

## Railways on maps: local economy and multiple interactions in Minas Gerais

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### Resumo:

This communication takes maps as starting points to analyse the connection between agricultural activities and the implementation of the railway in Minas Gerais between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In doing so, it sets out to use maps as main primary historical sources, not illustrations or add-ups. Scholarship has recently demonstrated that the introduction and expansion of railroads in Minas Gerais from the 1880s was not always tied up to coffee plantation. Contemporary maps lend weight behind this argument. They corroborate, for example, that while the foundation of the *Leopoldina* Railway Company (1874) is interwoven with coffee exportation, similarly to São Paulo, the *Ouro Minas* Railway (1881) bears a strong connection with the regional market. The *Leopoldina* was located in Zona da Mata, the first biggest coffee production area in Minas Gerais, as a merge between *União Mineira* (1871) and *Pedro II* (1864) (Blasenheim 1994). It was a private investment that counted with national political support, being a coffee railroad until the 1920s, when dairy became the primary product of the area (de Oliveira Birchal 2001). On the other hand, the *Oeste de Minas*, inaugurated in 1881, serviced local transportation of agricultural goods. It followed the pedestrian road that connected Minas Gerais to the south of the state and Bahia, playing a pivotal role in the national integrationist policy. However, maps also suggest that there was not a clear-cut division between agricultural areas in Minas, which allows visualisation of contact and merging zones where local and exportation activities interacted as in trading zones. According to physician and historian of science Peter Galison, in a trading zone “distinct cultures that live near enough to trade, sharing many activities while diverging on other” collaborate to maintain successful and continuous communication and exchange (Galison 1997, 803, Long 2015). Since communication improvement to serve commerce stands as one of the main motivations of railway construction, alongside territorial expansion and national integration – the idea of trading zones sheds light on how people that lived in proximity could overcome social, technological, and economic asymmetries. Railways thus emerge as multiple trading zones where interactions between diverse groups unfolded. These groups followed similar behavioural patterns despite their differences because they “depend[ed] on exchange for survival” (Galison 1997). All the maps in this communication are held at the Ibero-American Institute in Berlin and come from the *Society of National Agriculture* (1908), under the organisation of Paulino Cavalcanti, and from *Atlas do Brazil* (1909) by Barão Homem de Mello and Francisco Homem de Mello. Another map (1936) belonged to the *Ministério Nacional do Trabalho, Indústria e Comércio*. President Getúlio Vargas created this department in 1930, after

leading a coup d'état that started a new Republican period in Brazil. This map reveals the extent to which Vargas considered issues related to structural development essential to political propaganda, as the map mentioned above emphasises, among others, the evolution of the Brazilian railway system. This communication, therefore, spans from two different political regimes – monarchy and republicanism – and three different historical periods, namely the Second Empire, the First Republic, and the Second Republic. As such, the analysed maps contain information that goes beyond the economy and encompasses immigration policies, ideological propaganda, and external relations. For this reason, in addition to maps, this communication includes other sources, such as reports, *post-mortem* inventories, and *ex-votos*. *Ex-votos* are religious paintings on small wooden boards meant to be public demonstrations of gratitude and faith (Castro 1994, Barragán-Solis and Castro-García 2011, Giffords 1974, Graziano 2016). Often displayed on churches' walls or chapels, *ex-votos* recreated a dramatic scene that had a happy ending, usually ill people on beds who had asked for the miracle of cure and received it (Castro 1994, Oliveira 2017). The *ex-votos* examined in this communication reveal interactions between humans, machines, and the spiritual world, reinforcing the argument that trading zones involve more than trading activities, as people interact and negotiate the terms of living together in these areas. In the end, this communication hopes to contribute to not only to our understanding of the connection between agriculture and the expansion of railroads in Minas Gerais but also of how people interacted within the trading zones that railways created or expanded.

**Palavras - Chave:**

Railways, Minas Gerais, economy, agriculture, conviviality.