Debate

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Comments on the article by Professor Goldfeld

Comentários acerca do artigo da professora Goldfeld

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Discussion on the article "Why is it important to study the history of the Ottoman Empire?" by Monique Sochaczewski. Published in Revista Esboços: histórias em contextos globais, v. 32 (2025). DOI: https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7976.2025.e106590

Debate sobre o artigo "Por que é importante estudar história do Império Otomano?" de Monique Sochaczewski. Publicado em Revista Esboços: histórias em contextos globais, v. 32 (2025). DOI: https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7976.2025.e106590

Professor Goldfeld's article clearly calls for the Ottoman Empire, showing that it has not been much studied in the educational institutions of Brazil and that there is much to be gained by integrating it in the curriculum. Her goal is moreover to show the relevance of Ottoman Studies to Brazilian history. In my view, studies of Ottoman- South America can be useful, for methodological reasons, on a number of level. Such studies can place these two regions in the context of global history and shed light on south-south relations in regions where the dominant scholarship has been north-south. They can also open possibilities to provide a counterpart to the Eurocentric history which has dominated the historiography of the Third World or of colonized lands for a long time. For Ottoman Studies, often Istanbul-centered, such studies can provide a history which is not focused on the center of the empire.

Professor Goldfeld provides a summary of the political military history of the empire from its early start till its final days at the beginning of the 20th century, which constitutes the longest section of the article. Her article raises some questions in Brazilian academia regarding the Ottoman Empire, mainly on account of the need to "going beyond a historiography that focuses on the "Arab world" or "Muslim world" and that does not understand the Ottoman Empire as part of Europe as well." In fact, the historiography of the Ottoman Empire is usually considered to focus more on the central lands of the Empire, Anatolia, Eastern Europe, and of course, Istanbul, where decisions are taken and where the archives are located. In many histories of the Empire, there is little space for the Arab lands and when they are mentioned, it is in a separate chapter, not as an integral part of the empire. In reality, the Ottoman Empire is neither entirely European nor entirely Arab/ Islamic; the first 'Ottomans' came from Central Asia, subsequent conquests expanded the territory of the empire to include parts of Europe, Asia and Africa. The impact of these conquests impacted the empire as a whole in different ways. When parts of Eastern Europe came under Ottoman control, many persons of Balkan origin filled the important bureaucratic and political positions of the central administration, while the conquest of the Arab lands in the 16th century changed the demographic condition of the empire, as it integrated, for the first time, a Muslim-majority population, a fact which influenced the policies of the empire. In other words, rather than having to decide whether the empire was European or Arab-Islamic, the bigger challenge that historians have to face is to develop a methodology that covers 'empire' in its totality. This would bring to the light the relationships between central lands and the provinces of the empire, the

movement of bureaucrats and so on, from place to place, the transfers of population that were common under the Ottomans. [1]

The article in question includes a section on the historiography of the Ottoman Empire, citing the names of some prominent historians in the field, Halil Inalcik, Cemal Kafadar, as well as some out-dated writers (Wittek[2]). One would not expect to see in the four pages covered by this section all the important authors or works on the Ottoman Empire, as the author indicates, that the field is growing very fast and in many directions.[3] By and large the focus is on authors who study the central lands and whose body of sources is in Istanbul. I could add that a different view of the empire is evident in the writings which are based on provincial sources. For instance, in some fields, the study of Arab lands under the Ottomans is more developed than works about the Ottoman center, for example, in social studies, urban studies and in commercial studies.[4]

Professor Goldfeld devotes a large part of her article on migration. In this regard, she quite rightly emphasizes the later period ie the 19th and 20th centuries, because that is when relationships between the two regions, Brazil and the Ottoman Empire, can clearly be observed. One important aspect was precisely the flow of migrants from the Ottoman Empire who settled in Brazil. We could add a few thoughts to this matter. Firstly, since there is an interest in global and regional history, in placing Brazil within the larger perspective of the South American region could be included, especially since the migratory flow from the Ottoman Empire touched many parts of the continent. Numerous migrants from the different regions of the Ottoman Empire settled in the different parts of South America, in Mexico, in Cuba, etc. It might be significant to compare where, when and who were these migrants. It would also be interesting, presuming some data or archival material exists, to study the relationship of these Ottoman communities settled in South America retained with their place of origin.

Secondly, the article of Professor Goldfeld refers to a rich historiography regarding the waves of Jewish migrants, emphasizing those who were expelled by the Spanish in 1492 and settled in Brazil. She mentions another wave of Jewish migration to Brazil, from the Ottoman empire this time, in the 19th and 20th centuries. In fact, the subject of migrant can be broadened by the inclusion of Arab migrants from the Ottoman Empire, there is much to be said about the various Arab communities who left the Ottoman Empire and settled in the

[1] For a more elaborate discussion of this matter, please see Hanna (2025).
[2] His book was first published in 1938.
[3] I would include here two prominent authors who have written prolific works on the empire: Sevket Pamuk and Suraiya Faroqhi.
[4] I refer to works by historians like Andre Raymond and Nicolas Michel whose works have in-depth studies of merchants, artisans, guilds, and issues related to land tenure.

different countries of South America, including Brazil, from the Levant, Syrians from Lebanon, from Palestine, during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. Today they constitute one of the largest diasporas in the country and the members of these communities are still playing a role in the politics and economy of Brazil as well as of other regions of South America. A study of these communities would provide a welcome view of 'Ottomans' who settled in Brazil or other parts of South America.

The second point I would like to make is linked to trade and the economy. The economic links between the Ottoman Empire and South America can be traced to a much earlier date than the 19th century. I would suggest, in this context, to include the work of Sevket Pamuk on monetary history of the Ottoman Empire, a subject that is particularly relevant as it places the subject of Ottoman -Brazil relations in a global context (PAMUK, 2000). In fact, the Ottoman Empire, as of the 16th century, was greatly affected by the gold and silver that arrived from the Americas. Money became more prevalent. The degree of commercialization was also impacted. The gold of Brazil may, directly or indirectly, have reached the Ottoman Empire, a subject worth pursuing as it would open up avenues for further research on early economic relations between Brazil and the Ottoman Empire.

A further channel for research related to global history is the commercial activity that linked Brazil to the Ottoman Empire. We have an extensive literature on the coffee trade in the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century onward. Until the mid-18th century, merchants in Egypt monopolized much of this trade. Future research can shed light on the consumption of coffee in Brazil during the period when the Ottoman Empire was a major distributor of this commodity.

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