

# Reviews

## Ottoman Egypt and the emergence of the modern world, 1500–1800

By Nelly Hanna. Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2014. Pp. vii + 185. Hardback £29.95, ISBN: 978-977-416-664-8.

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doi:10.1017/S1740022817000213

This short book derives from the Hamilton Gibb Lectures, which, as Nelly Hanna explains in the acknowledgments, she was invited to deliver at Harvard in the autumn of 2012. A noted authority on Egypt during the Ottoman period, Hanna seeks to introduce Egypt into the narrative of the modern world's emergence, in the process giving due attention to the non-elites who helped connect this largest province of the Ottoman empire to the rest of the globe. Until fairly recently, most narratives of modern world history have emphasized western Europe's rise to global hegemony. In this scheme of things, the Middle East and the rest of the non-Western world appear as backward peripheries. Global history-writing has admittedly become far less Eurocentric in the past few decades, which have witnessed the publication of such path-breaking works as Janet Abu-Lughod's *Before European hegemony* (1989), K. N. Chaudhuri's *Asia before Europe* (1990), and Eric Wolf's *Europe and the people without history* (1982), which have added much-needed nuance to Immanuel Wallerstein's *Modern world-system* (1974). Yet the 'rise of

the West' narrative is still present in related disciplines, and thus it is useful to have the revisionist alternative explained.

In its core chapters, the book is much less a global history, with Egypt at the centre, than a selective microhistory of Egypt during the seventeenth century and, above all, the eighteenth century. Chapter 2 addresses linguistic changes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Egypt. Here, rather disappointingly, Hanna does not address the effect on Egypt's middle Arabic of Ottoman Turkish, which was the language not only of the Ottoman provincial administration but also of the military forces who remained in Egypt for the long term. These included not only elite commanders but also rank-and-file soldiers, many of whom settled in Cairo and opened shops. The late André Raymond, whom Hanna cites frequently, documented an entire community of these soldiers-shopkeepers, decidedly non-elite and entirely Turcophone, operating in and near the famous Khan al-Khalili bazaar during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Their lingua franca, like that of the government officials, had a profound impact, noticeable to this day, on Egyptian Arabic. The centuries of Ottoman rule also gave rise to a class of bilingual bureaucrats, some of whom composed chronicles in Arabic-inflected Turkish, others in Turkish-inflected Arabic. Hanna does accurately depict how colloquial Arabic began to enter the literary language used by Egyptian historians, up to and including the great 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti (1754–1825). She may not have had access to Shmuel Moreh's landmark 2013 critical edition of al-Jabarti's

multi-volume chronicle, based on original manuscripts, which incorporates the chronicler's colloquial idiom, edited out by the Bulaq Press in the late nineteenth century.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to artisans in Ottoman Egypt. Here, Hanna focuses on textile production, a large and important percentage of artisanal production in Egypt. She presents new and original discoveries on how Egyptian textile-makers undertook a kind of 'import substitution', producing their own versions of cotton fabrics originally imported from India. She also points out the technical innovations that artisans in Egypt introduced in dyeing – innovations that European textile manufacturers were eager to copy. In Chapter 4, which takes on transfers of textile-production technology from Egypt to France, the Egyptian craftsmen of Chapter 3 suddenly become 'Ottoman' craftsmen, and the discussion seems to include textile-workers in other provinces.

Where textiles and other artisanal goods are concerned, the author makes a laudable effort to place them in the context of international trade. Nevertheless, more attention might have been given to the extensive commercial networks that emerged within Ottoman territory. During the Ottoman period, the bulk of Egypt's commercial and demographic exchanges took place with Istanbul or with other parts of the empire. Meanwhile, the inclusion of Anatolia, the Balkans, and much of the Middle East in a single polity broke down barriers to internal migration. Egypt absorbed large numbers of merchants and craftsmen from Syria, Anatolia, and North Africa, as well as soldiers and administrators from Anatolia and the Balkans. Hanna does note immigrant craftsmen from Aleppo, Ayntab (today's Gaziantep), and Diyarbakır (in south-eastern Anatolia, not western Anatolia, as indicated on p. 83) during the seventeenth century. This probably represents an exodus from a discrete region – south-eastern Anatolia/northern Syria – almost certainly in response

to the disruptions caused by the Jelali rebellions. However, the increase in international trade from the same region during this period meant that merchants relocating to Egypt brought valuable commercial connections with them.

Similarly, in defining what commercial developments distinguished the Ottoman period in Egypt from the Mamluk period (1250–1517), Hanna could perhaps have taken into account the great variety of non-luxury goods traded in the earlier era, as demonstrated by S. D. Goitein's *A Mediterranean society* (1967–88). While the Ottoman era unquestionably saw a larger concentration of traffic in quotidian merchandise, the main changes from the earlier period were the much greater scale of trade, the much wider variety of products traded, and the much greater regional integration both within Egypt and in the Red Sea area and the Mediterranean littoral.

In sum, this is a useful introduction to some of the challenges of placing Ottoman Egypt in a global context, though readers will want to supplement it with some of the works cited above. At the same time, it provides a real service to readers wishing to know about textile production in Ottoman-era Egypt and recent secondary literature related to that topic.

### Why did Europe conquer the world?

By Philip T. Hoffman. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017. Pp. 272. Hardback £25.95, ISBN: 978-0-691-13970-8; paperback £14.95, ISBN: 978-0-691-17584-3.

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doi:10.1017/S1740022817000225

In this book, Philip T. Hoffman provides a compelling and impressively expansive