



# The Chief Black Eunuch at the Intersection of Race and Gender

*Emasculated Guardians of Power in the early modern Ottoman Africana Literature*

## A Lecture by Baki Tezcan (UC Davis)

The lecture will be followed by a roundtable of IU scholars featuring **MATTHEW HERMANE** (History), **OLIMPIA ROSENTHAL** (Spanish and Portuguese) and **KAYA ŞAHİN** (History, Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures, and Islamic Studies), Q&A, and a reception.

**ABSTRACT:** Mehmed Agha the Ethiopian and the Ottoman sultan Murad III (r. 1574-95) turned the office of the Chief Black Eunuch at the Ottoman court into a powerhouse that continued to play a major role on the Ottoman political stage through the mid-eighteenth century. Tezcan's talk will explore the reflections of this development in four books that were written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (*The Mirror for Ethiopians* by Ali of Mecca [d. 1612], *Dispelling the Darkness on the Merits of the Ethiopians* by Mullah Ali [d. ca. 1623], *The Halberdier's Treatise on the Affairs of the Chief Black Eunuch* by Dervish Abdullah [fl. 1741], and *The Thicket of Great Men* by Ahmed of Rethymno [d. 1783]), and demonstrate the significance of the intersection of blackness and castrated manhood that made the Ottoman Chief Black Eunuchs of this period such powerful men.

**BAKI TEZCAN** is Professor of History at UC Davis, and a founder and former director of its Middle East/South Asia Studies Program. He specializes in the history of the Ottoman empire, and his research focuses on the changing role of Islam in the public sphere and pre-modern ethnic and racial identities in the Islamic world. He has co-edited several volumes on various aspects of Ottoman and early modern history, and his book *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. He was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship in 2018-19.

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## GAYLE KARCH COOK CENTER AT MAXWELL HALL

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