

The Department of History at Central European University cordially invites you to the first lecture in the Departmental Research Seminar Series 2016/2017 entitled:

Historiography and Intellectual Decline: Turkish Interpretations of an Ottoman Symposium on al-Ghazali's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*

The lecture will be held on **Wednesday, September 21st, 2016 at 5.30pm, in
Nador 11 Building, 004 Smart Room**
Drinks to follow

Speaker: Dr Brett Wilson



Appropriating the past for the purposes of the present is at the heart of historical writing and forms an important component in generating skepticism toward the hermeneutics of history as a discipline. However, often times attempts to recover a desirable, usable history encounter difficulties, even insurmountable problems. These cases of failure present an interesting alternative narrative to those in which that past is selectively, triumphantly (and at times, elegantly) reconstructed to speak to the needs of the present. This paper explores how Turkish historians have wrestled with Ottoman intellectual history via an early modern symposium on the role of philosophy in Islamic thought. This event has been viewed by nationalist historians as a turning point in which the Ottomans

rejected philosophical thought and adopted a non-rational orientation toward knowledge acquisition and production. For many interpreters, decline begins at this moment in history. Attempts to revise this narrative by historians favorably disposed to the Ottomans have encountered difficulties re-interpreting the event and Ottoman scholarly life in general as intellectually vibrant. Expecting to find geniuses and signs of rapid innovation, both nationalists and revisions approach Ottoman history with skewed assumptions that fail to assess Ottoman accomplishments on their own terms.

Dr Brett Wilson's research and teaching explore modernization and religious transformation in the Muslim world with a focus on Turkey and the late Ottoman Empire. His research interests include print history, the cultural history of translation, Sufism, Qu'ranic studies and intellectual life in the Muslim world. He is the author of *Translating the Qur'an in an Age of Nationalism: Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

All students, faculty and staff members are welcome to attend!

Organised by
Dr Matthias Riedl (Head of Department), Ágnes Kelemen, Iva Jelušić and Nikola Pantić
CEU Department of History
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