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The Nature of Bodies: Natural History, Medicine, and Knowledge Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean

With the influx of new substances—such as coffee, tobacco, and ipecacuanha—early modern physicians and naturalists saw new *materia medica* as an opportunity to raise questions about the universality of human beings and human nature: were these substances medicinal or intoxicant? Did they have constant effects across individuals? Were human bodies interchangeable in the medical context, or were the “Turkish” bodies essentially different both emotionally and physically? Do all human beings have an essential nature?

In this talk, Duygu Yıldırım will consider how knowledge exchanges between the Ottomans and Europeans over the course of the seventeenth century reveal little-known patterns in the circulation of ideas, things, and knowledge. Ottoman and European scholars debated about artifacts—be they texts or natural objects—as a way to test their epistemological principles and approaches in an increasingly global world. By exploring what difference foreign knowledge made for early modern scholars, Yıldırım demonstrates how cross-cultural interactions shaped various knowledge systems. She brings Ottoman history into conversation with the global history of science and medicine, arguing that the success of knowledge exchanges did not necessarily depend upon the idea of scientific utility, but on the crystallization of opinion regarding which knowledge was useful enough to worthy of translation.

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Bio: Duygu Yıldırım is currently completing her dissertation, “The Age of the Perplexed: Translating Nature and Bodies between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, 1650-1730” in the Department of History at Stanford University. A recipient of numerous awards, her research explores one of the fundamental questions in the global history of science and medicine: What made medical translations successful? Most recently, she has been awarded the Geballe Dissertation Prize at the Stanford Humanities Center, and the Fellowship in History of Science and Technology and Allied Fields by the Program in History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) at Stanford. She has a forthcoming article in *Journal of Ottoman Studies*, and she is the co-editor of *Natural Things: Ecologies of Knowledge in the Early Modern World*, which will be submitted to the University of Chicago Press in fall 2020.