

Welcome to the **Winter 2017 Speaker Series** of the **Indian Ocean World Centre**

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5:45 pm, Peterson Hall, Room 116

The Commercial Tribunal at Aleppo and Legal Innovation in the Late Ottoman Empire



The Ottoman commercial tribunals (*mehakim-i ticaret*) set up in the second half of the 19th century were a key part of the legal reforms of the Tanzimat. While the tribunals' theoretical foundation, structure and benefits are summarized in various works on the reform period, their actual functioning and the practice of commercial law in different parts of the Empire remain largely unknown. The aim of this talk is to place the Aleppo' commercial tribunal within the larger framework of Ottoman commercial jurisdiction and to point out what the study of this particular court can tell us about the general history of commercial law. I argue that despite the strong influence of the European powers on the creation of this institution and the adoption of the French commercial code as the basis for commercial jurisdiction, this cannot simply be seen as the replacement of an indigenous legal culture by a foreign one. The transformation of Ottoman commercial jurisdiction was a slow one, which started well before the reform period (1839-1876), and represented the interplay of ethno-religious communities. Moreover, the commercial tribunals were a place where theoretical stipulations could often not be applied literally but had to be adapted to the circumstances and cultural realities of a specific place within the Empire.



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