



The Chief Black Eunuch at the Intersection of Race and Gender

Emasculated Guardians of Power in the early modern Ottoman Africana Literature

A Lecture by Baki Tezcan (UC Davis)

The lecture will be followed by a roundtable of IU scholars featuring **MATTHEW HERMANE** (History), **OLIMPIA ROSENTHAL** (Spanish and Portuguese) and **KAYA ŞAHİN** (History, Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures, and Islamic Studies), Q&A, and a reception.

ABSTRACT: Mehmed Agha the Ethiopian and the Ottoman sultan Murad III (r. 1574-95) turned the office of the Chief Black Eunuch at the Ottoman court into a powerhouse that continued to play a major role on the Ottoman political stage through the mid-eighteenth century. Tezcan's talk will explore the reflections of this development in four books that were written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (*The Mirror for Ethiopians* by Ali of Mecca [d. 1612], *Dispelling the Darkness on the Merits of the Ethiopians* by Mullah Ali [d. ca. 1623], *The Halberdier's Treatise on the Affairs of the Chief Black Eunuch* by Dervish Abdullah [fl. 1741], and *The Thicket of Great Men* by Ahmed of Rethymno [d. 1783]), and demonstrate the significance of the intersection of blackness and castrated manhood that made the Ottoman Chief Black Eunuchs of this period such powerful men.

BAKI TEZCAN is Professor of History at UC Davis, and a founder and former director of its Middle East/South Asia Studies Program. He specializes in the history of the Ottoman empire, and his research focuses on the changing role of Islam in the public sphere and pre-modern ethnic and racial identities in the Islamic world. He has co-edited several volumes on various aspects of Ottoman and early modern history, and his book *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. He was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship in 2018-19.

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GAYLE KARCH COOK CENTER AT MAXWELL HALL

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