The purpose of this series is to bring together and initiate active discussion among scholars and students in any field relating to the Ottoman Empire, its predecessors, successors, and neighbors, be they allies or rivals, in Europe or Asia. It welcomes the presentation of completed studies, work in progress, as well as discussions on recent trends in Ottoman and Turkish studies. The seminar aspires to facilitate the building of bridges with scholars working in adjacent areas.

Seminar in Ottoman & Turkish Studies

Muftis, dragomans, and Ottoman law in translation: Multilingual fatwas from the Turkish chancellery of the Republic of Ragusa

Selma Zecevic, York University

This presentation uses a selection of Ottoman fatwas issued by Ottoman muftis (16	extsuperscript{th} to 18	extsuperscript{th} c.) to the subjects of the Ottoman tributary state of the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), in order to address the linguistic and other transmutations that these texts underwent, from their composition in Ottoman Turkish to their translation into Italian and/or Ragusan Slavic. Specifically, attention is focused on various stages of the formation and transformation of these texts as they cross cultural and ethno-linguistic boundaries between the Ottoman Empire and its vassal-state, the Republic of Ragusa. Central to this inquiry is the analysis of the activities of the two interpreters/translators who were involved in the creation of each fatwa text and its corresponding translation: Ottoman muftis and Ragusan dragomans. A close comparison of fatwa texts in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic with the texts of the corresponding Italian or Slavic translations show how Ottoman muftis and Ragusan dragomans mediated between the imperial legal texts and their own cultural contexts. Furthermore, this comparison shows that numerous textual interventions—truncation, omission, and addition of words and phrases—in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, and in Italian and Slavic texts attest to the instability of muftis’ and dragomans’ identities themselves as they consistently negotiated their positions with respect to the trans-local and local, imperial and vernacular.

Thursday | 28 November 2013 | 4:00-6:00 pm
NMC Conference Room | Bancroft Building 200B | 4 Bancroft Ave. | 416-978-3006

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