Jihad in World War One

Studies on the Ottoman Jihad on the Centenary of Snouck Hurgronje's "Holy War Made in Germany"

Dutch scholar Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje published a book in World War I, The Holy War "Made in Germany" that blamed the German cofounder of modern Islamic studies, Carl Heinrich Becker, for World War I's German-Ottoman jihad. A century later, contributors to this multi-author volume confirm his point.

That jihad attempted to mobilize Muslims against Europe's colonies even though this represented a genocidal threat to non-Muslim minorities living in Muslim ruled areas. The kaiser and his Islamic scholars had discussed this problem since 1908 but saw no way to stop the deadly side effects against the Armenians and other minorities, such as the Jews. This was no regional jihad, like that against the Ottomans and British in Sudan in 1881, or local jihads against Russians in Iran in 1910, or Italians in Tripolitania in 1911; it was a full-bore interfaith world war coalition.

Among the most important chapters is that by M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, who writes of a double jihad: the Ottoman global jihad for the Sunnis and the kaiser, and the regional Shiite jihad beyond Iraq to defend Istanbul's provinces. Critical to these, I add, was the Egyptian Sunni Abd al-Malik Hamza, who edited the first Arab "theory of Islamism," نظرية الإسلامية, in 1916.

Hamza edited his 1916 November “theory of Islamism” in German, Berlin, and Arabic in Istanbul

Hanioğlu names a dozen Shiites who issued jihad fatwas against the Allies, among them Mustafa al-Kashani. Even earlier, in Iran in 1915, as-Sayyid Hibat ad-Din Muhammad ash-Shahrastani issued a jihad fatwa. That German scholars were behind it is clear: Helmut Ritter of the Sixth Army in Baghdad translated it from Persian to German; Becker conveyed it to Berlin where Martin Hartmann and Carl Brockelmann checked the translation, the Berlin journal Die Welt des Islams printed it and Max von Oppenheim widely circulated it by his Mideastern news organization also in Europe.

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Jihad and Islam in World War I adds greatly to a new area of research.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz