

France and Islam: Introduction

Patricia M. E. Lorcin and Paula Sanders

Recent global events have focused attention on the Islamic world and encouraged the resurgence of the unfortunate stereotypes of Muslims as fanatical and Islam as a religion with a proselytizing zeal structured by the jihad, or holy war.¹ But many of the historical connections that the juxtaposition of France and Islam conjure up—the Crusades, orientalism, or the postcolonial “banlieues” and immigrant ghettos—are also associated with France initiating or participating in conflict and violence, be it military, political, social, or cultural. France’s relations with Islam have always been difficult, at times hostile, at others more conciliatory, but a historiographical preoccupation with the most confrontational dimensions of the relationship obscures its complexity and diminishes the ambiguous roles of the players involved.

The choice of the terms *France* and *Islam* to describe what follows is, of course, a conceptual anomaly: France signifying a state or nation, Islam a religion. Even if at an earlier stage of their relationship France, as a major Catholic country, had religious connotations, over time the significance of the term has shifted from Christian state to secular nation, whereas Islam has remained for the West a signifier of religion. Retaining these two terms, in spite of the evolution of their linguistic and cultural significance, is thus emblematic of the West’s present-

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¹ See, e.g., René Marchand, *France en danger d’Islam: Entre djihad et reconquista* (Lausanne, 2003).

French Historical Studies, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Summer 2007) DOI 10.1215/00161071-2007-001
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day unarticulated discourse on Islamic countries as incorrigibly other, whatever else its political, economic, or diplomatic enunciations may be. In its most overt form such a discourse has become part of the “clash of civilizations” theory, which, as an extension of the preoccupation with violence and conflict, obfuscates more than it illuminates.²

The historiography of France’s early relations with the Islamic world has also had proponents of the deleterious impact of Islam. The posthumous publication of Henri Pirenne’s *Mohammed and Charlemagne* in 1939 presented a thesis, still debated today, that it was not the Germanic tribes but the advance of Islam and the eventual control of the Mediterranean by Islamic states that disrupted trade and urban life in the ancient world and led to the West’s decline during the Middle Ages.³ It is of note that his book appeared nine years after the centenary celebrations of the conquest of Algeria, which had long been justified as a reclaiming of the region by France for the Western tradition. French historiography of North Africa during the colonial period emphasized the negative impact of Islam on the region by exaggerating the erasure of the culture of classical antiquity that occurred after the Arab conquests of the seventh and eleventh centuries. More recently, scholars have examined the art, culture, and intellectual activities of these early periods and looked at their continuities rather than their discontinuities with late antiquity, thus complicating the binaries of Christianity and Islam and then blurring some of the boundaries between East and West.⁴ To be sure, much of this literature has focused on the Iberian Peninsula.⁵ This has highlighted either the exchanges that occurred between Islam and the West and, in our case, France, or the role that Islamic translations of classical texts played in their recovery for the West.⁶

Although scholarly literature documenting France’s connections to the Islamic world has explored discrete historical eras, William Wat-

² Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22–49. For a broad discussion of the debates over the representation of the Middle East and Islam, see Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge, 2004).

³ Henri Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (Mineola, NY, 2001).

⁴ Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne, and the Origins of Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1983).

⁵ See Barbara Weissberger, ed., “Interrogating Iberian Frontiers,” special issue, *Medieval Encounters* 12, no. 3 (2006).

⁶ See the discussion of the influence of Arabic songs on Troubadour poetry and, in the case of France, of William IX of Aquitaine in Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia, 1990). On religious connections or translations of texts, see Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam (1000–1500)*, trans. Graham Robert Edwards (Ithaca, NY, 2002); and Marie Thérèse d’Alverny, *La connaissance de l’Islam dans l’occident médiéval*, ed. Charles Burnett (Aldershot, U.K., 1994).

son's recent overview, *Tricolor and Crescent*, provides a useful introduction by tracing fourteen centuries of Franco-Islamic relations.⁷ Unlike Russia, Italy, and Spain, which also had long-term connections with the Islamic world, France was never occupied by Muslims; rather, it was the other way around. This difference has had a significant bearing on the historiography of the relationship insofar as it has encouraged scholars to concentrate on periods during which French activity in Muslim lands was at its most intense: the Crusades in the medieval period, the Barbary Pirates in the early modern period, and the colonies and imperial quests of the modern period.⁸ The significant exception concerns French alliances and diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Porte, often to facilitate trade relations.⁹

The historiography of Franco-Islamic relations in the modern period is more extensive due, in large part, to the recent interest in France's overseas empire and its postcolonial legacies. With regard to the colonial territories, France's sociopolitical reactions to Islam and the sociojuridical measures of the colonial state to contain and control its Muslim populations form much of this literature.¹⁰ The geographic specializations of the history profession often work against the sort of interdisciplinarity that is useful when dealing with the multiculturalism that resulted from the exchanges between France and the Islamic world. Yet historians of Islamic countries can greatly enhance our understanding of the relationship, as Elizabeth Thompson and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi have demonstrated for the modern period, Thompson in her prizewinning book on the French in Syria and Tavakoli-Targhi in his research on Iranian knowledge of England and France in the

⁷ William E. Watson emphasizes three key periods in the development of Franco-Islamic relations: the eighth and ninth centuries, when the French conquered Muslim armies in France and Spain; the era of the Crusades; and the nineteenth century, with Napoléon's foray into Egypt and the conquest of Algeria (*Tricolor and Crescent: France and the Islamic World* [Westport, CT, 2003]). For a twentieth-century focus, see Pascal le Pautremat, *La politique musulmane de la France au XX^e siècle: De l'Hexagone aux terres d'Islam; Espoirs, réussites, échecs* (Paris, 2003).

⁸ For the medieval and early modern periods, see, e.g., Daniel W. Weiss and Lisa Mahoney, eds., *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades* (Baltimore, 2004); Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World around It* (London, 2004); and Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge, 1999), esp. chap. 5, "European Sources on Ottoman History: The Travellers," an astute discussion of how to assess and deal with bias.

⁹ Fatma Muge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999). See also L. Carl Brown and Matthew S. Gordon, eds., *Franco-Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon* (Beirut, 1996).

¹⁰ Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960* (Cambridge, 1988); Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London, 1995); David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania* (Athens, OH, 2000); Charles-Robert Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France, 1871–1919* (Saint-Denis, 2005); Rebecca Anne Shereikis, "Customized Courts: French Colonial Legal Institutions in Kayes, French Soudan, c. 1880–c. 1913 (Mali)" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2003).

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹¹ In addition, Arabic and Persian texts are increasingly available to scholars in translation and promise to add considerably to our understanding of Muslim and Middle Eastern perceptions of France.¹²

Interest in postcolonial developments has tended to center either on the Muslims in France and the so-called immigrant problem or on the international ramifications of *Francophonie* and, more specifically, its Maghrebi component. Interest in both has been interdisciplinary, with political scientists and anthropologists as interested in the former as historians, and literary scholars closely associated with the latter.¹³ *Francophonie* is, of course, essentially a cultural movement with its emphasis on language, and literary scholars and theorists have informed the methodological structure around which the movement took shape and then developed into the broader framework of cultural studies.¹⁴ Unlike subaltern studies, which was first conceived to bring agency to colonial subjects, the Francophone movement was launched in the 1950s by Habib Bourgiba (1903–2000) and Léopold Senghor (1906–2001) to encourage economic cooperation among Francophone countries, to lay claim to a colonial-postcolonial hybridity of French language and culture, and to ensure an acknowledgment that their richness and development extended well beyond the Hexagon.¹⁵ From a scholarly

¹¹ See, e.g., Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens, Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York, 2000); and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York, 2001).

¹² See, e.g., Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Tahtāwī, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831)*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (London, 2004); Susan Gilson Miller, ed. and trans., *Disorienting Encounters: Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France, 1845–1846: The Voyage of Muḥammad Ṣaffār* (Berkeley, CA, 1992); Mirza Sheikh I'tesamuddin, *The Wonders of Vilayet: Being the Memoir, Originally in Persian, of a Visit to France and Britain*, trans. Kaiser Haq (Leeds, 2001); and M. Nasser Deyhim, trans., *An Iranian in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Travel Diaries of Hāj Sayyāh (1859–1877)* (Bethesda, MD, 1999).

¹³ See Jocelyne Cesari, *Etre musulman en France aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1997); Cesari, *Musulmans et républicains: Les jeunes, l'islam et la France* (Brussels, 1998); Jacques Simon, *L'immigration algérienne en France de 1962 à l'indépendance* (Paris, 2002); Abderahmen Moumen, *Les Français musulmans en Vaucluse, 1962–1991: Installation et difficultés d'intégration d'une communauté de repatriés d'Algérie* (Paris, 2003); Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington, IN, 2004); Nancy Venel, *Musulmans et citoyens* (Paris, 2004); Ruby Bird, *France versus Islam: Une simple histoire d'électorat* (Paris, 2004); Joel S. Fetzer and J. Christopher Soper, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany* (Cambridge, 2004); Richard Derderian, *North Africans in Contemporary France, Becoming Visible* (London, 2004); and Stephen Michael Croucher, "Looking beyond the Hijab: An Analysis of Muslim Adaptation to French Culture" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2006).

¹⁴ Alec Hargreaves, *Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London, 1995); Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney, eds., *Post-colonial Cultures in France* (London, 1997); Jean-Loup Amselle and Jane Marie Todd, eds., *Affirmative Exclusion: Cultural Pluralism and the Rule of Custom in France* (Ithaca, NY, 2003); Tyler Stovall and George van den Abbeele, *French Civilization and Its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race* (New York, 2003); Alec Hargreaves, ed., *Memory, Empire, and Postcolonialism: Legacies of French Colonialism* (New York, 2005); Patricia M. E. Lorcin, ed., *Algeria and France, 1800–2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* (New York, 2006).

¹⁵ The term was first coined by the French geographer Onésime Réclus in the 1880s to describe the community of French-speaking territories.

point of view, its early linguistic preoccupations have given way to a diverse field of study that is as much about writing the subaltern back into history as it is about language and culture. Most important, from a methodological point of view, it has underscored the way in which interdisciplinarity can enhance our understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of society at any given time.

In line with the two preceding special issues of *French Historical Studies*, “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on French History and Literature” and “Mobility in French History,” one of our aims in producing this collection is to emphasize an interdisciplinary approach. Unlike those two issues, in which interdisciplinarity was essentially across French specialist fields, we have extended the interdisciplinary range to include specialists of the Islamic world, whose ability to use Arabic or Ottoman sources in addition to French ones provides a wider vision of the events they describe. The limitation of a special issue has, of necessity, meant that the articles included can only suggest the methodological and analytic ramifications that such an examination of France and Islam has taken. It may surprise some readers that the Crusades and the Napoleonic foray into Egypt and the Levant are not represented. For both episodes the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach that we hope to highlight in this issue is already well established.¹⁶

Marianna Shreve Simpson’s article, with which the issue begins, expands recent scholarly interest in cultural exchange and in particular in gift giving by focusing on the possible influence of Capetian illuminated manuscripts on Il-Khanid culture of the thirteenth century. The arts of the book flourished under the Il-Khanids, a Muslim Mongol successor state in Iran, but this aspect of Islamic history and art history has received considerably less attention than the illustrated books and the paintings of the Safavids. Art historians have long recognized the cultural impact of the Chinese tradition of the illustrated scroll on Il-Khanid illustrated books, but they have not yet discussed possible artistic influences from the West.¹⁷ Looking back from the famous gift of the Morgan Picture Bible to the Safavid Shah ‘Abbas, Simpson proposes that diplomatic gift giving created an avenue through which French book illustration ultimately made an impact on Il-Khanid art. Simpson’s piece invites us to imagine how we might build a contextual

¹⁶ See, e.g., Irene Bierman, ed., *Napoleon in Egypt* (Reading, 2003); Henry Laurens, *Les origines intellectuelles de l’expédition d’Égypte: L’orientalisme islamisant en France (1698–1798)* (Istanbul, 1987); Caroline Gaultier-Kurhan, *Mehemet Ali et la France, 1805–1849: Histoire singulière du Napoléon de l’orient* (Paris, 2005); and Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism, 1789–1836* (Princeton, NJ, 1998).

¹⁷ See Sheila S. Blair, “The Development of the Illustrated Book in Iran,” *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 266–74.

case for the cultural reception of foreign motifs and symbols in the absence of direct evidence.

Direct evidence is not lacking, however, for the Ottoman period. The articles by Pascale Barthe and Christine Isom-Verhaaren demonstrate how close readings of underused sources allow, in Barthe's case, for a nuanced understanding of conventional images of Islam and, in Isom-Verhaaren's case, for a corrective. Barthe's careful analysis of a little-known French document penned by Jacques de Bourbon, a witness of the Ottoman conquest of Rhodes, throws light on France's policies toward the Ottomans in the early sixteenth century. Although Bourbon reiterates the contemporary association of Islam, and in this case the Ottomans and their leader, with the "devil," Barthe argues that his stance was much more nuanced. She suggests that Bourbon used this demonic image as an introductory palliative to what in fact contained a critique of the divisiveness in Christendom and the perfidy of certain of its followers. As the chronicle progresses, Süleyman, far from emerging as a demon, is presented as humane and merciful, in contrast to the perfidious Knight Hospitaller, Andrea d'Amaral. Published in late 1525, Bourbon's *Oppugnation* coincides with the realignment of French politics evidenced by a rapprochement with the Ottomans.

The relationship between France and the Ottomans is picked up by Isom-Verhaaren, who makes use of Ottoman and French sixteenth-century chronicles and texts to counteract the Hapsburg view of the Franco-Ottoman alliance.¹⁸ She argues that Hapsburg versions, which are still evident in present-day historiography, are essentially propaganda and therefore inaccurate. Focusing on the presence of the Ottoman fleet at Toulon during the winter of 1543–44, she suggests that whereas the Hapsburg interpretation emphasized the conflictual relationship between Europe and Islam and stressed Islam's purported unreliability, Ottoman and French sources reveal a complex relationship in which economic, political, and societal factors played an important role in the development and outcome of the campaign.

Algeria was the most important of France's Islamic territories, and a special issue on France's relationship with Islam would be incomplete without a mention of some aspect of it. Throughout the nineteenth century French attempts to impose their rule on the Maghreb met with resistance.¹⁹ In Algeria, Abd-al-Qadir waged a "holy war"

¹⁸ See Faroqhi, *Ottoman Empire*, 144–48.

¹⁹ See Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint; Muslim Notables Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (Berkeley, CA, 1994); Clancy-Smith, "Saints, Mahdis, and Arms: Religion and Resistance in Nineteenth-Century North Africa," in *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, ed. Edmund Burke III and Ira M. Lapidus (Berkeley, CA, 1988), 60–80; and Raphael

against French incursions for well over a decade, and even when the French considered “pacification” complete, after they had finally overrun Kabylia in 1857, revolts of varying intensity continued. In spite of a minority of Islamophile officers, the military regime that remained in place until 1870 was wary of Islam and in particular its Sufi brotherhoods. The colonial establishment, whose members misunderstood many aspects of Islam, kept the Sufi orders under close scrutiny, since it considered them a threat to security. The orders were inaccessible to non-Muslims and therefore miscategorized as “secret societies” that were potentially subversive. George R. Trumbull IV’s article focuses on attitudes toward one of those orders, the ‘Issawa, during the early years of civilian administration in the colony.²⁰ The advent and consolidation of the Third Republic coincided with the imposition of civilian rule in Algeria, when questions of secularization, education, and national identity that preoccupied the metropole were reflected in different ways in the colony. Trumbull highlights these connections by showing how political anxieties in the colonies were linked to religious debates in the metropole. His reading of ethnographic texts on the ‘Issawa goes beyond an analysis of their political and social implications to develop the links between scholarship and tourism. The transformation of the ‘Issawa into a tourist spectacle to “domesticate” and render them politically innocuous was, of course, an indication of a shift from the anxieties of a military regime about security to the preoccupations of a civilian regime with commercialism and capitalist ventures, coupled with more diverse ways of marginalizing Muslims.

Napoléon’s unsuccessful Syrian campaign was the first French attempt to gain a foothold in the area since the Crusades.²¹ Although France did not achieve its ends militarily, it managed to extend its cultural and economic influence into Ottoman territories throughout the nineteenth century, finally laying claim to Syria and Lebanon when the Ottoman Empire was carved up after World War I. In spite of the turbulence of the region in the second half of the twentieth century, historians of the “new” French imperial and colonial history have engaged far less with issues relating to the Middle East mandates than with those of French-controlled territories in Africa and Asia. It has been left to scholars of the Middle East or other imperialisms to tease out the political, economic, and cultural links between France and its

Danziger, *Abd-al-Qadir and the Algerians: Resistance to the French and Internal Consolidation* (New York, 1977).

²⁰ Other orders in Algeria were the Tidjaniyya, the Qadiriyya, and the Rahmaniyya.

²¹ Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh, 1966).

mandates.²² Although much of this literature is concerned with nationalist responses to French occupation, recently scholars have extended their scope to include analyses of gender, modernity, and cultural exchange.²³ Jennifer M. Dueck's article on scouting and youth culture in Lebanon in the interwar period underscores the ambiguities surrounding French efforts to impose their culture in occupied territories. If scouting was meant to expand French influence politically and culturally in the area, its rapid appropriation by Lebanese youth groups coupled with French "minority policies" created a potentially volatile situation that proved politically problematic for the colonial authorities. In her final paragraph Dueck asks her readers whether French interactions with Muslim youths in Lebanon conform to a distrustful vision of Islam. It is a thread that runs through most of the articles in this issue, namely, when, where, why, and to what degree were relations between the French and their Islamic interlocutors shaped by confidence or mistrust?

The predisposition to mistrust Muslims and to portray them negatively is the product of more than a millennium of Christian hostility to Islam.²⁴ The legacy of the Crusades was to encourage the emergence of a negative image of Islam that has been resuscitated at intervals to politically expedient ends. The articles in this issue all, in different ways, seek to move beyond these conventional images of Islam and to raise questions also about the historiographies that have relied on them. Bringing together historians of France and the Islamic world is an essential part of the historical reconfiguration of the connections between the two.

²² See, e.g., Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945* (Princeton, NJ, 1987); Nadine Méouchy, *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective* (Boston, 2004); Kais Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate* (London, 2003); and D. K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East* (Oxford, 2006).

²³ See, e.g., Kenneth L. Brown, ed., *État, ville et mouvements sociaux au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient* (Paris, 1986); Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*; and Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).

²⁴ See Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford, 1993); and John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York, 2002).