

the stories but it is also likely that they did it in very different ways, and with different motivations, when compared with Bleek and the other compilers of the edited stories.

It is refreshing that Wessels directs us back to a critical study of the particulars of the /Xam narratives but it is restricting that he combines this with a rigid aversion to all comparative study as if “particular” necessarily has to mean “singular”. In fact, given that the Bleek and Lloyd collection is heavily influenced by the prominent modes of thought of the collectors and editors and their time, and since we no longer have access to the original narrators, we will not get far without comparative evidence from other corpora and from contemporary storytelling practice. The critical exegesis of these texts will make advances not by restricting itself to the narratives themselves, nor by theoretical reflexivity alone, but rather through careful comparison combined with detailed linguistic analysis.

The book cover labels *Bushman Letters* as “metacritical” (which would make this review “meta-metacritical” and whatever you as the reader think of this review “meta-meta-metacritical”). But this (post)modernist idea wrongly suggests that the greater the distance from the object of study the better the view, and in fact there is much in this book that recommends less distance rather than more. For practical purposes, therefore, the book may play a useful role when teaching students the intricacies of Khoisan narratives and of dealing with oral narratives more generally. It will stimulate discussion in the classroom since it provides a theoretically interesting critique of existing works, but I suggest it should always be complemented with ethnographic studies of storytelling, ideally with direct exposure to storytelling events in field research and through available video records, and of course with the direct work on the collected texts themselves, ideally in their original language.

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PAUL SEDRA:

From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth Century Egypt.

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Since Paul Sedra began to publish on missionaries in nineteenth-century Egypt, it was apparent that that field was in for some change. Sedra’s book emerges in the wake of the well-received work by Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt* (Princeton, 2008). Sharkey has established the importance of American missionaries to the history of modern Egypt – she emphasized the arrival of the American Presbyterians in the mid-nineteenth century, their presence in Asyut and Cairo, and their role especially in the creation and early development of the American University in Cairo. What struck readers was her very close reading of sources, allowing for unusual and interesting insights about the Copts and about Egypt more generally.

Sedra adopts a similar technical approach, making skilful use of the archives of the Church Missionary Society in Birmingham among others. Sedra emphasizes the importance of the first half of the nineteenth century as the formative period for the modern missionary movement, and Europeans as those at its forefront. Sedra’s protagonist is John Lieder, whose half-century residence in Cairo has been virtually overlooked. We learn that the Church Missionary Society (UK) found through its contacts in Germany figures such as Lieder, individuals from an artisanal

background with a strong belief in religion as a moulding force, a force instilling an acceptance of hierarchy and one's place in it. Lieder and others who went to Cairo in the 1820s were also influenced by the idea of the importance of formal education as a means to inculcate the true Christian gospel.

The need for the education of the masses was emerging in countries such as the UK. Following the industrial revolution, it was apparent to the upper classes they were losing touch with their increasingly undisciplined and untrustworthy servant population. What was needed was some kind of inexpensive institution to inculcate not just elementary knowledge but more importantly certain values and forms of behaviour. Thus arose the Lancasterian system of education. Sedra discusses this system in detail first in its English context and then, following Lieder's move to Egypt, its application in the reform schools of the Muhammad 'Ali period. This brings other figures into the picture, notably Joseph Hekekyan whose papers Sedra also studies. Lieder's reputation, like Hekekyan's, in effect became bound up with Muhammad 'Ali's reforms and thus could be said eventually to have failed following the received scholarship.

Sedra, however, looks at the ongoing connections between state-building in Egypt and the use of the Lancasterian Method. Failure is clearly not the right word. Sedra shows that state control is progressively enhanced as knowledge becomes textual rather than oral, that modernizing states tend to promote literacy, also promoting some differentiation between folk tradition and real knowledge for the reasons given. Muhammad 'Ali, his entourage including Lieder, and their successors were no exceptions. Here Sedra draws on Timothy Mitchell's *Colonizing Egypt* as he fits much of what he discusses into the idea of a colonizing strategy.

Sedra then turns to look at the impact of the missionizing project, seen not just from the point of view of Muhammad 'Ali but from that of other powerful groups as well. Following Gregory Starrett's approach to Islam, Sedra finds Christianity too is made to fit the needs of such groups. He proceeds to introduce the patriarch and the Coptic notables as part of the power structure and examines their relationship to the missions. Here the received line is that the patriarchs and upper clergy defended old practices and fought the missionaries tooth and nail. While there is some evidence of this, Sedra shows that the reforms of Cyril the Fourth, the great reform figure, owe a great deal to the latter's relations with Lieder, and that even his successors and other figures who were not reformers were quite willing to adopt the new methods of education because they too wanted to retain their power. The issue was more one of power struggle than of enlightenment and obscurantism.

As Egyptian society continued to face disruption with the changes to the land system during the Occupation, the Coptic landowners and other notables felt that the patriarch was simply an obstacle to reform and that he could not be trusted with church funds, with matters of law or of education, and they tried to rein him in. What is interesting is that this is put in the context of a discussion of the activities of the late nineteenth-century Tawfiq Society and of the Great Coptic School and not of the 1940s, when all this is frequently brought up with the Sunday School Movement. It would seem that these struggles are a lot older than is commonly realized.

Another chapter which revises received opinions covers the visit to Asyut of the Patriarch Demetrius the Second in 1867. Here the patriarch seized upon various local issues to crack down on the American School. Some have read this visit and his actions as anti-foreign. Probing more deeply, Sedra finds it is a question of re-establishing church and state power over the Asyut School so that students

could not escape from the demands for *corvée* labour service which school enrolment permitted. Here issues of class, region and struggle emerge, showing in this optic Foucault's dispersion of power. Alternatively this could be seen as a part of the "Southern Question".

Sedra's work will have several readerships: in Coptic history, Egyptian history and among those interested in applications of Foucault to state-building. Sedra's work in Western archives is complemented in this growing field by the recent work of Magdi Guirguis and Febe Armanios, who have used church and state archives in Egypt.

Peter Gran