

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS



Travellers in Egypt by Paul Starkey; Janet Starkey

Review by: H. T. Norris

Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. 62, No. 2 (1999), pp. 351-352

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#) on behalf of [School of Oriental and African Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3107514>

Accessed: 03/05/2013 04:37

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press and School of Oriental and African Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

theoretical advances in broader fields. The volume under review is an attempt to fill this gap, to provide a work of synthesis in which the new theoretical analyses are applied to the broad range of Arab nationalisms as they developed from the period of the Great War onwards.

The book is divided into five parts, each concerned with a major theme. The first part, containing essays by Israel Gershoni, Fred Halliday and Gabriel Piterberg, looks at historiography and the scholarly interpretation of Arab nationalisms. Gershoni puts forward a comprehensive survey of the two successive narrative approaches prevailing in Western scholarship about the Arab world, the first in the 1950s and 1960s, the second from the 1970s onwards. He clearly shows how the political fortunes of Arab nationalism impinged on its conceptualization by academics and calls for greater awareness by researchers regarding their own susceptibility to how contemporary currents can influence their reading of the past. Halliday provides an analysis of nationalism in Yemen within the framework of 'comparative contingency', a concept he has employed elsewhere to analyse Eritrean nationalism. He defines his aim as being to show not how a Yemeni 'nation' has existed for centuries or millennia, or how such a pre-existing 'nation' has 'arisen' or 'woken up' but, rather, how a set of recent processes, some international, some within Yemen, have combined to produce a nationalist movement and discourse and to give them their particular content. The final essay in this section is Piterberg's discussion of the presence of the Orientalist discourse in non-European nationalist historiographies, with modern Egyptian historiography as a case-study.

The second major theme with which the volume is concerned is that of the modes of presentation employed by nationalists to portray history in their own image. This section begins with William Cleveland's reconsideration of the foundational text for the study of Arab nationalism, George Antonious's *The Arab awakening*, in terms of recent analyses of nationalist narrative, imagery and symbolism. There then follows an account by Reeva Simon of the efforts made by the monarchical regime in Iraq in the inter-war years to impose the ideological dominance of a unitary Arab nationalism over an ethnically diverse Iraqi population, and a discussion by Beth Baron of the employment by nationalist iconography in Egypt of the image of the woman to symbolize the Egyptian nation, and the significance of this for both nationalism and the position of women in Egypt.

The third section of the book examines the coexistence and competition of alternative understandings of communal identity in the modern Arab world, and contains a fascinating study by Donald Reid of early twentieth-century Egyptology and the struggles of indigenous students of ancient Egypt to find a place for themselves in this scholarly field, and a discussion by James Jankowski of the different national orientations competing in the Egypt of the 1950s. The book's fourth theme is polycentrism, and essays by Rashid Khalidi, Musa Budeiri and Emmanuel Sivan examine the simultaneous presence of various national, and other, identities in both individuals and communities. The final section, containing contributions from Philip Khoury, James

Gelvin and Zachary Lockman, focuses on the role played by subaltern groups in the construction and diffusion of the nationalist discourse.

Each of these essays stands alone as a study of a specific facet of nationalism in the Arab world and each possesses considerable intrinsic merit. Furthermore the collection as a whole demonstrates an unusual degree of thematic coherence, and displays to full advantage the rich and varied scholarship currently being undertaken in this field.

STEPHANIE CRONIN

PAUL STARKEY and JANET STARKEY
(ed.): *Travellers in Egypt*. 319 pp.
London and New York: I. B.
Tauris, 1998. £25.

This interesting and informative selection of essays began as a long-planned conference about travellers in Egypt which brought together some 80 participants at the Oriental Museum, Durham, in July 1995. The publication of the book, within three years and to a high standard of editing, is in itself a feat worthy of praise.

The volume approaches the whole question of the quest of the oriental traveller from many angles and in many aspects, and the style is inviting with not a dull page anywhere. A number of the contributors break new ground with the information they provide, the approach to the topic they adopt and the little known, sometimes all but unknown, travellers, both men and women, they bring to our attention. One section of the book (pp. 120–78) is devoted entirely to travellers in Egypt who were artists, including photographers, and one's sole regret here is that there are no illustrations to represent their achievements. The curious will need to consult the footnote references, or the lavish reproductions in Alastair Hamilton's, *Europe and the Arab world* (1994; revd. *BSOAS*, 59/1, 1996) where examples of the work of a few of the artists who feature here are to be found, along with that of others who receive little or no mention in the book under review.

Early travellers figure little. They are represented by Professor Holt's account and assessment of the travels in Egypt in the Ottoman age (1615–16) by Pietro Della Valle, and by Rosemarie Said Zahlan's portrait of the enigmatic George Baldwin during the latter part of the century which followed (pp. 24–38). It is unfortunate that the most important Western traveller in Egypt and Arabia at that time, Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815), is entirely neglected. If one turns to *Den Arabiske Rejse*, ed. Stig T. Rasmussen (Copenhagen, 1992; revd. *BSOAS*, 57/3, 1994), 20–38 and 348–66, the unique contribution made by this traveller and his expedition's companions, ill-fated though it was, is only too obvious.

Egypt and Nubia were (and still are) a writers' and artists' oriental dream country. Over the archaeologist (who as traveller and Egyptologist both, is represented here by Belzoni, for example, pp. 41–50) searching the unsealed chambers for the mummy and its tomb treasures, hover the phantom figures of opera like Aida and Rádames. We have here a good cross-section of artists and men of letters,

special attention being given to Alexandre Dumas, Gustave Flaubert, Théophile Gautier and to French women travellers (as well as to women who travelled as brides and honeymooned in Egypt, pp. 97–117). With but one exception, all the travellers discussed came from Western Europe. That exception is the Pole, Juliusz Słowacki, who visited Egypt in 1836–37, at a time when the Poles were seeking allies in the Orient and offering their services, especially in the cavalry, to Muḥammad ‘Alī. (Juliusz Słowacki (1809–49) is one of the Polish travellers in the East also included in a recent work published in Poland, *Polacy a świat Arabski*, by Marek M. Dziekan, ‘Rocznik Tatarów Polskich’, Warsaw: Niezależne Wydawnictwo, 1998, 82–3).

As one would expect, Edward Said’s work is referred to by several contributors, especially in the essays by John Rodenbeck and Geoffrey Roper (pp. 233–43 and 244–56, respectively) in Part 6, ‘E. W. Lane and scholarly perceptions’. Lane’s stature amongst both travellers and sojourners in Egypt, and as a foremost Orientalist and Arabist, is a labour of love which has yet to be written and Roper, in his lucid and well annotated essay, is without doubt correct to remark (p. 252) that, ‘There is still room, and indeed a need, for a full biography of Lane.’ Much of the Orient in Lane’s writings (the *Lexicon* apart) is a vision of Egypt at first hand (e.g., *The manners and customs of the modern Egyptians*), in the trappings of the Mamluk age (e.g., his translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*). But one of the most recent critical reassessments of Lane’s translation is in fact not by Edward Said but by Husain Haddawy (*The Arabian Nights*, New York and London, 1990, revd. in *BSOAS*, 55/2, 1992). Haddawy deems Lane’s literary attempt to be ‘to guide the prudish Victorian reader through Cairo by introducing him to a higher class of Egyptian society’, (p. xxii). Earlier (*ibid.*, p. xxi), Haddawy observes that Lane translated ‘the work as a travel guide’; ‘Lane omits sometimes a few details, sometimes whole passages, curiously because he finds them inconsistent with his own observations of life in Cairo.’ *A mal de voyageur*, in this instance a severe case of myopia it would appear, observed at the highest Orientalist level.

The curious inconstancy of what is ‘standard’ has created a problem for the appraiser. Roper (p. 248) refers to Lane’s ‘translation’ of the Quran—which is far from being such—and quotes A. J. Arberry’s unfavourable view of it. It is indeed an enigmatic work, wedged between the *Nights* and the *Lexicon*, although not without its interest. It is the direct opposite of Wahb b. Munabbih’s *Kitāb al-Tijān*, for example. While the latter infuses and interpolates quranic passages into a text full of Arabian folklore, Lane inserts bits of folklore, Arabian lore, Bible parallels and sundry comment into a gloss upon the translated sacred text itself. Strangest to most readers will be the opening to the preface of this work, bearing in mind that it is only a series of ‘Selections’ with an ‘interwoven commentary’ and borrowed notes from Sale. Citing Dr Johnson, Lane writes, ‘There are two objects of curiosity—the Christian world, and the Mahometan world:

all the rest may be considered as barbarous.’ How many other scholar-travellers in Egypt (many of them fanatical Egyptologists, including Lane himself perhaps?) would have agreed with him?

It is with such arbitrary and fluctuating judgements that others have to contend in passing an opinion on these travellers, some of them Orientalists of the highest calibre in what they wrote about the peoples of the East (and here Egypt specifically). The book under review grapples with this problem, and Paul Starkey’s essay (pp. 280–6) on ‘Some Egyptian travellers in Europe’ which closes the volume attempts to redress the balance. Michael Reimer’s chapter, which precedes it, on ‘Views of al-Azhar’, pinpoints the problem (p. 272), ‘Herein the first *leitmotiv* in European travel-writing: the Orient is a museum of changeless artifacts, “a phenomenon of arrested development”’.

This book explores with an admirable clarity the works that flowed from travellers’ pens, some of them scholars, or pretenders to the title; their work presents a mixture of fascination, delight, hate, greed, prejudice, idealism, the loneliness of a Manfred searching for his lost Astarte, of the scientific pursuit in Egypt itself and ultimately penetrating deeper, into Africa towards the source of the Nile.

H. T. NORRIS

‘ABD AL-MUHSIN AL-‘ABBĀS (ed.): *Handlist of manuscripts at the Centre de Documentation et de Recherches Historiques Ahmed Baba, Timbuktu. Compiled by the librarians of the Centre. Vol. 3. (Handlist of Islamic Manuscripts Series VI: African Collections—Mali.)*[iv], 864 pp. London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1417/1996. £17.

This massive volume concludes the trio which are devoted to the Ahmad Babā collection, one of the major collections of the Western Sahara and West Africa and remarkable for the breadth of its subject matter. It is a mine of source materials for those who are concerned with research into Sahelian societies and contains documents of major interest to linguists and sociologists, including some concerning topics which are only marginally concerned with Islamic studies proper. (The two previous volumes have been reviewed in the *Bulletin*: see *BSOAS* 60/3, 1997, 61/1, 1998).

The present volume has been prepared with care and with commendable accuracy. Where relevant, there are references to Brockelmann (*GAL*) and to the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (both editions). The 4,500 entries are comprehensively indexed. The subject matter is organized under the categories of Ethics, Literature and Prosody, Prayers and invocations (*adhkār*), the Quran, *usūl*, *hadīth* and *fiqh*, Sufism, *tafsīr*, *tawhīd*, Homilies, Astronomy, Chemistry, History, both general and local, Genealogies, fixed calendars, local politics, trade, slavery and biographies. Very many of the texts are fatwas and *nawāzil* which are concerned with