In the vast literature on the First World War, studies on the involvement of the Ottoman Empire occupy only a small percentage of what has been written so far. One important reason for what is in fact a serious shortcoming is the continuing domination of military historiography by Eurocentric ontology and epistemology, which creates “others” out of non-western states and societies, in most cases either neglecting them or ensuring that they appear only when they are in conflict with the west.\(^1\) From such a viewpoint, which perceives warfare in battlefields outside Europe as a sideshow to the main event, aspects of the Ottoman participation in the war are often studied only with relevance for the European powers’ own perspective, which results in an incomplete understanding of the First World War as a global conflict.\(^2\) The problem is aggravated by the language barrier arising from the fact that Turkey’s wartime sources are linguistically accessible only to a small number of scholars who are trained in Ottoman Turkish.\(^3\)

Writing truly global histories of what was a global conflict, however, requires the overcoming of these obstacles and a thorough understanding and incorporation of the Ottoman involvement in the studies on the First World War. This essay hopes to make a modest contribution to this quest by focusing on a particular aspect of the Ottoman participation in the war, i.e. the experience of the fighting man in winter warfare.

Climatic conditions are an important factor influencing military operations and frontline experience, and history attests that lack of preparedness can not only make life miserable for the soldiers, but also doom entire armies to failure.

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\(^1\) For an insightful discussion of Eurocentrism in military historiography, see Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 66–103.

\(^2\) It is striking that some serious studies on the First World War that discuss each of the belligerent states separately do not even devote a chapter to the Ottoman Empire. For example: Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, ed. *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh GmbH & Co KG, 2009).

\(^3\) The alphabetization of the Turkish language was changed from Arabic to Turkish script in 1928 as part of the efforts to modernize the newly founded republic.
and disaster. Winter is, from a military perspective, “a season with a clear predominance of below-freezing temperatures, freeze-up of open water bodies, accumulation of snow cover on the ground, and shorter periods of daylight,”

and in this sense, winter warfare differs substantially from military action in warmer seasons. During the latter half of the 20th century, military organizations have drawn on the experiences of the armies of Napoléon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler, who have attempted – and failed – to invade Russia during winter, in order to study the distinguishing characteristics of cold weather warfare and to propose measures to increase their own armies’ operational preparedness. According to these studies, major setbacks associated with winter warfare are restricted mobility and logistics support on snow- and ice-covered terrain; serious health threats such as frostbite and hypothermia, combined with the difficulty of performing adequate medical services on the field; difficult orientation due to adverse weather; guns and other mechanical instruments freezing and becoming inoperative under low temperatures; difficulties of constructing defences on frozen earth; and reduced range of bullets, as well as reduced impact of explosives falling on deep snow.

Military planners are required to take these effects into consideration and prepare accordingly, ensuring first and foremost that the troops are provided with suitable gear and equipment; adequate shelter is available; and guns, ammunition and other mechanical instruments are properly maintained.

How prepared was the Ottoman army for winter warfare during the First World War, and consequently, how did the Ottoman troops experience fighting under extreme climatic conditions? Instead of tackling these issues solely from an operational perspective, this essay focuses on individuals to investigate the factors that shaped the experience of snow and ice during the war. For this purpose, the encounters of the men of the Ottoman Third Army in the Caucasus and the 15th Army Corps in Galicia, both of which fought against the Russian army, albeit under different structural conditions such as geographical features, transportation and accommodation logistics, availability and quality of equipment, and access to allies’ support, are studied comparatively by making use of diaries and memoirs from the front line. Through a discussion of the
