

Dear Colleagues and Students,

You are kindly invited to the seminar entitled as “Slavery, Disease, and Medical Authority: Syphilis in the Early Modern Ottoman World” organized by the Department of History.

Date: 09 October 2025, Thursday

Time: 16.30

Venue: A-130 FEASS Seminar Room

Title: Slavery, Disease, and Medical Authority: Syphilis in the Early Modern Ottoman World

Speaker: Tunahan Durmaz, European University Institute, Florence

Abstract:

This paper analyzes the medicalization of syphilis in the early modern Ottoman world, particularly during the late seventeenth century. It locates Ottoman attitudes toward the disease within the broader Mediterranean context, considering also the transformations of the so-called Columbian Exchange. To that end, the paper discusses three interrelated matters: (1) the early appearance of syphilis in sixteenth-century Ottoman medical domain; (2) the expansion of the medical theory and remedies, such as guaiacum, during the seventeenth century, and finally (3) the socio-legal contexts in which slavery, disease, and medical expertise intersected (3). By considering the development of the medical discourse within broader societal concerns, the paper argues that syphilis created a context in which Ottoman physicians could assert their medical authority, engage with global knowledge, and address local needs.

Bio:

Tunahan Durmaz is a finishing Ph.D. researcher in the Department of History at European University Institute in Florence. His research interests include social, cultural, and political aspects of disease and illness in the early modern Ottoman world. His dissertation “Anxious, Insatiable, and Poxed: A History of Disease Concepts in Ottoman Istanbul, 1640-1691”, which he recently submitted, explores the ways of knowing and understanding diseases in the Ottoman world from the 1640s to the 1691, particularly focusing on the medico-social dimensions of three conditions: hypochondria, bulimia, and syphilis.

Tunahan is a researcher in the SHIFA-ANA project, hosted at Rutgers University (Newark), a research initiative investigating into long-durée histories of death and disease in Anatolia. In 2024-25, he held a research fellowship at Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED). He is also the 2025 recipient of Andreas Tietze Memorial Fellowship at University of Vienna, Department of Near Eastern Studies.