



Combatants of Muslim Origin in European Armies in the Twentieth Century ed. Xavier Bougarel, Raphaëlle Branche, and Cloé Drieu.

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Historians long paid little attention to the impact of Islam and Muslims on European national and international affairs in the first half of the twentieth century. But this tendency has been severely challenged in recent years. Scholarship on the history of Muslims in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century has made huge strides. This volume is another testimony to the growing interest in the entangled histories of Muslim and European societies in the modern period. Its editors state their purpose as follows:

Other publications have focused on the religious dimensions of the First World War, endeavouring to reconstruct the religious beliefs and practices of ordinary soldiers. Yet Islam has remained relatively marginal in these works. The present collective work aims to show the importance of this theme by focusing on the combatants of Muslim origin that fought in European armies in the two world wars, and by using Islam as a prism through which to better understand how these soldiers were supervised, where their allegiances lay, and what their everyday practices were. (1)

The nine case studies gathered here focus on the participation of Muslim soldiers in the British, French, German, and Russian (later Soviet) armies. A general introduction outlines the issues of religious belonging and practice and perceptions of Muslims and the institutionalization of Islam in the European colonial military context.

The first study concerns the Algerian soldiers who fought for France in the First World War and highlights the close links between the war experiences of the Algerian *tirailleurs* (infantry) and the rise of Algerian nationalism. Its author, Gilbert Meynier (Univ. Nancy II), argues that the Great War set in motion critical debates about the civil rights of Algerians in their homeland that heightened Europeans' mistrust. Algerian veterans' exile experience, including their low social status in France, impelled many of them to hold more strongly their Muslim values and rediscover their patriotic feelings. The latter gradually gave impetus to anticolonial political activism.

The second study, by Emmanuelle Cronier (Univ. de Picardie) is dedicated to military logistics, specifically the crucial issue of food supplies and management in the British and French armies of the First World War. The author concentrates on the moral effects of supplying the troops with halal food (i.e., permissible under Islamic law) and the challenges that posed for commanders in wartime. She describes how logistic failures to serve lawful rations obliged Muslim soldiers to adapt to lower food standards.

Tanja Bühner (Univ. of Rostock) examines the echo of the German government's call for jihad during the First World War among the Muslim population in German East Africa. She concludes that, although the German-Ottoman alliance and calls for pan-Islamic solidarity resonated among Arab elites, they were not sufficient to convince them to participate in the war.

The third and fourth studies both explore the history of Muslim soldiers in the Russian (and later Soviet) army. Salavat Iskhakov (Inst. of Russian History) focuses on the conditions of service of Turkic Muslim soldiers before and after the Revolutions of 1917. He shows how the formation of

these units allowed Turkic troops to gain more political autonomy and defend their own nationalities by fighting for the Russian state. His use of military and personal archival material will remind Western scholars how much they might profit from exchanges with their counterparts in Eastern European countries. On the other hand, Kiril Feferman (USC Shoah Foundation Center for Advanced Genocide Research) traces the fate of Turkic soldiers after the Bolshevik Revolution. He focuses on the perceptions and self-perceptions of Soviet Muslim soldiers during the Second World War and highlights the confusion regarding the identities of young Central Asian recruits in the Red Army and the evolution of Soviet attitudes towards them. Feferman argues that “Muslim” was used as a non-religious label in referring to various Central Asian groups, who adopted the designation to reconcile their identities with their Soviet reality.

The sixth case study, by Xavier Bougarel (Centre d’Études Turques, Ottomanes, Balkaniques et Centrasiatiques), concerns the controversial 13th Waffen-SS Division Handschar, a unit created by the Nazis around Muslims recruits from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Bougarel concludes that the Nazi scheme to cast Islam as a warlike ideology to be followed blindly by Bosnians failed to have the desired effect. In fact, he continues, most of the soldiers were recruited by force, and several thousand of them deserted in autumn 1944 (154).

Claire Miot (École Normale Supérieure), in case study seven, analyzes tensions surrounding the so-called Officers of Muslim military affairs, a corps the French army created in 1938 to manage North African conscripts. She demonstrates that this was an imperialistic intelligence effort whereby “the military hierarchy imposed its conception of Islam to avoid the development of a subversive practice of Islam” (175).

The eighth study, the most refreshing in the collection, speaks to an understudied issue: the mental health of Muslim soldiers in European armies. Julie Le Gac (Univ. of Paris IV Sorbonne) examines the putative role of Islam in shaping what was perceived to be a “unique North African psyche.” The latter was presented by colonial officers and doctors as a blend of mystical and fatalist views that made North Africans more affective than rational compared to Europeans. This confusion of racial, cultural, religious, and intellectual categories, Le Gac argues, impacted the treatment of indigenous combatants suffering from mental health issues and minimized the effects of war on their psyche.

The ninth and final study shifts to the Muslim presence in European naval forces, especially in British colonial navies from the Second World War to the independence of British colonies. Daniel Owen Spence (Univ. of the Free State) traces the influence of race theory in the recruitment of Muslim naval personnel in East Africa and Southeast Asia and the role of Islam and Muslim leaders in British navies. He highlights the tensions between naval commanders and Muslim sailors as well as the effects of the politicization of Islam that emergent nationalisms brought to bear on naval institutions.

Combatants of Muslim Origin in European Armies in the Twentieth Century is a welcome contribution to the study of the entangled military histories of Muslim and European societies. Its broad purview will benefit students and scholars interested in its subject matter. One would have wished, however, for two things: an arrangement of the chapters in thematic subsections to help readers better navigate through the complex topics discussed in the collection; and a more explicit emphasis on the contribution of the respective case studies to our broader understanding of Islam in the European context. Nevertheless, the book’s well-researched and enlightening essays are valuable both in themselves and as guideposts for future investigations.