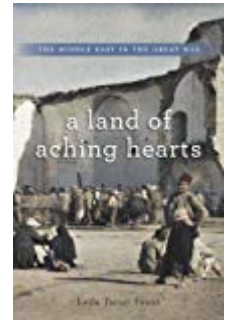


Leila Tarazi Fawaz. *A Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014. xiv + 384 pages \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-73549-1.



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The centenary of the First World War has seen renewed public and academic interest in the conflict and its consequences. This is particularly true of the war in the Middle East, which ushered in a century of upheaval in the region that continues today. In addition to a variety of specialist studies of specific armies, campaigns, and individuals, the past year has seen the publication of three surveys of the war in the Middle East, by Eugene Rogan, Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, and Leila Tarazi Fawaz. While Rogan and Ulrichsen offer analytical narratives of the conflict, Fawaz, the Issam M. Fares Professor of Lebanese and Eastern Mediterranean Studies at Tufts University, takes a different approach. Recounting the experiences of civilians as well as ordinary soldiers on both sides of the conflict, she seeks “to bring to life the social history of those who endured the Great War” (p. x).

The structure of the book is largely thematic. The first chapter sets the stage for the conflict by painting a dynamic picture of the Middle East in the early twentieth century. Fawaz shows how Ot-

toman reforms and European investment contributed to economic development and social change as well as labor and political unrest in the years prior to the war. The second chapter provides a succinct overview of the campaigns that took place in the Middle East from the perspective of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to relating relatively familiar events at Gallipoli, and in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Palestine, Fawaz recounts more obscure operations in the Caucasus and Persia.

The rest of the book explores the impact of the conflict on civilians and soldiers alike. In the third chapter, Fawaz discusses the human tragedy that unfolded due to conscription, mass deportations, famine, and disease throughout the region. The following chapter illustrates how a variety of entrepreneurs managed to survive and even profit in the midst of catastrophe. Fawaz then examines the experience of Ottoman soldiers, documenting the inadequacy of the logistical system that left them without adequate rations, clothing, and medical care. Perhaps not surprisingly given

the conditions under which they served, Ottoman soldiers deserted with such frequency that military authorities had to issue a general amnesty in the summer of 1918. A subsequent chapter discusses the role of South Asians in the conflict in the Middle East. Fawaz examines the motivations of Indian, Afghan, and Nepalese soldiers who fought in Britain's Indian army, as well as the religious, political, and domestic considerations that undermined their commitment to serve against the Ottomans. The final chapter, entitled "Cooperation and Disaffection," discusses the way in which the war "reshuffled the decks of identity," as burgeoning national sentiment and prolonged suffering fueled resentment toward Ottoman and British rulers and increased ethnic and sectarian tensions (p. 237). Fawaz concludes by examining the remembrance of the First World War in Middle East, noting that its exorbitant costs—perhaps higher than in any other theater—combined with the turmoil that followed, left bitter memories among the people of the region. Over time, however, monuments, popular celebrations, and literature have emerged to commemorate the conflict.

This is by no means an exhaustive history of the First World War in the Middle East. Readers unfamiliar with the multiple military campaigns that took place in the region may find themselves continually returning to the brief overview of events in the second chapter in order to understand the context of the discussion in the chapters that follow. Those seeking an understanding of the causes and conduct of the war in the region might consider starting with one of the other recently published surveys by Ulrichsen or Rogan. That said, the book succeeds in its aim of providing a "tribute to the everyday heroes who faced adversity as best they could" (p. 2).

Drawing on a diverse range of sources in several languages, including recent scholarship, as well as memoirs, archival documents, and literature, Fawaz sheds light on the experiences of millions of soldiers and civilians affected by the con-

flict, the vast majority of whom left behind no written records. Her account is replete with insights into the inner workings of the Ottoman and Indian armies, as well as such events as the Armenian genocide. Fawaz does not discuss the fate of the Armenians in extensive detail, but she does point out that the Ottomans made no effort to distinguish between combatants and civilians, or between those guilty and innocent of aiding the Russian army. At the same time, her account demonstrates that Armenians survived and even thrived in Lebanon and Jerusalem during the war. This is consistent with the theme of individual resiliency running through the book.

Overall, however, the principal contribution of Fawaz's study is its illumination of the immense tragedy that unfolded within the Ottoman Empire. While the author does not draw specific causal links between the First World War and the conflicts that ensued throughout the region over the next century, its impact is difficult to deny. *A Land of Aching Hearts* is therefore recommended not only to readers interested in the First World War but also to those seeking to understand the historical roots of current tensions throughout the Middle East.

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