

# BYOSE Seminar Series at Oxford

## “Territory, trade & material culture from Byzantium to the Ottoman world”

### BYOSE III: Imagining Cities in Transition

Ioannou Centre - 7 June 2023 - 5 p.m. (GMT)

Late Antique and Byzantine Seminar

66, St. Giles', Oxford

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The starling talisman, a late sixteenth-century Ottoman

Turkish book of wonders, British Library, Harleian 5500, 31v.

## The Starling Talisman of the Late Fifteenth-Century Istanbul: Ottoman Historians' Engagement with the City's Deep Past

For early modern Ottoman writers, Istanbul's antiquities were not insignificant remains of a distant past, as often assumed, but had important uses and talismanic powers. Through the focus on the story about a starling talisman, I will discuss what we can learn from them about the Ottoman interest in Istanbul's pre-Ottoman past and the place of the occult in it. My talk is about an object which probably never existed. According to an anonymous Ottoman Turkish chronicle from the late fifteenth century, a talisman-maker from Maghreb came to Istanbul in 1200 BC to construct a talisman in the image of a starling, inscribed by sacred letters and powered by a special spring from Isfahan. He placed it on the dome of a great temple at the site of Hagia Sophia. Every year during the olive season, the talisman attracted starlings from all around the Mediterranean and made them bring tons of olive to Istanbul.

Such a story about a mighty talisman is unique in Ottoman histories. It gathers diverse sources to tell how people, knowledge, and resources from different places and times were brought to Istanbul. This particular collection and its geographical extent is also very different from what we know about the reach of Mehmed II's imperial project and offers an in-sight into the ways which Istanbul's past was imagined in a post-conquest city. The object secured an important place in the Ottoman historical imagination and was circulated widely throughout the early modern period.

Organizers: Olivier Delouis (Maison Française d'Oxford, Campion Hall), Lilyana Yordanova (Musée du Louvre, École française d'Athènes).

For Trinity Term 2023, the research programme “From Byzantium to the Ottoman world in South-Eastern Europe” (BYOSE), will co-sponsor the “Late Antique and Byzantine Seminar” (LABS) at the University of Oxford. The LABS is convened by Ine Jacobs (University College), Marc Lauxtermann (Exeter College), Ida Toth (Wolfson College), and Olivier Delouis (MFO, Campion Hall).

