

Britain and the World

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Justin Quinn Olmstead
Editor

Britain in the Islamic World

Imperial and Post-Imperial Connections

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PREFACE

The early and rapid expansion of the Islamic religion from 612 to 750 CE saw the growth of its influence advance from Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula, to the Indus River in the east and the Franco-Spanish border in the west. It encompassed Persia (Iran), the Northern Tier of Africa along the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, Asia Minor, and India. With such far-ranging boundaries, Islam and the ensuing Caliphate became the dominant force in the Mediterranean region and would remain so through the year 1000. Fighting between Muslims and the Christian Franks along the Pyrenees as well as fighting elsewhere in the Mediterranean world would last for a quarter century before culminating in the crusades. English scholar Robert of Ketton provided the first Latin translation of the Qur'an in 1143 and within forty-five years Richard the Lionhearted of England took the first English army to fight against Islam in what would become the third of nine crusades by Christian European armies. Not all of the interactions between the Europeans and Muslims were violent. Despite religious prejudices, Europeans studied, borrowed, and traded with the Islamic world during the two centuries it fought to reclaim Jerusalem.

The armies that traveled to fight in Palestine may not have given the people of the British Isles their first encounter with Islam and Muslims during the crusades, but the ferocity of the battles and the religious hatred left a distinct impression of the region and those who inhabited it on the individuals who returned to the British Isles. This contact left an indelible mark on Europe and the British Isles in the form of new foods,

household goods, and ideas which led to the development of trade with the Islamic world. The initial impact of Islam and the Middle East on Europe and Britain is well-trod. What this book intends to do is capture the role of Britain, as a nation and the British people, in the Islamic world. To do so, the chapters that follow offer several new perspectives on Britain's relationship with Muslim societies by examining social, political, diplomatic, and military issues that arose over the centuries of British involvement in the region. Indeed, by 1857, the British Empire itself could be debatably conceived to be the Islamic world.

Decisions made by individual traders and high governmental officials are examined in an attempt to understand how Great Britain impacted the Islamic world. Decisions and actions are also examined to understand how events in the Islamic world influenced British decisions within the empire and for protection of the empire. The phrase *Britain in the Islamic World* might give the impression that one nation is comparable to an entire religion that encapsulates a large portion of the globe. It is not. The attempt here is to provide some analysis to the impact Britain, its people, and its empire had on the region and to examine Islam's impact on Britain. The phrase "Islamic World" is intentionally vague but it should not be mistaken for lack of understanding of what it means to be a Muslim in Egypt, Iran, India, or anywhere else. It is merely a signifier for a region in the world that encompasses many nationalities and covers multiple continents. It should not be mistaken for lack of understanding of the role national identity plays in determining the actions, reactions, and experiences of individual Muslim's in different regions of the world.

The book is organized thematically to allow readers to gain an understanding of how Britain's involvement in the Islamic world developed and transformed over time. Its goal is to contribute to the understanding of British influence on the Islamic world and the Islamic worlds influence on Britain. The focus is meant to provide readers a view of the numerous ways Britain and Muslims have influenced each other over time. In this context, it is essential to recognize that influence is not always positive. With chapters that range in subject from the British view of Muslims and Islam in general in the twelfth century, to British policy toward the Ottoman Empire, to colonial legislation of midwifery and the limitation of health care to Palestinians, to British management of their encounter with Islam, this volume provides a view of how Britain as a nation and as a people interacted with the Islamic world.

British involvement can be separated into three phases: Discovery, Colonization and Decolonization, and post-Empire. Because perceptions of Islam influenced British decisions, this book begins by examining how the image of Islam in the eighth and ninth centuries influenced British rule as far east as India. It also analyzes the role of trade in developing this image of Islam in the British public and governmental mind. It will address British and Ottoman problems that led to Britain expanding its imperial hold on the region and tackle the tricky issues of colonial rule and how the British Government used religion as a means to control the Muslim populations. Because British imperial rule left a lasting effect on the Islamic world, this book will also address the developments that have led to many contemporary issues. However, it does not discuss present-day matters. The hope is that with an understanding of the past, readers can make sense of the events of the present.

The British view of Islam was, and is, ever-evolving, as Andrew Magnusson and Alistair Maer note in the opening two chapters. This evolving view is due in large part to the myriad of ways that the British people interacted with Muslims from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries. Conor Meleady further develops this view by demonstrating how the incorporation of the Shi'a minority into the British system fueled the Sunni-Shi'a divide. The importance of the connections of individual Britons and Muslims driving much of the conversation is not lost on the other authors. Elizabeth Brownson and Warren Dockter both make a case for understanding how policy targeted at minority groups create hardships and fostered a sense of rebellion in contradiction to the desired outcome of a benign Britain.

Derek Blakeley turns the tables slightly with his focus on the influence of a small group of determined people far from the corridors of power in London. The infamous "Mad Mullah's" brand of Islam was, to the British, foreign to Somalis and therefore dangerous to Somali society. In this case, the influence of Mullah Muhammad Abdullah Hassan was felt by the tribes in British Somaliland, and the rest of the British Empire, particularly India as resources were gathered to fight what were considered fanatical forces. Stefanie Wichhart delves into British attempts at creating messages directed at influencing its subjects in the Islamic world, as well as those Muslims living outside the empire, are an important if not overlooked piece of interaction between groups. Juliette Desplat also tackles this theme as she explores how British occupation shaped of national identity in Egypt and Iraq. Justin Quinn Olmstead

and James Tallon suggest that the British treatment of the Ottoman Empire during the era of the First World War helped define the end of the Ottoman era and the nature of modern Turkey.

By 1919, the British Empire would consist of more Muslim subjects than any other as the empire expanded to include not just India and Malaya but the Middle East too. Britain's hold on its empire was weakening and, as Pippa Catterall points out, policymakers attempt to manage their encounters with Islam as a religion and the Muslim subject is an existential crisis that many Britons are still coming to grips with.

These chapters, organized in chronological order, explore the breadth of the British involvement in the Islamic world. Each one aiming to provide a diversity of ideas that critically investigate the role Britain the country, and its citizens had in the development of the Islamic world, is unique precisely because of the different approaches taken by the authors. Where the timeline of the chapters overlaps, we hope that the reader will understand that events, people, and ideas do not stand alone—they are intertwined. This book does not purport to be the final word on Britain's role in the Islamic world. What it hopes to do is provide readers with a fresh view of how the encounters between the British people and Muslims shaped the world and their relationship in it. By understanding the trajectory events took, how people learned of and thought of each other over time, it is possible to formulate an appreciation of just how vital interaction is to be accepting.

Winfield, KS, USA
January 2019

Justin Quinn Olmstead

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