Changing Identities in Post-Ottoman Salonica

Lecture by Prof Katherine Fleming

On the 26th of October, 1912, the Ottoman Commander signed a protocol surrendering Salonika (Selanik) to the advancing Greek army. The decade that followed was one of unprecedented change and upheaval for the city’s residents. The Great Fire of 1917 (which destroyed huge swaths of the city), World War I, and the population “exchanges” of 1923 were among the many events that literally and figuratively redrew the map of the city. This paper will discuss the extent to which the “changed identities” of post-Ottoman Salonica were the direct product of the end of Ottoman rule, as opposed to other historical processes. The paper will also consider the peculiar ways in which the city’s residents framed themselves as at one and the same time national citizens and imperial subjects in the years after the Balkan Wars and indeed after the end of the Ottoman period.

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Presentation of the Seminar

What is the historical experience of cities in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire - in the Balkans, Anatolia, the Middle East, and North Africa - in dealing with the impact of global changes and the transformation from Empire to nation States? How did people of different cultural, social and religious backgrounds live together? How are such examples of conviviality, conflict, migration, and urban regimes of governance and stratification conceptualized? And how have urban traditions been reinterpreted, and what bearing does this have on modern conceptions of civil society, multicultural societies, migration, or cosmopolitanism. These and other questions will be addressed in this year’s Seminar in Ottoman Urban Studies. This seminar is supported with funds of the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.