Anglo-Turkish Society / RAI online lecture, 5 October 2022, 6.00 pm (UK time)
Speaker: Prof. Dr. Hande Birkalan-Gedik, Goethe - Universität Frankfurt
Platform: Zoom with link provided to those who register
Title: 'Eugène Pittard and the Political-Anthropological Scene in Turkey in the 1930s'



My research, which is based on an analysis of several archival documents, looks at how Swiss and Turkish anthropologists, historians, and political leaders came up with a racial-anthropological knowledge that served the political interests of Turkish nation-building in the 1930s. The founder of Musée d'ethnographie de Genève and the first holder of the Chair of Anthropology at the Université de Genève, Eugène Pittard was a pioneering scholar who scientifically demonstrated that the notion of 'race' did not make sense. He initiated numerous international, humanitarian projects in Switzerland and beyond. Still, he was the mouthpiece of the 'Turkish History Thesis', which argued for the 'superior' character of the 'Turkish race.' It happened to be the 'genesis' of the European races—a notion which effectively served the nation-building processes in the Turkish Republic in the long durée of the 1930s. Based on a DFG-funded research project, I examine the milieu of 'racial' knowledge, produced and transferred by several actors through different networks and venues in Turkey in this period. Using numerous archival documents in Switzerland, Germany, and Turkey, I scrutinise the interactions between a group of heterogeneous actors—European and Turkish anthropologists, historians, cultural diplomats, and political leaders who created and used anthropological knowledge for political endeavours. Ultimately, I hope to advance our knowledge of the history of anthropology in Turkey by providing a critical and deconstructive reading of these interactions.

Booking essential: https://hande-birkalan-gedik-lecture.eventbrite.co.uk

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Hande Birkalan-Gedik (Ph.D., Indiana University), is professor of anthropology, folklore, and gender studies. Currently, she is leading a DFG Project titled Traveling Theories: The History of Anthropology in Turkey (1850-1950) at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, where she formerly taught courses as visiting professor. Before coming to Frankfurt, she taught anthropology courses in Istanbul more than 15 years on anthropology of Europe, history of anthropology, anthropology of Turkey, and feminist ethnography. She works on Greek, Kurdish and Alevi groups in Turkey, Greece, and Germany. She is the co-convener of EASA-HOAN, Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, and a member of Border Crossing Network, Greece. She was the president of the Anthropology Association, convener of EASA-EuroNet, and correspondent of HOAN for Turkey

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