



6th Levantine Heritage Foundation Zoom lecture gathering with guest speaker Berna Kamay
19 March 2021, 6pm (UK time)

“Frenkhâne” of Rossi: An Inheritance Story from a Port City, Smyrna

Smyrna (today's Izmir) was one of the main hubs of commerce and cultural encounters in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. The hectic life, already visible by Armenian, Jewish, Greek, and Muslim populations, set the pace in a bustling city with accelerating European contact. The atmosphere back then can only be explained as the new dynamism of an urban port city. Engaged in different trades and industries, the financiers, artisans, and mongers mostly gathered around similar economic interests. Located at Frank Street, a lively spot just across the Agia Fotini Orthodox Church, the *Frenkhane* Rossi (the Frank House) was among many commercial sites where those people ran their shops and shared the same space. The owner Marie Madeleine Rossi, the grandmother of Eduard Blacque Bey, was a Smyrniote who died from cholera at an early age. By adopting a legal framework, this talk analyzes a long-standing inheritance dispute centered around the *Frenkhane* Rossi. Accordingly, it also traces the line of a Levantine family. Apart from the changing face of property rights in the Ottoman Empire, it revisits the nationality question grounded in a legal quagmire. Following Rossi's death in 1831, the process of property transfer becomes illustrative at a period when the reforms came in leaps and bounds. The heirs who played against the Ottoman and French authorities by acting both as *reayas* (Ottoman subjects) and French subjects reoriented the legal proceedings. Both the waqf administration and the French consuls claimed legal competency in the matter. The arguments they supported portrayed an Ottoman legal realm whose authority was frequently contested and shaped by different actors and powers. The documents from the Ottoman Archives of Istanbul and Diplomatic Archives of Nantes allow a comparative lens to track this legal episode.



Berna Kamay is a doctoral candidate in History Department at Boğaziçi University. She worked as Research and Teaching Assistant in the same department. She specializes in the late Ottoman Empire, Ottoman legal history, and European-Ottoman diplomatic encounters. Her dissertation traces the extradition practice in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. As a particular legal concept and a diplomatic tool, the subject qualifies for a broader analytical perspective. It accompanies a wide range of issues such as the capitulations, contests of sovereignty, territorial jurisdiction, subjecthood, conflicts of laws.

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