Anglo-Turkish Society hybrid lecture, 11 November 2025, 6.00 pm (UK time)

Speaker: Dr Semih Celik (Lecturer in History of Science and Citizenship, University of Exeter)

Venue: Royal Anthropological Institute, 50 Fitzroy St, Fitzrovia, London W1T 5BT

Title: 'Exploring and Digitizing the First Ottoman Natural History Museum and its Eco-Heritage'

Natural History Museums (NHMs) are at the forefront of research on climate change, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and decolonization. The institutional histories, biographies and scientific value of the objects they house are increasingly scrutinized in an interdisciplinary manner, with historians and heritage researchers taking on leading roles. However, such research often focuses on European and colonial NHMs. This talk aims to reconstruct the history of a non-western imperial NHM - the Ottoman Natural History Museum founded in Istanbul in the 1830s and destroyed by fire in 1848, along with all its collections and archives. I will present the findings of my recent research on the Ottoman NHM in various NHM archives in Europe. I will also attempt to reconstruct the Ottoman NHM as a 19th century "knowledge infrastructure" that made the circulation of objects, knowledge, and people between Middle East, Eurasia, and Europe possible, and discuss the significance of reviving the museum's eco-heritage to address current climate-related challenges in Istanbul and the post-Ottoman world.

Booking essential: https://semih-celik-presentation.eventbrite.co.uk

Contact: contact@angloturkishsociety.org.uk





Dr Celik is a historian specializing in the history of science and environment in the Middle East. After completing his PhD at the European University Institute in Florence in 2017, he held postdoctoral research positions at Koç University in Istanbul. In 2022, he joined the University of Exeter as a lecturer. His research explores the evolving relationships between humans and the environment in the Ottoman and post-Ottoman worlds through the lens of the Anthropocene. He is currently working on a book manuscript that examines famines, climate change, and empire-building in 19th-century Anatolia. He further aims to scrutinize historical ecosystem conservation strategies and eco-heritage to address the current challenges of the Anthropocene in the region.

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