

ON THE SPOT

SURAIYA FAROQHI

We ask leading historians why their research matters, what history has taught them, and what we should be reading...



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Why are you a historian of the Ottoman Empire?

I am intrigued by the many sources that remain unused and underused.

What's the most important lesson history has taught you? The need to understand why people did the things they must have done, even if they seem absurd or criminal to us.

Which history book has had the greatest influence on you? Fernand Braudel on the Mediterranean in the 16th century.

What book in your field should everyone read? *Les chrétiens d'Allah* by Bartolomé and Lucile Bennassar.

Which moment would you most like to go back to? None! Despite all its problems, for a female scholar, the present is better than any time that has preceded it.

Which historian has had the greatest influence on you? Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie.

Which person in history would you most like to have met? Mihri Hatun, a poet of Ottoman Bursa, who dared to state that a clever woman was worth 1,000 incompetent men.

How many languages do you have? German and English; I lecture in Turkish and French, and read Ottoman Turkish and Dutch, Italian and Spanish.

What historical topic have you changed your mind on?

I realise now that if you don't deal with gender, you miss important sources of conflict.

What is the most common misconception about your field? That the Ottoman Empire was so special as to make any comparison impossible.

Who is the most underrated person in history... Mahmud I (r.1730-54), who built the Nuruosmaniye Mosque.

...and the most overrated? So many that it would be unfair to single one out!

What's the most exciting field in history today? Gender and environmental studies.

Is there an important historical text you have not read? Lots!

What's your favourite archive? The Chambre de Commerce in Marseille.

What's the best museum? The Renaissance Museum in Écouen, near Paris.

What technology has changed the world the most? The internet.

Recommend us a historical novel... Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed*.

... and a historical drama? Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

What will future generations judge us most harshly for? For our unwillingness to make space for animals.