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ARIT LECTURE

Alcohol at Empire's End: The Politics of Prohibition in Post-WWI Ottoman Empire



by

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Despite its categorization as part of the “Islamic world” and its consequent omission from many global histories of alcohol, the Ottoman Empire included many sites and situations meriting inclusion. While Ottoman leaders pronounced firmer proscriptions during the war for military purposes, their justifications were often rooted in religious and moral arguments. Following WWI, additional reasons arose from both the state and society. Within the defeated and internationally isolated Ottoman Empire, legal prohibition appeared to appease the United States and build bridges while negotiations over post-war settlements took place. This interest in enhanced Ottoman-American relations was mutual; Anti-Saloon League leaders and other organizations also looked to Turkey. Oftentimes, their gaze included the Ottoman region not only as a curious site of alcoholic prohibitions; they also sought global allies and inspiration. Although initiatives to bring prohibition before the Ottoman parliament ceased entirely once the legislative body was forced to close, the momentum behind this cause carried into the emerging Turkish republic. Proposed, debated, and passed in 1920, the republic’s prohibition only lasted until 1924, when its cost became evident and nationalists consolidated their authority.

This talk examines the politics of alcohol and anti-alcoholism in late Ottoman history; a period marked by intense internal and external pressures and shifting perspectives. It explores the socio-political factors that brought together religious conservatives and physicians who would induce the republic’s short-lived prohibition. By examining this transitional period, we can discern that the ban was not just the product of an odd internal coalition between conservatives and socio-medical reformers; it shared profound connections to ongoing temperance narratives and activism observable at the global scale, particularly in the US. Scrutinizing these linkages evident in temperance rhetoric and relationships, the often-isolated histories of national experiences become more nuanced and less insular.

For Zoom Registration:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/4iyZ0A_kTPq417RR5g0ebg