Anglo-Turkish Society online lecture, 15 June 2026, 6.00 pm (UK time)

Speaker: Prof. Emerita Leah Makovetsky

Title: 'Protestant Missionaries to the Jewish Communities of Istanbul, Salonika and Izmir 1820-1914'

This talk examines the wide-ranging evangelical, educational, medical, and philanthropic activities carried out by three Protestant missionary societies among Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire in the years 1820-1920. Focusing on the major Jewish centres of Istanbul, Salonika, and Izmir, the study explores key dimensions of Jewish communal life, including legal and social status, traditional and modern education, internal communal conflicts, processes of secularization, class structures, family life, and the position of women.

At the core of the analysis are the missionaries' objectives, achievements, and failures.

The presentation will highlight the varied Jewish responses to missionary initiatives and investigates the strategies employed by Jewish leadership to counter Christian influence during a period marked by profound political, social, and religious transformation in both the Ottoman Empire and its Jewish communities.

The talk will demonstrate that Protestant missionaries arrived with strong convictions and ambitious plans, particularly the aim of converting Jews. It also will address the broader question of whether the Protestant mission ever had a realistic prospect of success among the Jews of Istanbul, Salonika, and Izmir. The study draws extensively on missionary reports and journals, as well as Jewish sources, especially responsa literature and Jewish periodicals.

Booking essential: https://leah-makovetsky-presentation.eventbrite.co.uk

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Prof. Emerita Leah Makovetsky was born in Tel Aviv (19 November 1948) and completed her doctoral studies in Israel in 1979. Throughout her career, she has devoted much of her time to teaching and research. She taught a wide range of courses related to Jewish history in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, first at Bar-Ilan University and later at Ariel University. In parallel, she conducted extensive research on the history of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire and has presented her work at approximately sixty academic conferences.

Her research encompasses diverse topics concerning Jewish life in the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Much of her scholarship is grounded in rabbinic literature as well as British archival sources. She has authored eight books and more than 150 articles published in academic journals, collected volumes, and encyclopedias. To date, she has supervised fifteen doctoral dissertations.