Lecture

A Project to Remove the Elements of Trouble, the Ottoman Nationality Law and the Deportation of Neo-Hellenes, 1868–69

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Respondent: Michael Reynolds, Near Eastern Studies

I argue through the example of the Ottoman plans for the deportation of Greeks in 1869 that the Ottoman Naturalization Law of 1869 did not intend to create a more inclusive imperial identity; rather, it aimed to establish and maintain the control of the state over the subject peoples, by facilitating expatriation, displacement, naturalization, and the loss of subjecthood. In the 1860s the Ottoman state faced a constant threat of separatism from non-Muslim populations, and reacted by creating an exclusivist imperial nationality and denaturalizing those populations. Most importantly, this denaturalization process would entail the deportation (teb’id) of significant portions of the native Ottoman population, most of whom were Greeks by nationality. Through examination of individual cases, as well as bureaucratic and diplomatic correspondence, my paper contextualizes this “Neo-Hellene” problem of the Ottoman state beginning in the 1830s, and provides a detailed analysis of the expulsion plans of 1868, outlined in hundreds of pages of commission reports prepared by Ottoman officials.

Berke Torunoglu specializes in the social and political history of the modern Middle East, with a particular focus on the history of the Ottoman Empire. He published his first book, Murder in Salonika 1876: A Tale of Apostasy and International Crisis (Gorgias Press, 2012). His current book project, tentatively titled “Estranged Subjects of the Ottoman Empire 1830-1876,” examines the formation of Ottoman nationality during the Tanzimat era. It argues that Ottoman nationality developed through an iterative process aimed at the containment and retention of individual subjects of the state, whose adopted nationalities posed a problem to the state’s control. He holds a PhD in Modern Middle East History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Monday, November 19, 2018
4:30 p.m.
Scheide Caldwell House, Room 103

Supported by The Christos G. and Rhoda Papaioannou Modern Greek Studies Fund