

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

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5:45 pm Peterson Hall Room 116

A Culture of Eclecticism: Medical Pluralism and the Question of Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire



This holistic study of the early modern Ottoman medical field challenges the broadly accepted premise that Ottoman medical knowledge was stagnant until the westernization efforts of the late eighteenth century. The most salient characteristic of traditional Ottoman medical culture was medical pluralism, meaning a multiplicity of medical traditions including Hermetic, prophetic, Galenic, and -as of the seventeenth century- Paracelsian bodies of knowledge. Pluralism applied to both theory and practice; medical practice took diverse shapes at the imperial court, public hospitals, pharmacists' shops, mosques, convents and courthouses. Moreover, the Ottoman medical marketplace was characterised by constant revision of received medical knowledge. In this paper, I offer a socially informed perspective on the history of Ottoman medicine. In particular, I underline a widely shared discursive tradition that advocated perpetual amendment and supplementation of received medical wisdom. This discourse invited contributions from a variety of medical practitioners and prioritized case-based experience over medical theory. The study of medical manuscripts as sites of knowledge production –rather than as passive vessels of transmission- attests to the cumulative effect that this emphasis on case experience had on the evolution of medical knowledge.



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