



## Arab Studies Journal

---

Travellers in Egypt (second edition) by Paul Starkey; Janet Starkey

Review by: Jessamine Price

*The Arab Studies Journal*, Vol. 10/11, No. 2/1 (Fall 2002/Spring 2003), pp. 175-178

Published by: [Arab Studies Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27933851>

Accessed: 03/05/2013 04:39

---

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.



*Arab Studies Journal* and *Arab Studies Institute* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Arab Studies Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## *Travellers in Egypt*

Paul Starkey and Janet Starkey, Editors  
London: I.B. Tauris, 2001 (second edition)  
(328 pages, bibliography, index) \$19.95 (paper)

*Reviewed by Jessamine Price*

---

In 1980, Paul Fussell wrote in his “elegy” for a by-gone age of luxury travel, “Travel is now impossible and...tourism is all we have left.”<sup>1</sup> Nostalgia permeated Fussell’s study of British traveler-authors of the 1920s and 1930s, in which he described the last days of “real” travel, at the tail end of the slow “decline” of travel from elite exploration to mass tourism. Happily, this kind of writing about travel has been joined in the past twenty-five years by less nostalgic works that seek to analyze the place of travelers and travel writing in the colonial encounter.

Edward Said’s critique of Orientalist scholarly and literary production in *Orientalism* (1978) kicked off extensive debates about the role European travelers to the Middle East played in extending European power over the region. Recent years have seen numerous works on widely varying aspects of this subject, such as Mary Louise Pratt’s study of travel writing in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Billie Melman’s work on women travelers in *Women’s Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (1992), and Timothy Mitchell’s provocative analysis of the ‘metaphysics of modernity’ which informed travelers’ perceptions in *Colonising Egypt* (1988). These works and the many others on the subject vary in theoretical approach but share a rejection of nostalgia. They raise difficult questions about the role travel writing—and the act of travel itself—has played in constructing ideological boundaries between the ‘West’ and the Middle East. Unfortunately, in the edited volume under review, most of the articles embrace Fussellian nostalgia, and base their discussions in a somewhat naïve rejection of Said’s work.

---

*Jessamine Price* is a doctoral candidate in the joint program in the Departments of Middle Eastern Studies and History at New York University.

---

*Travellers in Egypt*, edited by Paul Starkey and Janet Starkey, contains the proceedings of a conference held at the Oriental Museum at the University of Durham in 1995. Subsequently, the Starkeys were among the founders of the Association for the Study of Travel in Egypt and the Near East, which holds conferences that bring together a wide variety of academics, biographers, museum curators, Egyptologists, and enthusiastic amateurs. These conferences draw eclectic groups of people who share an interest in travelers of all kinds to the Middle East. Recent conferences have included presentations on varied subjects such as early modern Muslim *rihla* literature, Disraeli's 'Middle Eastern' novels, and European graffiti on Pharoanic temples. The unifying theme of these conferences and this volume is an emphasis on the factual rather than the theoretical.

*Travellers in Egypt* consists of twenty-seven short essays and an introduction by the Starkeys that summarizes the articles to follow without interrogating the scholarship at hand. A majority of the articles discuss Egyptologists, artists, and *litterateurs*, and recount the biographies and travelogues of individual travelers. Other essays in the volume include: Hussein M. Fahim on Orientalist travelers in general, Hossam M. Mahdy on travelers as conservationists, Philip Sadgrove on travelers' cultural institutions in Cairo, Paul Starkey on Egyptian travelers in Europe, and Michael J. Reimer's comparison of two nineteenth-century descriptions of al-Azhar.

Amongst the travelers discussed are well-known figures such as the Italian circus-strongman-turned-Egyptologist Giovanni Battista Belzoni, and lesser-known figures such as the painter Nester l'Hôte. The majority of articles recount the travelers' journeys in great detail, which is occasionally interesting, as in Caroline Williams' description of Francis Frith's logistical difficulties with early photography in Egypt. Often, however, the details are excessive for the general reader, as in John Ruffle's article on Lord Prudhoe's Egyptological expedition of 1826-1829. Some of the biographical essays collected here appear to be aimed at museum curators or biographers rather than scholars generally interested in travel. The editors attempt to bridge the gap between Said's and Fussell's approaches to travel by including Hussein M. Fahim's analytical essay, "European Travellers in Egypt: The Representation of the Host Culture."

The volume as a whole, however, embodies Fussell's notion that travelers are interesting in that they represent a lost past of elite adventure. A few articles provoke useful questions. For instance, John Rodenbeck aims to resuscitate the reputation of one of Edward Said's targets, Edward Lane, in a detailed discussion of Said's comments on this figure in *Orientalism*. Rodenbeck is not the first to point out that Said was unnecessarily harsh in his portrayal of the relatively sympathetic Lane. Rodenbeck argues that Lane was a remarkable figure who spent many years acquainting himself with the inhabitants of Egypt, more than any other scholar or traveler of the period. Rodenbeck's article is an informative companion to Said's well-known passages on Lane. However, Rodenbeck's attempt to discredit Said by stating that Said never actually read *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* does not have any bearing

on Said's main argument that travelers, even Lane, contributed to colonialism because of their social and political position.

Another piece that attempts to complicate Said's monolithic view of European travelers is John David Ragan's essay on French women travelers, which includes a discussion of Suzanne Voilquin, the Saint-Simonian who worked in Egypt from 1834 to 1836. Voilquin's experiences as a working-class French woman who worked closely with Egyptian reformers are in striking contrast to the normative experiences of male leisure travelers. Her 1866 memoir remains relatively unknown in comparison to those by Théophile Gautier and Gustave Flaubert. Ragan argues that Voilquin's absence from the canon of travel writers reflects the way that Orientalism operated as a popular consensus that determined which books received public attention, circulation, and renown.

Ragan's point about reception is further illustrated by Marianna Taymanova's piece on Alexandre Dumas in Egypt, in which she convincingly argues that he never set foot in Egypt in order to produce his 1839 travel memoir *Quinze jours au Sinaï*. In fact, to write his account, Dumas relied entirely on reading other travelers' memoirs (much like Jules Verne, another famous French author who wrote about travel without traveling himself). The fact that this apocryphal 'memoir' achieved great popularity, whereas a 'genuine' and unusual memoir like Voilquin's disappeared quickly from circulation, reveals a great deal about the formations and limitations of the canon of travel literature.

The authors in this volume unfortunately tend to reproduce many of the Romantic images of the traveler in Egypt. For the most part, they assume, like Fussell, that the category of 'traveler' is self-evident and that it is intrinsically different from, and superior to, the category of 'tourist.' The majority of the travelers who appear here are Egyptologists, writers, and artists, who left behind writings and images of their journeys. It is unfortunate that we know less about travelers who did not leave such detailed records, and that there has been relatively little effort to research leisure travelers. In fact, rather than discussing 'travelers in Egypt,' this book primarily covers British and French scholarly and literary travelers of the 1830s and 1840s.

Moreover, by focusing on strict biographical accounts of these scholarly and literary travelers, the authors in this book give the impression that European travel in Egypt is only interesting because of its impact on European Egyptology and literature. By refusing for the most part to engage with Edward Said's critique of Orientalist travelers, these authors attempt to ignore three decades of academic discussion over the production of colonial knowledge. Only Hussein M. Fahim's article mentions one of the main effects of European travel writing—the creation of Europe's dual image of Egypt, as both 'Oriental' and Pharaonic. Travel writing encourages visitors to see Egypt in a certain way, according to preconceived images. The best discussion of this phenomenon to date is that in Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt*. Mitchell argues that tourists and travelers, like government officials and sociologists, all shared a common view of the 'world-as-exhibition.' As the nineteenth century progressed, travelers increasingly came to Egypt expecting to see 'Oriental life,' and this expectation shaped the relationship between Europe and the Middle East. The act of travel itself remains undertheorized,

for most of the major works on travel and tourism in sociology and anthropology do not address travel in a colonial or post-colonial context. Thus, there is a need for discussion of travelers in Egypt that goes beyond 'elegy' à la Paul Fussell. The few in this volume who do address these critiques focus primarily on factual corrections to *Orientalism*, and, thus, fail to introduce new ideas to the debate.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 41. ♦