Muslim Converts, Christian Wives  
Locating Hybrid Armenian-Muslim Identities in the Shari‘a Courts of Aleppo

A Public Lecture by
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4 pm
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While most of Aleppo’s Armenian population are the descendants of refugees from the forced deportation and genocide in 1915, a vibrant Armenian community flourished centuries earlier in the Ottoman Empire’s third largest city. This presentation focuses on registered cases of conversion and, alternatively, statements by Armenian women who resisted conversion to Islam while their husbands and children converted. The presentation will show how, in some cases, the shari‘a court offered those converted women more legal options for divorce where Armenian canon law restricted them. The product of this process of conversion and resistance to conversion were hybrid Armenian/Muslim families documented in the court registers.

Elyse Semerdjian is Associate Professor of Islamic World/Middle Eastern history at Whitman College. A specialist in early modern Ottoman history, she authored “Off the Straight Path”: Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo (Syracuse University Press, 2008) as well as several articles on women, non-Muslims, and law in the Ottoman Empire. She is a two-time Fulbright awardee and is currently writing a social history of the Armenians of Saliba Judayda, the Christian quarter of Aleppo, focusing on the formative seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She is also a contributor to the Armenian Weekly.

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