



Seminar

**KAYA ŞAHİN**

Fellow, SCAS.

Associate Professor of History and Adjunct Associate Professor of  
Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University Bloomington

*Imperial Performances:  
Circumcision Ceremonies for Ottoman Princes,  
1457-1582*

Tuesday, 4 May 2021, 2:15 p.m.

Due to the precautions imposed by the current Corona pandemic,  
the Thunberg Hall will be closed to the public until further notice.

You are therefore invited to join the seminar via Zoom instead:  
<https://uu-se.zoom.us/j/66334219829>

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## ABOUT KAYA ŞAHİN

Kaya Şahin (PhD in History, University of Chicago, 2007) is a historian of the early modern Ottoman Empire, with a particular interest in history writing, governance, religious/confessional identity, and ceremonies and rituals.

Şahin is the author of *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman World* (2013; Turkish translation, 2014). He has written several journal articles and book chapters on Ottoman and Byzantine apocalypticism, early modern Orientalism, comparative political ideologies East and West, and various aspects of Ottoman political and cultural life in the 15th and 16th centuries. He is currently working on two monographs. The first is a biography of the Ottoman sultan Süleyman (r. 1520-1566). The second is a history of Ottoman public ceremonies in the 15th and 16th centuries. (Please see [https://history.indiana.edu/faculty\\_staff/faculty/sahin\\_kaya.html](https://history.indiana.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/sahin_kaya.html) for a list of his publications.)

Şahin serves on the editorial boards of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, the *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, and the *I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History*, the editorial advisory board of the *Renaissance Quarterly*, the advisory board of the ARC Humanities Press' *Connected Histories in the Early Modern World* book series, and as an elected discipline representative for the Islamic World at the Renaissance Society of America.

During his SCAS Fellowship, Şahin will work on the role of performativity in Ottoman political and cultural life, and the linkages between public ceremonies and governance in an Ottoman as well as a larger Eurasian context in the 15th and 16th centuries.

## ABSTRACT

In my talk, I will discuss circumcision ceremonies organized by the Ottoman palace between 1457 and 1582. Activities within the ceremonies, such as parades, mock battles, banquets and scholarly discussions allowed individuals and groups within the Ottoman political-military elite, and members of urban communities, to perform their identities and assert their place in the Ottoman social order. These particular ceremonies allow us to discuss the origins and contents of Ottoman ceremonial culture, which borrowed themes and motifs from the Byzantines, the Venetians, and the myriad Turko-Muslim polities with whom the Ottomans maintained intense diplomatic and cultural relations. Next, they highlight the elevation of male circumcision, a fundamental ritual in all Islamic societies, into a major dynastic event that addressed the entire Ottoman polity as well as its interlocutors and competitors in East and West. Finally, they show how, in early modern societies, public ceremonies served as instruments of governance by creating highly visible, memorable, and relatively participatory events, and by constituting new spaces for political and cultural interactions.