

ROMANTICIZING TRAVEL IN A TIMELESS EGYPT

Women Travelers in Egypt: From the Eighteenth to the Twenty-First Century.

Edited by Deborah Manley.

Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 2012. Pp. xi+216. \$24.95, hardback (ISBN 978-977-416-485-9).

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As a genre, travel literature invites the reader into an experience, offering a mode where the potentially foreign might become accessible and seemingly familiar. Through a collection of excerpted writings about Egypt that spans more than two centuries, editor Deborah Manley looks to make Egypt's past something more identifiable to travelers in the present. Manley draws from forty monographs previously published in English and written by British, European, and American women, presenting them as an historic path through Egypt. Rather than organizing her selections chronologically, Manley orders them according to overlapping paths through the country. The reader starts with first arrivals, the majority of which are set in Alexandria, then takes a trip up the Nile to Cairo and its surrounding ancient monuments. This is followed by instances of southbound travel to Nubia and the return trip northward, past Luxor, concluding with ventures into the desert. This is Manley's fourth edited collection of travel narratives on Egypt. The first looked at travel broadly, which she followed with separate monographs on the Sinai and the desert.

Manley devotes the majority of the text to Englishwomen who traveled to Egypt during the nineteenth century. In fact, of the 218 excerpted vignettes she includes, 193 are from the nineteenth century. The other three centuries are sparsely represented, with only one woman standing in for the eighteenth century. While Manley offers brief biographies of each author at the end of the book, she is less concerned with their particular contexts or perspectives and more interested in presenting a seemingly timeless perception of Egypt. The effect is a string of experiences that together infuse modern Egypt with a highly romanticized interpretation of its ancient past. We learn of travel writer and cyclist Bettina Selby's disappointment in 1988 upon finding Alexandria's Hellenistic past obscured, something she attributes to cold and cloudy weather rather than the city's adaptations to the late-twentieth century, concluding, 'it needs sunshine to dream of Alexander' (p. 21). Manley affirms Selby's sentimental expectations by following it with a vignette from Eliza Fay's 1779 encounter with the pyramids at Giza, where she related, 'I could have fancied myself an inhabitant of a world, long passed away' (p. 22). The same approach is used when describing Egypt's natural environs. When transitioning from American travel writer Rosemary Mahoney's trip down the Nile in 2006 to Countess Ida Hahn-Hahn's 1844 description of the Upper Egyptian city of Esna, Manley makes the brief editorial comment that while the river's environs had changed significantly in the more than a century between the travelers, 'some scenes were little changed' (p. 152). The comment helps drive Manley's travel narrative, even when the selections are incongruent. What actually remained continuous between Mahoney and Hahn-Hahn is unclear – Mahoney gives a picturesque description of the Nile in Upper Egypt, while Hahn-Hahn is disgusted at finding a snake charmer in Esna (pp. 152, 153).

Manley argues that women offer particularly valuable travel narratives because they had more time than the men they accompanied, who usually traveled to Egypt on more official business. She does not address several of the authors' contributions to nineteenth-century Egyptology and archaeology or their movement to Egypt as specialists in their own right. For descriptions of Cairo, Manley heavily relies on Sophia Poole, who lived in the city for seven years during the 1840s with her brother, Egyptologist Edward William Lane. Poole's observations were popularized among her contemporaries because of her descriptions of elite harems and the use of Turkish baths – selections that Manley includes in the text. What is less clear are the negotiations Poole made in her day-to-day life in Cairo and how her scholarly interests in Egypt informed her observations. The term 'traveler' does not adequately describe women like Poole and others working in Egyptology and archaeology. In Manley's account, their observations appear fanciful and imaginative, while the complexities of their contributions to Western perceptions of Egypt fail to come across.

Without explaining what makes a traveler, or why these nineteenth-century British, European, and American writers are representative of women's travel experiences in Egypt, Manley targets *Women Travelers in Egypt* at English-reading travelers whom she imagines might encounter the country in the same highly fanciful way she presents. In doing so, Manley does not acknowledge the range of other reasons people travel to Egypt. One wonders how Egypt would come across if Manley interwove the collection with the experiences of refugee women from twenty-first century Sudan and Somalia. Manley, however, is not interested in using the shared experience of travel to make the less romantic ways of accessing Egypt more identifiable, leaving a significant opening for a more nuanced discussion of what travel into Egypt has meant and can mean.

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CELEBRATING ERITREAN SOLDIERS AND ITALIAN IDENTITY

Anch'io per la tua bandiera: Il V battaglione ascari in missione sul fronte libico (1912).

By Massimo Zaccaria.

Ravenna, Italy: Giorgio Pozzi Editore, 2013. Pp. 263. €17, paperback (ISBN 978-88-96117-26-2).

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Key Words: Eritrea, Libya, colonial, military, identity.

Contemporary political debates about the experience of colonial troops – Dr. Massimo Zaccaria, of the University of Pavia, reminds us in his very stimulating book – are by no means new. Virtually every modern imperial power struggled to come to terms with the problems posed by the ambiguous social location occupied by locally recruited soldiers. The problems were never satisfactorily resolved and colonial askari (from the Arabic word for 'soldier') found themselves at the receiving end of conflicting policies and ideological impulses throughout the era of formal European rule. During the Fascist invasion