

Talk

Wide Awake: Nocturnal Life in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul

Tuesday, 19 July 2022 at 5 p.m., at ZMO

The dark half of the day, indeed of history, has rarely attracted the attention of historians of the Middle East. The assumption was, presumably, that everyone went to sleep and therefore, that there was nothing worthy of attention going on in the dark. It is as though history itself hibernates at night, as if it unfolds only in broad daylight. In fact, the night in the early modern Ottoman Empire created unique conditions for economic, criminal, political, devotional, and leisurely pursuits that were hardly possible during the day. It offered livelihood and brotherhood, pleasure and refuge; it allowed confiding, hiding, and conspiring. Common to most of these opportunities was their being out of sight, and hence, unacknowledged. To be "in the dark" not only involved the insecurity of not knowing, but also the promise of not being known, and the benefits of pretending not to know. This hide-ability had far-reaching consequences on Ottoman state and society in the Early Modern period.

Avner Wishnitzer is Associate Professor in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University. His work focuses on the social and cultural history of the late Ottoman Empire. He is the author of *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), and *As Night Falls: Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Cities after Dark*. Among his latest articles are "Kerosene Nights: Light and Enlightenment in Late Ottoman Jerusalem" (*Past & Present*, 2020) and "Yawn: Boredom and Powerlessness in the Late Ottoman Empire" (*Journal of Social History*, 2021).

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