

Workshop: Religion and its History in Turkey: New Approaches, Alternative Perspectives

Leipzig University, Institute for the Study of Religions

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The dichotomy between “secular state” and “religious society” has long dominated narratives on “the Turkish experience with modernity”. Although the Turkish “secular state” and its homogenising policies have been subject to critical scholarly interrogation, less attention has been afforded to its alleged counterpart, namely, “religious society”. Scholarship on religion in Turkey has largely been confined to Islam, privileging thereby binary oppositions such as orthodox-heterodox, official-popular, or high-low Islam and not paying sufficient attention to alternative religiosities or dynamics of convergence between religious traditions. This two-day workshop aims to revisit the Turkish modernity experience on the centenary of the republic by considering diverse forms of religiosity and the complexity of religious life in Turkey. Against the background of empirical research, we would like to question binary conceptualisations of religion as well as the notion of a strict dichotomy between religion and the secular. To challenge normative assumptions about religiosity and “true religion” as defined by religious and state authorities, we would like to focus on everyday, material, and spatial aspects of religion that tend to become marginalized in official accounts. Bringing together scholars from diverse fields to discuss avenues for future research on religion in Turkey, we want to address the following questions and corresponding themes:

- * How can we move beyond binary conceptualisations such as orthodox-heterodox, official-popular, or high-low Islam?
- * What can recent critical scholarship on religion and secularism as well as the field of postcolonial studies add to the study of religion and secularism in Turkey?
- * Which new methodologies and sources can expand our scope of analysis?
- * What are marginalized domains in the field (such as the religious experiences of individuals and groups outside of official religion) and how can they be made visible?
- * Which practices, stories, or people challenge the religious-secular binary and hegemonic definitions of religion and religiosity?
- * What may material and spatial perspectives add to our understanding of religion and religiosity in Turkey?
- * How does gender matter in a binary conceptualisation of religion and the secular? How can we include women as religious subjects beyond the confines of Islamic-political activism?