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# Perceptions and realities of the Mediterranean East: French soldiers and the Macedonian Campaign of the First World War

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## ABSTRACT

*The historiography investigating the fate of the 300,000 French and colonial soldiers who served in Macedonia during the First World War remains incomplete. This article offers an analysis focusing on the cultural discovery of the 'Mediterranean East' by the French soldiers who served in Macedonia. It utilises the literature produced by the French personnel to define the differences between their imagined representations of the East, and the reality they encountered once they landed in Salonica. It also highlights the Orientalist influence exerted over the minds of many Frenchmen who sailed to an East that remained profoundly unknown.*

## Introduction

On 14 November 1916, at 2 pm, during the joint-Franco-Serb offensive, which recaptured the Bulgarian-held city of Monastir, a 21-year-old sergeant of the 175 *Régiment d'Infanterie* (RI) named Jean Leymonnerie, fell severely wounded in no-man's-land between the Bulgarian and French lines.<sup>1</sup> Leymonnerie was hit in the knee by the

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<sup>1</sup>Until the First Balkan War, the Ottomans controlled Monastir (today Bitola) which was captured by the Serbian First Army on 19 November 1912. Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913. Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 48-52. During World War I, Bulgaro-German forces occupied Monastir on 5 December 1915. *Les armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre* (AFGG), tome 8, Vol. 1, appendix 909, telegram of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the East General Maurice Sarrail, Salonica, 11 December 1915 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1927), p. 150. The Bulgarians occupied the city for less than a year, when it was reconquered by Franco-Serbian troops on 19 November 1916. Gérard Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient: (octobre 1915 - novembre 1918)* (Paris: Economica, 2003), p. 99.

fragment of a Bulgarian 150 mm shell. Forgotten on the battlefield, he spent the next two days feverish, thirsty, and scared of dying far from his native Périgord. During the next two days, Bulgarian soldiers robbed Leymonnerie of his jacket, money, and his watch. Despite his rapidly deteriorating medical condition, the *Boulgres* did not finish him off and let him live to die another day.<sup>2</sup> It was only on 16 November 1916, at 10 am, that four *Tirailleurs sénégalais* of the 56 *Régiment d'infanterie coloniale* (RIC) finally rescued Leymonnerie. These African soldiers fighting for the *Mère Patrie* carried Leymonnerie on a blanket, across the mountainous terrain of the Kenali Salient, back to the safety of French lines. On 18 November, Leymonnerie endured an operation at the evacuation hospital of Excissou, which resulted in the amputation, below the knee, of his left leg. From Excissou, Leymonnerie was then transported to Salonica, where he had previously arrived from France on 3 October 1916. Aboard the hospital ship *Le Sphinx*, Leymonnerie sailed across the Aegean and Mediterranean seas, to arrive finally in Toulon on 12 December. A few days later, he was sent in convalescence to the American Hospital at Nice. For Leymonnerie, the First World War was over, and despite (as he humorously professed) 'leaving one leg in the Orient,' he lived a good life. He married, had four children, and peacefully passed away in 1963 at the age of 68.<sup>3</sup> Leymonnerie was one of the 4,266,000 French soldiers who were wounded in the First World War and whose bodies were maimed by the violence of that unprecedented conflict. He was also one of 300,000 French and Colonial soldiers of the First World War who served in the Balkans, 50,000 of whom never returned to France or its colonies. Their individual experiences in the Mediterranean East in general, and Macedonia in particular, constitute the focal point of this study.

Leymonnerie's service, in 1915 in the Dardanelles, then in 1916 in Macedonia, provides a useful vantage point of the militarised encounters that occurred during the First World War. Moreover, the encounters that took place during the Macedonian Campaign epitomised a continuation of the French soldiery's collective memory and negotiation of the Mediterranean world where they fought for the glory of the *Tricolore*.<sup>4</sup> From the Revolutionary Wars and Napoleon Bonaparte's Expedition to

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<sup>2</sup>French soldiers fighting in Macedonia referred to their Bulgarian foes as *Boulgres* or *Bulg*.

<sup>3</sup>Information for this paragraph stems from chapter 7 of the memoir of Jean Leymonnerie, *Journal d'un Poilu sur le Front d'Orient*, ed. Yves Pourcher (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), pp. 228-257.

<sup>4</sup>The historiography of the Macedonian Campaign starts with *Les armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre* (AFGG), 107 Vols., tome 8, (3 vols.) *La campagne d'Orient: Dardanelles et Salonique* (Paris: Imprimeries nationales, 1927-34); Also, the British Official History of the Great War in the Balkans: Cyril Falls, *Military operations. Macedonia*, 2 vols., (London: H.M.S.O., 1933-1935); As well, Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika: The*

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Egypt in 1798, to the First World War and the *Armée d'Orient* which (under the command of General Maurice Sarrail) faced the Central Powers in Macedonia, these French soldiers encountered distinctive cultures, landscapes, and people, which they invariably compared to what they knew at home in the *Métropole*.<sup>5</sup> The soldiers, who carried the arms of the French Third Republic in the Mediterranean, observed these “foreign” societies with the eyes of Frenchmen, who principally viewed themselves as ‘the potent symbol of European civilization, and culture’.



**Figure 1:** Monastir during the First World War, (where Jean Leymonnerie was wounded during heavy fighting with the Bulgarians) – now Bitola in Macedonia.<sup>6</sup>

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*Macedonian Campaign 1915-1918* (London: André Deutsch, 1965); Also, Pierre Miquel, *Les Poilus d'Orient* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Max Schiavon, *Le Front d'Orient. Du désastre des Dardanelles à la victoire finale 1915-1918* (Paris: Tallandier, 2014); Jean-Yves Le Naour (ed.), *Front d'Orient: 1914-1919, les soldats oubliés* (Marseille: Éditions Gausson, 2016).

<sup>5</sup>General Maurice Sarrail was a divisive figure within the French Army high command, whose personality remained controversial during and after the war. See his memoirs, Maurice Sarrail, *Mon commandement en Orient (1916-1918)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1920). For a favorable biography, see Jan Karl Tanenbaum, *General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929: The French Army and Left-Wing Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1974).

<sup>6</sup><http://www.histoire-passy-montblanc.fr/histoire-de-passy/de-la-prehistoire-au-xxie-s/la-guerre-de-1914-1918/les-soldats-de-passy-en-1917/les-passerands-de-larmee-dorient-en-1917/> . Accessed 10 September 2019.



**Figure 2:** Transportation of wounded French soldiers, (on this occasion the men were placed on a precarious horseback stretcher) Monastir, 19 November 1916.<sup>7</sup>

This article offers a continuation of the works recently produced by Justin Fantauzzo and John Horne. It will explicitly investigate the gap between soldiers' perceptions of the Mediterranean East and the realities they faced while fighting in Macedonia between 1915 and 1918.<sup>8</sup> This article will first describe the origins of the French colonial mindset and recall previous military encounters where this ethos was formed. It will then study the cultural and geographic environment where the *Armée d'Orient* was deployed and will utilise a cultural lens to describe Macedonia as a European borderland. Finally, it will focus on the descriptions (replete with Colonial and Orientalist influences) of Salonica and Macedonia produced by French military personnel. In so doing, it suggests that there were three primary trends of conveying French cultural superiority. First, these Frenchmen held wildly conflicting opinions about Salonica, which indicates that there was no uniform pre-war French discourse about the area. Second, soldiers conveyed a pervasive sentiment of disillusionment toward cities, particularly regarding the filth and poverty they noted. Third, some Frenchmen exhibited a confident colonial outlook toward a region in which they saw the potential to implement the *mission civilisatrice* of France. These themes have been

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<sup>7</sup>[http://www.histoire-passy-montblanc.fr/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/7-cpa\\_monastir-transport-blesses.jpg](http://www.histoire-passy-montblanc.fr/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/7-cpa_monastir-transport-blesses.jpg). Accessed 10 September 2019.

<sup>8</sup>Justin Fantauzzo, 'Rise Phoenix-Like: British Soldiers, Civilization and the First World War in Greek Macedonia, 1915–1918', in John Horne and Joseph Clarke, (eds.), *Militarized Cultural Encounters in the Long Nineteenth Century. Making War, Mapping Europe* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 125-147; John Horne, 'A 'Civilizing Work?': The French Army in Macedonia, 1915–1918', in Horne and Clarke, (eds.), *Militarized Cultural Encounters*, pp. 319-349.

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displayed in iconographic documents, soldiers' diaries, periodicals, and memoirs of French veterans of the Macedonian Campaign.

### **Origins of the French Colonial Mindset in Macedonia**

French soldiers of the First World War who served in Macedonia followed in the footsteps of their Napoleonic War predecessors. Men like Antoine Bonnefons, Charles François, or Jean-Claude Vaxelaire, participated in the famous Expedition to Egypt (led by an ambitious General Bonaparte) and left multiple accounts of their "Eastern" journeys.<sup>9</sup> Of the Egyptian Expedition, it is noteworthy that during the Cairo revolt of 21 October 1798, French forces employed a high level of violence and repression against the insurgents who opposed them.<sup>10</sup> This systemic use of force was applied again during the conquest of Algeria in 1830, the 'pacification' of Morocco in the early 1900s, and finally during the Great Syrian Revolt between the two World Wars.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the long nineteenth century, the French Army waged war abroad and contributed to a cultural renaissance of the French Empire. Between 1830 and 1911, successive French governments acquired new territories across the world, which in size, ran second only to the British Empire. To conquer and administer such an enormous empire, French military power reached as far as Algeria, West Africa,

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<sup>9</sup>For the experience of French soldiers during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, Fergus Robson, 'French Soldiers and the Revolutionary Origins of the Colonial Mind', in Horne and Clarke, (eds.), *Militarized Cultural Encounters*, pp. 25-47.

<sup>10</sup>Regarding the violence employed by the Republican armies both in France and abroad, see Fergus Robson, 'Insurgent Identities, Destructive Discourse and Militarized Massacre: French Armies on the Warpath Against Insurgents in the Vendée, Italy and Egypt', in Brian Hughes and Fergus Robson (eds.), *Unconventional Warfare from Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 133-154.

<sup>11</sup>For the French 'takeover' of Morocco in the early 1900s, see William A. Hoisington Jr., *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Daniel Rivet, *Lyautey et l'institution du protectorat Français au Maroc, 1912 – 1925* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996); About the French military, socio-political, and cultural efforts to control the new French Mandate of Syria, Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005); Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Idir Ouahes, *Syria and Lebanon Under the French Mandate. Cultural Imperialism and the Workings of Empire* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2018).

Madagascar, and Indochina.<sup>12</sup> This onslaught of 'French Republican Imperialism' was marked by military conquests and forms of violence exerted against both regular and unconventional armed forces that attempted to resist French control; as well as against civilian populations. Algeria, from the early phase of the French conquest, (including the massacre of Dahra on 17 June 1845) to its bloody war of independence remained a primary example of French military violence perpetrated in colonial spaces.<sup>13</sup>

The First World War and its aftermath marked the zenith of French imperial aggrandisement.<sup>14</sup> Following the Paris Peace Treaty of 1919, France received Mandates in Africa and the Near East that were awarded by the newly established League of Nations. However, these new imperial domains (such as Lebanon and Syria) remained under French rule for a mere twenty-five years.<sup>15</sup> Like their precursors in previous centuries who had crossed the expanses of the Mediterranean and sailed to Egypt, Algeria, and Crimea, French soldiers of the First World War also served abroad and waged war in Africa, Italy, the Balkans, Southern Russia, and the Middle East. The global nature of the French war effort must be analysed within a distinct imperial dimension. Historians including but certainly not limited to Hew Strachan and John H. Morrow have demonstrated that the First World War was a global conflict that fitted within

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<sup>12</sup>For the *mission civilisatrice*, see Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup>For the violence employed by French arms in the early conquest of Algeria, see William Gallois, 'Dahra and the History of Violence in Early Colonial Algeria', in Martin Thomas (ed.), *The French Colonial Mind*, Vol. 2, *Violence, Military Encounters and Colonialism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), pp. 3-25; Chapter 3 of Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest* (London: Routledge, 1998); For the brutal end of French rule in Algeria, Martin Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Martin S. Alexander, Martin Evans and John F. Keiger (eds.), *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-62: Experiences, Images, Testimonies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

<sup>14</sup>For French Imperialism in the First World War era, Christopher M. Andrew and Alexander Sydney Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas: The Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981).

<sup>15</sup>For the British and French mandates see, Andrew J. Crozier, 'The Establishment of the Mandates System 1919-25: Some Problems Created by the Paris Peace Conference', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.14, Iss.3 (1979), pp. 483-513; For the French acquisition of the German Colonies in Africa see, Brian Digre, 'French Colonial Expansion at the Paris Peace Conference: The Partition of Togo and Cameroon', *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society*, 13/14 (1990), pp. 219-229; For the Mandates in the Middle East see, Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett (eds.), *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

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the context of imperialism.<sup>16</sup> In the *War to End All Wars*, the French Third Republic mobilized hundreds of thousands of men who came from both Metropolitan France and its vast empire.<sup>17</sup> This unprecedented mobilisation fitted in a conflict in which all belligerents fully committed to the war to achieve their expansionist objectives.<sup>18</sup> During the First World War, the French Army fought on multiple fronts. It dispatched large forces such as the *Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient* (CEO), which in 1915 saw action in the Dardanelles alongside British and Dominion troops.<sup>19</sup> Before the French withdrawal from the Dardanelles (on 3-8 January 1916), the first troops of the 2nd *Division d'infanterie* (DI) of the CEO under the command of General Maurice Bailloud disembarked in Salonica on 5 October 1915.<sup>20</sup> Those French soldiers, just like their Allied counterparts and German opponents, found themselves fighting in a distant land, away from the decisive Western Front. Moreover, those Western European soldiers were quartered among populations that they did not understand, nor genuinely

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<sup>16</sup>Hew Strachan, 'The First World War as a Global War', *First World War Studies*, 1, 1 (2010), pp. 3–14; John H. Morrow Jr., *The Great War: An Imperial History* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>17</sup>During World War I, the French Colonies produced an enormous effort to support the *Métropole*, see Marc Michel, *Les Africains et la Grande Guerre: l'appel à l'Afrique (1914-1918)* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2003); Mohamed Bekraoui, "Le Maroc et la Première Guerre mondiale: 1914-1920," PhD diss., (Université de Provence, 1987); Jacques Frémeaux, *Les colonies dans la Grande Guerre: combats et épreuves des peuples d'outre-mer* (Saint-Cloud: 14-18 Éditions, 2006); Kimloan Hill confirmed that 'Between 1915 and 1919, 48,922 Vietnamese soldiers and 48,254 Vietnamese workers were recruited to serve in France. Some recruits were sent to Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East, but the majority went to France'. Kimloan Hill, 'Sacrifices, Sex, Race: Vietnamese Experiences in the First World War', in Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 53.

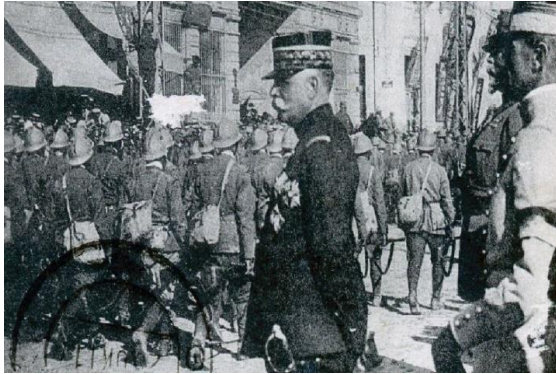
<sup>18</sup>For the effort provided by the French colonies, see Richard S. Fogarty, 'The French Empire', in Robert Gewarth and Erez Manela (eds.), *Empires at War, 1911-1923* (Oxford: University Press, 2014), pp. 109-129.

<sup>19</sup>About the French Expeditionary Corps in Gallipoli, George H. Cassar, *The French and the Dardanelles: A Study of Failure in the Conduct of War* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971); John Horne, 'A Colonial Expedition? French Soldiers' Experience at the Dardanelles', *War & Society*, 38, 4 (2019), pp. 286-304.

<sup>20</sup>General Maurice Bailloud commanded the *Corps Expéditionnaire d'Orient* (CEO) in the Dardanelles between 1 July and 4 October 1915, when the first French troops landed in Salonica. He was then replaced by Sarrail who became the new commander-in-chief of the *Armée d'Orient*. Bailloud's military record is held at the *Château de Vincennes* by the *Service historique de la Défense* (SHD), SHD 9 Yd 336. For the arrival of the first French troops in Salonica, see Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient*, p. 18; Horne, 'A Colonial Expedition,' p. 17.



appreciate, in a region, the Balkans, whose physical environment proved to be as harsh and unforgiving as the Western Front.



**Figure 3 :** General Maurice Sarrail looks at his soldiers walking through the streets of Salonica. Salonique, le général Sarrail regarde défilér ses Poilus. ©) Collection particulière.<sup>21</sup>

### **Macedonia as a European borderland**

On 12 October 1915, when General Maurice Sarrail disembarked at Salonica with the 114 *Brigade d'infanterie* (BI), he quickly found himself in a precarious situation. Sarrail was the commander of an army that existed only on paper. His mission orders were vague, and merely instructed him to rescue the Serbian Army, which had been forced to retreat by the vast concentric offensive conducted by Austro-German and Bulgarian forces.<sup>22</sup> In his mission orders, Sarrail was tasked mainly with covering the Vardar railroad which ensured communications with Serbia, and 'to give a helping hand to the Serbs'.<sup>23</sup> However, he was forbidden from taking the offensive against Bulgaria or participating in the combat operations then underway in Northern Serbia. In an article published shortly after the war, Sarrail wrote that he arrived 'Without any information,

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<sup>21</sup>Léna Korma, 'Se mobiliser pendant la Grande Guerre. Trois aspects de l'espionnage dans l'Armée d'Orient, 1915-1918', *14-18 Mission centenaire*, 23 June 2016 <https://www.centenaire.org/fr/espace-scientifique/societe/se-mobiliser-pendant-la-grande-guerre-trois-aspects-de-lespionnage-dans>. Accessed 20 April 2020.

<sup>22</sup>For the Central Powers joint offensive against Serbia see, Charles Fryer, *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997); and more recently, Richard L. DiNardo, *Invasion: The Conquest of Serbia, 1915* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015).

<sup>23</sup>General Sarrail's mission orders can be found in the French Army archives, SHD 7N 2168, ordre de mission n° 5776 – 9/11, 3 October 1915.

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without any official strategic direction, not knowing anything of the country, nothing of the people, nothing of the events that occurred since the beginning of the war'.<sup>24</sup>

If the commander-in-chief of the *Armées alliées d'Orient* was baffled by the lack of clarity of the orders he received from the *Grand Quartier Général* (GQG), one could forgive the lowest French private for not knowing much about Macedonia in general or Salonica in particular. The officially sanctioned designation of the *Armées alliées d'Orient* finds its origins in the name *Armée d'Orient* (Army of the East), which was given to the French Expeditionary Corps bound for the Balkans. As he accepted his command, Sarrail specifically insisted on this title. The reason can be traced back to two previous French Expeditionary Corps that fought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. General Bonaparte created the first 'Army of the Orient' during the Egyptian Expedition of 1798-1799, the second 'Army of the Orient' represented the French forces sent to the Crimean War of 1853-1856.<sup>25</sup>

Lastly, and as stated by Justin Fantauzzo and Robert L. Nelson, 'the specter of orientalism' was always present in the minds of Allied servicemen, German soldiers, as well as Frenchmen.<sup>26</sup> This 'orientalist state of mind' penetrated the consciousness of the French military personnel, the Allied contingents, as well as their German foes fighting on the other side of the wire with their Bulgarian allies.<sup>27</sup> French soldiers who

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<sup>24</sup>Maurice Sarrail, 'La Grèce vénéizeliste. Souvenirs vécus', *Revue de Paris*, 26, 6 (1919), p. 685.

<sup>25</sup>Fassy, *Le commandement français en Orient*, 7; About the French participation in the Crimean War, see Alain Gouttman, *La guerre de Crimée, 1853-1856. La première guerre moderne* (Paris: SPM, 1995); Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2010).

<sup>26</sup>Justin Fantauzzo and Robert L. Nelson, 'Expeditionary Forces in the Shatterzone: German, British and French Soldiers on the Macedonian Front, 1915–1918 in Alan Beyerchen and Emre Sencer (eds.), *Expeditionary Forces in the First World War* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 149-176 & p. 150.

<sup>27</sup>For the British memory of the First World War in the Balkans see, Alan Wakefield and Simon Moody, *Under the Devil's Eye: The British Military Experience in Macedonia, 1915-18* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2011); for the Irish experience of the First World War in Southeast Europe, the 10 (Irish) Division was the only unit from Ireland to serve in Macedonia, the Dardanelles and the Middle East. Stephen Sandford, *Neither Unionist nor Nationalist: The 10th (Irish) Division in the Great War* (Sallins, Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2015); For the German soldier's experience in the Balkans see, the previously mentioned chapter by Fantauzzo and Nelson; also, Oliver Stein, 'Wer das nicht mitgemacht hat, glaubt es nicht.' Erfahrungen Deutscher Offiziere mit den Bulgarischen Verbündeten 1915-1918', in Jürgen Angelow (ed.), *Der Erste Weltkrieg auf*

set foot in Salonica, and Macedonia, characterised the region as 'on the fringes of Europe', a cultural and geographic space of which they possessed only minimal knowledge. Numerous British, Frenchmen, Germans, Irish, or Italians stationed in Albania, Greece, or Macedonia, widely accepted that 'the Balkans are the Ottoman legacy' in Continental Europe.<sup>28</sup> This connection to a declining empire made it a naturally inferior and impoverished section of the continent in their minds. As Maria Todorova argues, 'The Balkans are also a bridge between stages of growth, and this invokes labels such as semideveloped, semicolonial, semicivilized, semioriental'.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the French representations of Macedonia and the Balkans fit within an even more significant cultural and geographic construct: Eastern Europe. In *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Larry Wolff contended that 'Eastern Europe' was indeed a recent creation of the intellectuals of the *siècle des lumières*. Wolff wrote:

Voltaire's perspective on Europe from eighteenth-century Paris was altogether geographically different from that of Machiavelli in sixteenth-century Florence. It was Voltaire who led the way as the philosophes of the Enlightenment articulated and elaborated their own perspective on the continent, gazing from west to east, instead of from south to north. In doing so, they perpetrated a conceptual reorientation of Europe, which they bequeathed to us so that we now see Europe as they did.<sup>30</sup>

The Balkans were an integral part of this larger Eastern Europe, mainly within travellers' literature. Pre-war authors often depicted the region as possessing an aura of elemental barbarity and an inescapable 'Oriental' aspect. In 1908, in *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans*, which depicted the actions of Macedonian revolutionaries against Ottoman forces, American novelist Arthur D. Howden Smith wrote, 'The struggle of the Macedonian Bulgars, for liberty, was interesting, I think, because of its quaint setting, and its mingling of the barbaric colour of the East with the more sober tones of the West. Macedonia is the shadow of the Orient'.<sup>31</sup> Smith's lively prose might have contributed to improving the knowledge of an informed American readership, but in the early twentieth century, even for well-cultured British diplomats, serving in an

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*dem Balkan. Perspektiven der Forschung* (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft verlag, 2011), pp. 271-287.

<sup>28</sup>Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 12. For a detailed discussion of the foundations of a certain Western European conception of the Balkans, see Todorova's introduction.

<sup>29</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 16.

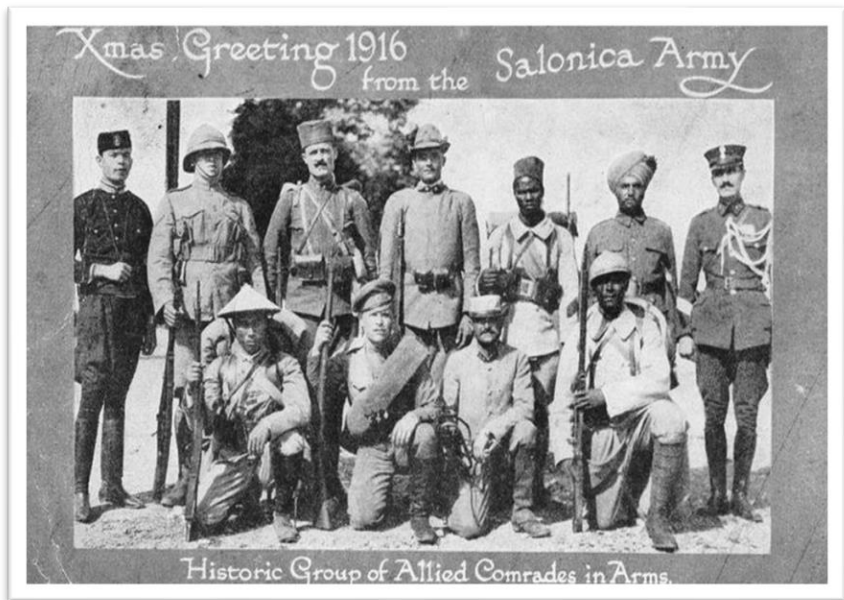
<sup>30</sup>Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>31</sup>Arthur D. Howden Smith, *Fighting the Turk in the Balkans. An American's Adventures with the Macedonian Revolutionists* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), p. v.

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embassy in southeast Europe (whether Belgrade or Sofia) seemed to be the purgatory of their careers. Mary Edith Durham, an experienced British anthropologist who toured Albania, Bulgaria, and Serbia, professed:

A Balkan legation is to an Englishman a spot which he hopes soon to quit for a more congenial atmosphere in another part of Europe. As for a Consul, he often found it wiser not to learn the local language, lest a knowledge of it should cause him to be kept for a lengthy period in some intolerable hole.<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 4:** This picture illustrates the ethnic diversity of the Allied contingent in Salonica. The Macedonian Campaign, 1915-1918 -, 'Historical Group of Allied Comrades in Arms.'<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Mary Edith Durham, *The Serajevo Crime* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1925), p. 10; About Miss Durham and her fascinating voyages in the Balkans, Marcus Tanner, *Albania's Mountain Queen: Edith Durham and the Balkans* (London: Tauris, 2014).

<sup>33</sup>© IWM (Q 67857). Imperial War Museum, London, UK.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205315079> . Accessed 10 September 2019.

### Conflicting opinions of Salonica

During the First World War, Durham's opinion was echoed by analogous comments from French personnel that served in Macedonia. On 4 October 1916 in a letter addressed to his parents, Jean Leymonnerie acknowledged:

Salonica is a rather curious city. We can see pretty much everything. The latest modern innovations mingle with the most primitive levels of civilization. The Turk runs alongside the Greek, the Annamite, the Negro or the European, and everybody seems to get on well. There are some cafés that have nothing to envy to the most comfortable ones that we have back home; but on the other hand, in the indigenous quarter, there are some shady bars where the population swarms, grows, and lives in disgusting filth.<sup>34</sup>

Like many of his compatriots, Leymonnerie was intrigued by the buoyant mix of cultures, races, religions, and languages that he witnessed, in a city which, for more than four centuries, belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Salonica possessed a cultural and racial diversity to which the French Army itself contributed a great deal with its diverse contingent of Colonial troops. In the last twenty years, historians have examined the multiple accounts left by the men who served in Macedonia and presented a more nuanced perspective of the sometimes-conflicting opinions that the *Poilus d'Orient* held toward the region where they served.<sup>35</sup>

It was only after the Balkan Wars, and the Treaty of Bucharest of August 1913, that Salonica was formally attached to Greece. When the first Allied troops disembarked, the city had not yet been completely 'Hellenised.' On 14 May 1913, in the aftermath of the Greek annexation, an Athenian officer, Hippocrates Papavasileiou, wrote to his wife the disgust that Salonica inspired in him: 'I am totally fed-up. I'd prefer a thousand times to be under canvas on some mountain than here in this gaudy city with all the tribes of Israel. I swear there is no less agreeable spot'.<sup>36</sup> On 19 May, he added, 'How can one like a city with this cosmopolitan society, nine-tenths of it [sic] Jews. It has

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<sup>34</sup>Leymonnerie, *Journal d'un Poilu sur le Front d'Orient*, p. 185.

<sup>35</sup>For works focusing on the experience of the *Poilus d'Orient*, see Francine Roussane – Saint Ramond, 'L'armée d'Orient dans la Grande Guerre: Une mémoire occultée?', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 192 (1998), pp. 25-43; François Cochet, 'L'armée d'Orient, des expériences combattantes loin de Verdun', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 81 (2010), pp. 91-103.

<sup>36</sup>Lyntia Tricha, *Hēmerologia kai grammata apo to metōpo: Valkanikoi polemoi, 1912-1913* (Athens: Hetaireia Hellenikou Logotechnikou kai Historikou Archeiou, 1993), pp. 307-310, quoted in Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430-1950* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 277.

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nothing Greek about it, nor European. It has nothing at all'.<sup>37</sup> Papavasileiou's tirade confirms not only his anti-semitism, but the fact that at the turn of the century, Salonica was largely a Jewish city. After their departure from Spain and Portugal in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Sephardic community had profoundly transformed Salonica and made it one of the largest centres of Jewish life in Europe. Mark Mazower explains that 'In the experience of the Sephardi, we see the astonishing capacity of refugees to make an unfamiliar city theirs. Through religious devotion and study, they turned Salonica into a 'new Jerusalem'.<sup>38</sup>

If Salonica's evident lack of Hellenic identity discomfited a Greek officer, it is not surprising that between 1915 and 1918, many French troops shared comparable xenophobic views, especially as following *l'affaire Dreyfus*, antisemitism in France was rampant. Papavasileiou's reaction highlights the ethnic make-up of the city after the Balkan Wars: 38% of Salonica's population was Jewish. Mazower states that 'That in the 1913 census, the overall population came to 157,889, of whom just under 40,000 were listed as Greeks, 45,867 as "Ottomans," in other words Muslims, and 61,439 as Jews'.<sup>39</sup> By comparison, in 1928, after the wholesale destruction caused by the Great Fire of 1917, a massive exchange of populations forced by the Greek-Turkish War of 1919-1922, and a vigorous campaign of Hellenization, the Greek community, then amounted to 75% of the 236,000 inhabitants of Salonica.<sup>40</sup> The French personnel in Salonica encountered a city that not only possessed a large Jewish population but also symbolised their Orientalist vision of the East.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, by the late nineteenth century, the French servicemen's cultural perception of the East had been shaped by the prominent stereotypes of Orientalist painters, as well as by the writings of Pierre Loti. These artistic and literary works generated lasting orientalist imagery of the Mediterranean world.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Tricha, *Heimerologia kai grammata apo to metōpo*, pp. 307-310.

<sup>38</sup>Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts*, p. 50.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 310; For the Great Fire of August 1917, see Alexandra Yerolympou, 'L'incendie de Salonique en août 1917. Fait divers ou "dégât collatéral?', in Yannis Mourellos (ed.), *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2005), pp. 251-260; Kiki Kafkoulas and Alexandra Yerolympou, 'Influences françaises dans la formation de l'urbanisme moderne en Grèce, 1914-1923', in Yannis Mourellos (ed.), *La France et la Grèce dans la Grande Guerre* (Thessaloniki: University of Thessaloniki, 1992), pp. 207-227.

<sup>41</sup>Regarding Orientalism, Said's work remains an inescapable reference, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>42</sup>Among the artists who forged an orientalist vista: Horace Vernet, *The Arab Tale-Teller* (1833); Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *L'Odalisque à l'esclave* (1839), *Le Bain Turc* (1862); Eugène Delacroix, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1833); Edouard

The following French soldiers' depictions reflected comparable tropes of discovering the Mediterranean East for the first time. Generally, the initial impressions of arriving in the Salonica Bay were positive, and many Frenchmen were impressed. On 5 October 1915, Ernest-Albert Stocanne who was a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) with the 17th *Régiment d'artillerie de campagne* (RAC) wrote,

At sunrise on 5 October 1915, we are arriving within sight of Salonica. The city grows the closest we come...The city is there spreading like an amphitheatre alongside the bay, and under the sun shows us its buildings with soft and varied colours, partially hidden by the greenery of the trees. Numerous white minarets are emerging. We remark a white tower on the quay, and in the old town, toward the hill, we notice the ramparts.<sup>43</sup>

An Engineer of the 1st *Régiment du génie* (RG) Gaston-Louis Giguel also remarked:

What a luxury! How many pleasures one can get in this town! *La Canebière* is eclipsed! Here are only cafés, ice-cream parlors popping from everywhere, and which are crowded by officers of all nations, of very chic women, of Navy officers, dressed all in white, of aviators, and automobile drivers in very elegant garb. A promenade on the quays leads to the *Tour Blanche* which is the most exquisite rendezvous place of all Salonicians, of Greeks, Turks, and Israelites. All of them are competing in elegance! In this city, one can get any type of pleasures, all the luxury of the Orient.<sup>44</sup>

Not all soldiers were as excited. Captain Constantin-Weyer, who first discovered Salonica on a rainy day, declared, "The minarets looked disorientated under the drizzle."<sup>45</sup> For the soldiers walking across the city to reach the Allied Camp of Zeitenlick, the march was an opportunity to observe Salonica more closely. Many of

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Debat-Ponsan, *Le Massage. Scène de hammam* (1883); Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Le Marché d'esclaves* (1866); For the writings that reinforced orientalism, see Pierre Loti, *Aziyade* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1877).

<sup>43</sup>Born in 1894 in Gentilly, Stocanne received the *Croix de Guerre* and the *Légion d'Honneur*, he fought in the Dardanelles and Macedonia. He was the last *Poilu d'Orient* and died in 1999, at the age of 105 years. Ernest-Albert Stocanne, *Souvenirs de guerre et de vie militaire*, in Association Nationale pour le Souvenir des Dardanelles et Fronts d'Orient, *Dardanelles, Orient, Levant, 1915-1921. Ce que les combattants ont écrit* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), p. 91.

<sup>44</sup>Gaston-Louis Giguel, *Dardanelles, Orient, Levant, 1915-1921*, p. 128.

<sup>45</sup>Maurice Constantin-Weyer, *P.C. de compagnie* (Paris: Les Éditions Rieder, 1930), pp. 38-39.

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these witnesses distinguished two sides. One side appeared, 'As a European city, with its high buildings, its streetcar lines, with the clattering of the street where we can find the military element outside ... A population, most of it, dressed in a European fashion'.<sup>46</sup> However, the other side was truly the 'Oriental half', that displeased the soldiers:

What a bewilderment when we touched the ground! The quays swarm with peoples of many races; all the languages can be heard. Opulence mixes with sordidness...We are crossing the neighborhood of refugees hosted in small Greek barracks. This is an appalling picture. In these filthy interiors, families are sleeping, higgledy-piggledy on these mean pallets. We can only see some sick faces ravaged by jaundice and smallpox. They are covered with disgusting rags and stay all day under the sun.<sup>47</sup>

For many French officers, the "Orient" that they enjoyed the most was the one which offered entirely Europeanised social and economic standards, comparable to those they knew in France. In many accounts, French soldiers voiced a recurrent feeling about Salonica, their disgust toward the squalid conditions of many neighbourhoods of the city, conditions which fell far below the French public hygiene standards to which they were accustomed. Altogether, these comments reveal the wide gap existing between their perceptions of what the "East" ought to be, and the realities that they uncovered once in Macedonia.

### **A Sentiment of Delusion**

Numerous French witnesses who recorded their impressions about Salonica were often urban dwellers who unmistakably took for reference the French cities they knew as their model of Western urbanism. They then compared Salonica to these French cities, and unsurprisingly, their descriptions of Salonica were mostly condescending. According to Pol Roussel, a seasoned veteran told him that 'Salonica is a leprous agglomeration of hovels and tight cabins close to a putrid gulf, an unhealthy ghetto; in sum, a cesspit bathed in light'.<sup>48</sup> Another soldier, Pierre Beau endorsed this sentiment when he acknowledged:

This city makes much more of an impression from the bay than from up close. When I saw it from the *Colbert*, it charmed me with its aspect of a wholly

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<sup>46</sup>Alcide Ramette, *Au secours de la Serbie. Le retour d'un blessé* (Paris: Plon, 1917), p. 54.

<sup>47</sup>Omer Potard, *Dardanelles, Orient, Levant, 1915-1921*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>48</sup>Pol Roussel, *Impressions d'Orient au temps de la Grande Guerre : Salonique au temps de la campagne d'Orient* (Paris : Chiron, 1925), p. 92, quoted in Francine Saint-Ramond, *Les désorientés. Expériences des soldats français aux Dardanelles et en Macédoine, 1915-1918* (Paris: Presses de l'Inalco, 2019), p. 159.



Oriental city. But when one penetrates in the interior of the city, all you can see is some dirty alleys which open on the souks of many Jewish merchants, or onto some other neighbourhoods with the miserable and abject houses of the Turks or the Czechs.<sup>49</sup>

The descriptions of Salonica were usually disdainful, but notably, French officers targeted the Turkish district. Captain Ferdinand Deygas saw it as the expression of a genuinely backward world. He declared, 'Everywhere, we find the trace of Islam, laziness, carelessness, indifference, filth. The Turk enslaved, befooled all the races that his courage and his bravery had bent under his yoke'.<sup>50</sup> René Dufour de La Thuillerie, a high-ranking naval officer, reinforced Deygas' disdain for the Turk when he too commented that 'Salonica, an ancient city, very Oriental by its colorful aspect as well as by its decay, is a permanent demonstration of the incurable and unbelievable laziness and the indifference of the Turk'.<sup>51</sup> The fact that the Ottoman Empire was a French foe might explain the stinging nature of some of the latter observations. Nevertheless, these statements further demonstrate a persistent and narrow-minded view of non-Western European populations. Many of the French personnel who previously served in North Africa would have been already acquainted with Islamic culture, even more so as large numbers of French colonial forces were also of Muslim confession. Overall, considering this French colonial mindset, the harsh criticism directed against the Turk does not seem surprising, nor unexpected.

As French soldiers marched from the harbour to Zeitenlick, they passed through the outlying districts of the city, and again their descriptions were unforgiving for the degraded conditions of Salonica's urban environment. Jean-José Frappa, declared, 'People are dirty, rubbish is all over the sidewalk, sickening smells go up in flushes from the primitive sewers'.<sup>52</sup> Georges de Lacoste said, 'The streets badly cobbled are dirty, full of peelings and household refuse. The houses of the inner suburbs that we pass by are some pathetic shacks without solidity, without regularity, without

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<sup>49</sup>Pierre Beau, 'Journal du soldat Pierre Beau, 175e, 176e puis 287e Régiment d'infanterie (10 octobre 1916 - 11 novembre 1918)', <http://www.chtimiste.com/carnets/beau.htm>. Accessed 16 October 2019.

<sup>50</sup>Ferdinand Deygas, *L'Armée d'Orient dans la guerre mondiale (1915-1919)*. (Dardanelles, Grèce, Macédoine, Albanie, Serbie, Bulgarie, Constantinople, Danube, Hongrie, Roumanie, Russie) (Paris: Payot, 1932), p. 179.

<sup>51</sup>René Dufour de La Thuillerie, *De Salonique à Constantinople. Souvenirs de la Division navale d'Orient, 1916-1919* (Paris: J. de Gigord, 1921), p. 5.

<sup>52</sup>Jean-José Frappa, *Makédonia souvenirs d'un officier de liaison en Orient* (Paris, Flammarion, 1921), p. 38.

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symmetry...Foodstuffs exposed in the air must collect lots of microbes.<sup>53</sup> Many French soldiers noticed the hopeless poverty of the city, especially when groups of children in rags rushed to Zeitenlick, imploring them for food, selling cigarettes, matches, or newspapers. These bands of children also roamed the city streets begging for money, shining shoes, or directing Allied soldiers to the countless brothels of the shady Vardar district. Marcel Brochard complained angrily, 'The *loustro* assails you with his yelling, takes hold of your big shoes, manages to make them shine, wriggling like a little grimacing monkey. After being paid, he cynically indicates the house of his sister'.<sup>54</sup> Brochard's statement corroborates the misery that prevailed in the popular neighbourhoods of Salonica, where before World War I, thousands of refugees had fled the violence of the Balkan Wars.

Another feature of Salonica which several Frenchmen grumbled about were the countless peddlers who came prowling the quays and harassed them continually to buy their knick-knacks. The French military ordinarily did not hold in high esteem such *mercantis*, often mentioning their greed and filth.<sup>55</sup> For Captain of the Zouaves Ricciotto Canudo, 'The teeming of these grasshoppers is intolerable'.<sup>56</sup> Military chaplain Henri du P, wrote, 'There are some *mercantis* of race and uncertain origins, Greeks, Maltese, Spaniards, Italians, who all join in the universal exploitation of the foreigner'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Georges de Lacoste, *Scènes et images de la campagne d'Orient* (Paris: Payot, 1923), p. 34.

<sup>54</sup>Marcel Brochard, *Quatorze, dix-huit* (Nantes: L'Amicale des anciens combattants du 157<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie alpine, 1953), p. 105. The 'loustro' was the shifty Salonica's street youth who shined shoes for a few coins.

<sup>55</sup>Ramette, *Au secours de la Serbie*, pp. 52-53; Henri Libermann, *Face aux Bulgares. La campagne française en Macédoine serbe. Récits vécus d'un officier de Chasseurs à pied, octobre 1915-janvier 1916* (Paris: Librairie Militaire Berger-Levrault, 1917), p. 51.

<sup>56</sup>Ricciotto Canudo, *Combats d'Orient. Dardanelles-Salonique (1915-1916)* (Paris: Hachette, 1917), p. 77. Ricciotto Canudo, was an Italian novelist, born in Bari, who lived in Paris at the beginning of the war. Canudo was also a close friend of Blaise Cendrars. The two of them, like the American poet Alan Seeger with 'almost eighty-eight thousand foreigners' volunteered to fight for France, a country they viewed as their second motherland. Nicolas Beaupré, 'Construction and Deconstruction of the Idea of French 'War Enthusiasm' in 1914', in Lothar Kettenacker and Torsten Riotte (eds.), *The Legacies of Two World Wars: European Societies in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), p. 49. Biographical details consulted on 'Notice de personne, Canudo, Ricciotto (1877-1923)', *Catalogue général de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (BNF), 24 May 2017 <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb12778191f>. Accessed 14 October 2019.

<sup>57</sup>Henri du P, 'Lettres d'Orient, octobre 1915 – mai 1916', in Léonce de Grandmaison, (ed.), *Impressions de guerre de prêtres soldats*, vol. 2 (Paris: Plon, 1917), p. 373.

Many French soldiers were infuriated by the Oriental custom of bargaining for everything, Sergeant Julien Arène raged, 'The fixed-price is unknown here. The French spirit becomes exasperated by this haggling, and I know more than one *Poilu*, who in one vengeful kick threw the whole stall of the *mercanti* in the air'.<sup>58</sup> These hostile remarks expressed the evident sense of superiority that the French felt towards the locals; they also reinforced the belief that the Frenchmen saw themselves as representing the pinnacle of a civilized Europe.

### **A Definite Colonial Outlook**

The cosmopolitan nature of Salonica is a characteristic that marked the memories of the French contingent stationed there during the First World War. For Major Bernard de Ligonès, Salonica was a multicultural hodgepodge, he recognized that 'You can meet all the races, except the ones from the Central Powers; you can hear all languages.'<sup>59</sup> Frédéric Rousseau argued, 'For different witnesses, we can note the extreme variation in the use of the word race; sometimes equivalent to people, or nation, sometimes a racial epithet in all its contemporary racist dimension'.<sup>60</sup> The commonly used word 'race' among the French contingent undeniably betrayed the imperial dimension of the Macedonian Campaign. Several soldiers and officers who served in the Balkans came from the colonial forces posted in North Africa or Asia. Before World War I, many of the French officers who had previously served abroad were familiar with the indigenous peoples of the Maghreb or West Africa. As such, they applied in Macedonia what I call a 'definite colonial outlook' to the local population that they regarded more as Easterners than Europeans. This outlook was primarily based on an ethnocentric sense of superiority, and on the premise that French civilization, culture, and language needed to be exported for the apparent benefit of backward societies such as the ones the French Army encountered in the Balkans.

Through many accounts written by the French personnel posted in Salonica, this 'definite colonial outlook' emerges. When they faced the Macedonian population, many French officers employed a vocabulary, surprisingly like the one adopted by their counterparts in Algeria, Indochina, Morocco, or Senegal. For numerous Frenchmen, this colonial vision had been immortalised in prevalent displays of imperial power such as the colonial exhibitions of Lyon in 1894, Marseille in 1906, and the Paris universal

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<sup>58</sup>Julien Arène, *En Macédoine, Carnet de route d'un sergent de l'Armée d'Orient* (Paris: George Crès, 1916), p. 44.

<sup>59</sup>Yves Pourcher, (ed.), *Un commandant bleu horizon : souvenirs de guerre de Bernard de Ligonès, 1914-1917*, (Paris: Editions de Paris, 1998), p. 114.

<sup>60</sup>Frédéric Rousseau, 'Entre découverte de l'altérité et définition de soi. L'"Orient méditerranéen" de soldats français de la Grande Guerre (1915-1918)', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 81 (2010), p. 111.

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exhibition of 1900. These various exhibits presented the unstoppable march of an empire which spread French culture and civilization to the four corners of the world. Predictably, French officers' writings of Macedonia, reveal their undeniable sense of dominance toward the local populace. Lieutenant Ramette reported that one of his subalterns believed that service in Macedonia was the perfect preparation for the young Frenchmen who, after the war, would follow their colonial destinies and embrace a bright future overseas. He asserted:

It is probable that those who had lived these war years, who had made the trip to Serbia or Gallipoli will be less frightened at the idea of faraway colonization. I hope that after the war, the French will decide to leave their homes. The greatness of a country is abroad. The English and the Germans have shown it to us enough.<sup>61</sup>

The writings published in the *Revue Franco-Macédonienne* reinforced these allusions to colonisation.<sup>62</sup> In 1917, the issues of the previous year were collected and published as a monograph. In its preface written on 18 December 1916, Edouard Herriot, Senator-Mayor of Lyon, expressed his opinion concerning the future of Macedonia. For him, the goal in the Balkans was to prolong the enterprise of French colonisation. He cited the names of Faidherbe, Galliéni, and Lyautey, the illustrious officers who had contributed to the renaissance of the French Empire in the nineteenth century. Herriot had a clear-cut understanding of what France could and should undertake in Macedonia. He declared, 'This war is a war of merchants. It carries in it all the economic future of the world. Unless we consent in advance to an irremediable imbalance, we cannot renounce to a policy of commercial penetration and influence whose center is in Salonica, not anywhere else.'<sup>63</sup> In the *Revue Franco-Macédonienne*, another article sang to the same tune. Captain Destrée opined:

The small farm holder of Algeria, Tunisia or Morocco, his comrade the small businessman or the young industrialist, who are for the moment dressed in Zouave's large pants and its colorful *chechia*, feel that they could very well after the war, have as happy a life here [in Macedonia] than the one they had over there [in French-dominated North Africa]. They have already appreciated all that they could draw from these unused lands, without causing any harm to the native people...And already many of our *Poilus* of Africa promised themselves

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<sup>61</sup>Ramette, *Au secours de la Serbie*, p. 55.

<sup>62</sup>The *Revue Franco-Macédonienne* published twelve volumes between April 1916 and December 1917. After December 1917, the *Revue* changed its name to the *Cahiers d'Orient* and published four additional volumes between July and October 1918.

<sup>63</sup>Edouard Herriot, Preface to *La France en Macédoine* (Paris: Georges Crès, 1917), pp. ix-x.

to come back and erect their tents...even after the signature of peace. This French colony will be born from the war and will spread in all the East.<sup>64</sup>

The colonial spirit on display in the declarations of Herriot and Destrée confirms the leitmotiv that during World War I in the Balkans, many Frenchmen looked at Macedonia as a strategic outlet where French cultural power and commercial influence could be implemented durably. They imagined that Macedonia could be transformed into a new French colony like Algeria.



**Figure 5:** Vietnamese French Colonial troops occupying Koritza early 1917 (today Korçë in Albania). Occupation de la ville de Koritza (24 -27 janvier 1917). Indochinois dans une rue de Koritza.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Capitaine D., 'Les troupes d'Afrique en Orient', *Revue Franco-Macédonienne*, I (1916), pp. 39-40.

<sup>65</sup>© Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine. Ministère de la Culture, Charenton-le-Pont, France.



**Figure 6:** African French Colonial troops in Albania, early 1917. On the road from Sarandë to Korçë (today in Albania). Sur la route de Santi Quaranta à Koritza, entre Liaskovik et Izvor (7-8 février 1917).<sup>66</sup>

### Conclusion

For the French troops posted to the Balkans, the experience of the Macedonian Campaign was strikingly similar to 'colonial' experiences in other sections of the French Empire. This sizeable French military deployment to Southeast Europe facilitated an encounter with the various populations from Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia. This encounter was a crucial moment of mutual discovery. It was marked by an unmistakably colonial and racialised view of the populations they met. The French military personnel of Macedonia, fighting in this faraway corner of the continent, was haunted by a sentiment of abandonment caused both by the distance to France, and the lack of interest of French public opinion. Furthermore, the men who served in the Balkans left far fewer accounts than their counterparts of the Western Front. Frédéric Rousseau stated that within Jean Norton Cru's remarkable book, *Témoins*, the number of testimonies produced by soldiers and officers who served in Macedonia, barely surpasses two percent of the entire corpus.<sup>67</sup> This fact further contributed to the lack of remembrance of the men who underwent long years of war in the Macedonian mountains, where they endured frigid winters and sizzling summers. The scornful opinion that the French public held about them further

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Rousseau, 'Entre découverte de l'altérité et définition de soi', pp. 105-106.

compounded their physical misery, homesickness, and resentment. French domestic opinion erroneously viewed the men sent to Salonica as merely *planqués* (holed-up) or *embusqués* (shirkers).<sup>68</sup> Finally, the bitterness of the French servicemen who fought in the Balkans was aggravated by the ever-lasting moniker of Clemenceau, who ridiculed them as 'The gardeners of Salonica.' In toto, many French servicemen held unrealistic perceptions of the East; however, during the Macedonian Campaign, their opinions were replaced by the exacting reality that they encountered. The reality of war that the *Poilus d'Orient* painfully discovered in the Macedonian mountains was undoubtedly different to the Western Front. Still, just like the Tommy or Feldgrau, who also served in this remote area of Southeast Europe, it was equally as painful and traumatic.

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<sup>68</sup>About the so-called *planqués*, see Francine Saint-Ramond Roussanne, "Les planqués du Front d'Orient," in *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War*, pp. 185-194.