



47th Levantine Heritage Foundation Zoom lecture with guest speaker Prof. Robyn Dora Radway
23 November 2026, 6.00 pm (UK time)

Constantinople in the Friendship Albums of the German House in the Sixteenth Century

During a period of relative peace between two imperial rivals in the late sixteenth century, hundreds of travelers from across the Holy Roman Empire and Habsburg ruled territories made their way to Constantinople. Whether serving in the retinue of an ambassador to the Ottoman court or stopping over on their way to the Holy Land, subjects of the emperor found food, wine, shelter, and good company in the confines of the Habsburg ambassador's residence, known as the German House. This multi-lingual and religiously diverse group of noblemen, humanists, artists, servants, cooks, and messengers living in close quarters left behind traces of a vibrant social and visual culture. They collected, commissioned, and produced a series of over forty albums of decorative papers, signatures, costume images, genre scenes, and city views, which are preserved today in collections across Europe and North America. These works on paper are some of the earliest examples of costume books and friendship albums that had a profound impact on later iterations of both genres. This talk introduces these albums and their relationship with the urban setting in which they were produced. I will discuss how these albums reveal and conceal the variety of ways central Europeans engaged with the city of Constantinople. Some album owners recorded their movements through different neighborhoods, their visits to gardens, and outings to points of interest along the Bosphorus in texts and images. Others collected images: city views, watercolors of mosques, baths, pavilions, fountains, and more. These images documented a plurality of experiences: some residents recorded their mobility whereas others observed the city from the windows of the building and the pages of the manuscripts that circulated in it.

Booking essential: <https://robyn-radway-presentation.eventbrite.co.uk>

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Robyn Dora Radway is a historian of Habsburg central Europe and its imperial entanglements across internal and external borders (1450–1800). She specializes in the study of administrative institutions, scribal practices, book cultures, military conflicts, and material culture. She has published articles and chapters on costume books, arms and armor, dress and identity, Habsburg-Ottoman diplomacy, Ottoman Hungary, and the circulation of information on city streets and at imperial courts. She is currently a Key Researcher in the FWF funded Cluster of Excellence, EurAsian Transformations. She has also worked in several international and local museums with whom I continue to maintain strong ties. In both teaching and research, she seeks to combine perspectives from art history with a primary-source-based historical method rooted in both Continental and Anglo-American traditions.