

Dear Colleagues and Students,

You are kindly invited to the seminar entitled “Land, Labor, and Class Making in the Seventeenth Century Thessaloniki” organized by the Department of History.

Date: 18 April 2024, Thursday

Time: 16.30

Avenue: AZ-31 Seminar Room

Title: Land, Labor, and Class Making in the Seventeenth Century Thessaloniki

Speaker: Mehmet Ali Çelik, University of California

Abstract:

The seventeenth-century social and economic transformation is one of the most controversial topics in Ottoman historiography. Even though this period has been generally understood as an era of crisis and change, there is no explanatory framework shared by scholars. I aim to contribute to this field by focusing on the class formation processes in the provinces and by reassessing this debate on the general crisis of the seventeenth century. I argue that a new landed gentry and new forms of agricultural labor emerged in the seventeenth-century Thessaloniki. The complex amalgamation of long-term demographic, economic, social, and climatic factors and, most importantly, conscious actions of people made the new class relations in this environment. This new agrarian economy was different from the peasant subsistence economy that existed in the sixteenth century; the establishment of privately owned estates (çiftlik) engaged in commercial agriculture went hand in hand with the expropriation of certain segments of the peasantry. While the dispossessed peasants became workers and sharecroppers in these estates, a new rural landed gentry came into being with a distinctive class disposition. The conventional reading construes that independent peasantry remained the core of agriculture until the nineteenth century, and class divisions had not developed based on property relations. The Ottoman economy remained intact in its ancient past. It was stagnant, and no change came from within. The integration of the Ottoman economy into global capitalism is also explained through the peripheralization of its economy to a European-dominated market. My research challenges this conventional understanding by emphasizing the internal dynamics of social and economic change coming from below and by raising critical questions about the early modern transformations and the nature of early modern agrarian capitalism.

Bio:

Mehmet Ali Çelik is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at the University of California, Davis, and currently, he is finalizing his dissertation. He also completed his minor degree in early modern European intellectual history in his graduate program. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in sociology at Middle East Technical University. In 2021-22, he was a PhD fellow at Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED). In 2022-23, he received another PhD fellowship from the Gerda Henkel Foundation (Germany). His research focuses on the early modern social and economic history of the Ottoman Empire. His dissertation project analyzes the general transformation of the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire by emphasizing the significance of the emergence of a new rural landed gentry, changes in the agrarian economy, property relations, and class structure in the Balkan and Anatolian provinces. The history of the peasantry is an important component of this project. Besides his specialization in Ottoman history, Mr. Çelik is also interested in the early modern social and economic history of Europe, Safavid Iran, and Mughal India.