a named fellowship chair.

We are always open to exploring new avenues for collaboration with partners. If you have any suggestions, queries or require additional information, please contact:

IRIS Director, Christine van den Toorn, at [c.vandentoorn@uis.edu.iq](mailto:c.vandentoorn@uis.edu.iq)

IRIS Coordinator, Zeina Najjar, at [zeina.najjar@uis.edu.iq](mailto:zeina.najjar@uis.edu.iq).

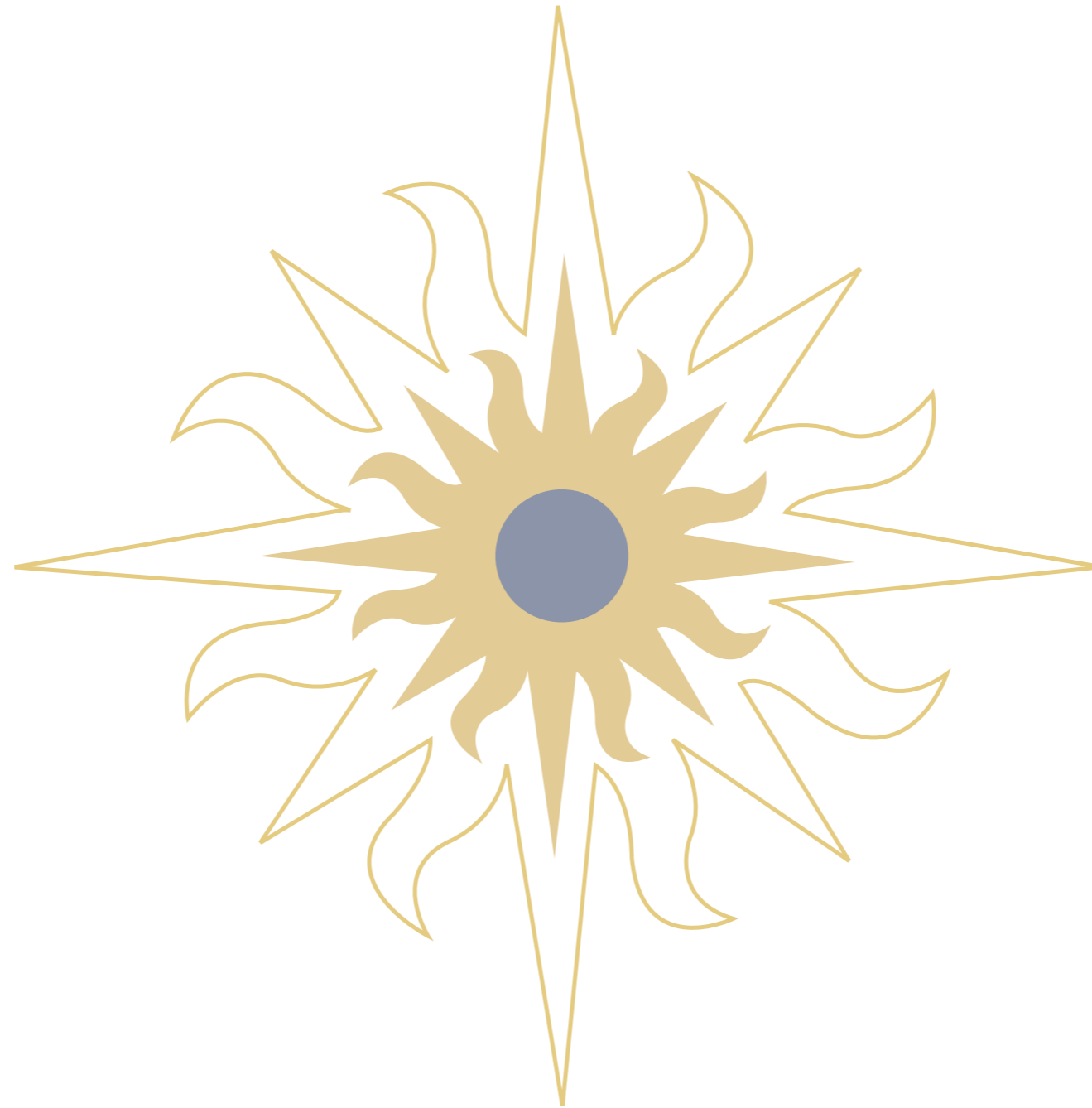
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