

Title—Islam and the European Empires

Author—David Motadel

Year—2014

Categories: Imperialism/Colonialism, Islam/Religion, Europe

Place: The World

Time: 1650-1970

Argument Synopsis:

David Motadel's *Islam and the European Empires* is an essay collection that seeks to counter the prevailing trend in the historiography regarding the relationship between religion and empire that focuses primarily on the role of Christianity and Christian missionaries, by focusing on the role of Islam in the various European empires. Motadel tries to bring together historians who work on Islam in different imperial contexts and geographical regions, in order to complete the first comparative account of Islam in the European empires. The role of Islam within the European empires is comparatively understudied, especially when compared to the oversaturation of studies focused on Christian missionaries and Christianity. The various essays help point to the centrality of religion in the encounters between European empires and Muslim subjects, while demonstrating that this encounter was not dominated by the promotion of Christianity. Motadel classifies his essay collection as a comparative and global history of empire. According to Motadel, at the height of empire there was no independent Muslim state that governed as many Muslims as any of the four individual empires governed alone. The collection of essays is organized thematically around three themes: the accommodation of Islam in the imperial order, the role of Islam in anti-colonial resistance movements, and the relationship between Islam, information, and colonial knowledge. Islam became central as colonial officials attempted to embed rule into existing structure and hierarchies to achieve legitimacy, Islam provided significant preexisting structures for the colonial officials to exploit.

John Slight's "British Imperial Rule and the Hajj," addresses the policies of the British empire towards the hajj from the 1865 cholera epidemic to the outbreak of World War I in 1914; arguing that the governance of religious practices provides a vital framework of enquiry in assessing the history of empire. Slight highlights the unintended consequence of Britain's regulation of the hajj, being the facilitation of pilgrimage, mirroring the practices of older Islamic empires; this facilitation also bolstered anti-colonial sentiment across the Muslim world. The complex bureaucracy established by the British for controlling the flow of pilgrims passed into the hands of the newly independent countries after the fall of British imperialism.

"Islam and resistance in the British Empire," by Benjamin D. Hopkins, examines the role of Islam as an idiom of anti-colonial resistance in the British Empire from the early nineteenth century until the end of empire in the mid-twentieth. Hopkins posits that the empire was plagued with consistent religious imperial resistance throughout the history of the empire; the Northeast frontier of British India is identified as the epicenter. Using a comparative approach, he argues that the revolts that broke out were not the result of influential Muslim holy men and their followers, as argued by the British empire, but rather these holy men were able to activate the disquiet of the imperial subjects, using language of millenarianism. Through its essays, the writers seek to break down the historical narrative of the preeminence of Christianity and Christian missionaries in the religious encounters between the colonized and the colonizer.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Studies of Islam and empire are dominated by studies of Christian missionaries and their interactions with Muslim populations
- Regulation of the hajj was a critical decision for all European empires ruling over Muslims
- Islam provided significant preexisting structures for the colonial officials to exploit