

Imperial Bodies: Empire and Death in Alexandria, Egypt. Shana Minkin, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020). Pp. 224. \$60.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781503608924

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Shana Minkin has embarked upon a commendable undertaking. In her book *Imperial Bodies: Empire and Death in Alexandria, Egypt*, she excavates the history of this Egyptian port city and of British-French imperial rivalry in the 19th and early 20th centuries through death, approaching it as a “purposeful, public foundation of political and social community.” This is a guiding principle in “death studies,” a field in which scholars study social, cultural, and political life through practices related to death (pp. 1–2; p. 135), as Minkin has articulated before in trailblazing articles. “To know the dead is,” in Minkin’s words, “to know the living” (p. 98).

Minkin dives headfirst into British, Egyptian, and French archives and swiftly re-emerges from their “linguistic mishmash” (p. 15) to offer a relatively short but intense analysis. Her subjects are first tended to at hospitals, then feted at funerals, later buried in cemeteries, and finally inscribed in the written record of their passing. But to whom did this once-pulsating flesh and blood belong? This book’s protagonists are those Alexandrians who also happened to be British, or French, or other European imperial subjects. They lived those “complicated, multifaceted, ambiguous lives” that have already come under the spate of previous historiography of modern Egypt. Only Minkin finds that, in the postmortem, the British and French consulates in town could successfully shoehorn these individuals’ previously complex identities into narrow national categories. Death made people more manageable. It produced “flattened categories that purported to define an imperial population” (p. 94).

The book follows a four-step “imagined path of dying” (p. 15) that accompanies readers from the hospital to the funeral, then to the grave, and finally to the bureaus where death was recorded. The first chapter lingers in hospital corridors and testifies to the complexity of negotiations of power between the colonizing and the colonized over the fatally sick. Medical facilities in Alexandria tended to include all nationalities (p. 32) but were nonetheless patronized by specific European consulates. Yet, by maintaining the power to determine which land would be used for hospitals, the Egyptian national government remained the final arbiter of the built environment for the dead and dying of Alexandria. The second chapter presents the funeral as a moment of closure in which Alexandrian residents were transformed into “imperial bodies.” Minkin approaches the funereal rite as a community performance that gave both the British and the French consulates the chance to claim their respective presence in the city. By examining prosaic aspects of funeral organization in interimperial light, Minkin shows how empire was “maintained not only from the metropole but also in the quotidian doings in the colonies” (p. 47; p. 50). After making a stop at hospitals and funerals, the book’s third chapter heads towards cemeteries. Once again, Minkin demonstrates that the Egyptian government firmly exercised its sovereignty. It could choose to grant or reject cemetery requests and to engage with or disengage from Catholic intra-communal bickering. Again, empire is denied absolute power: Minkin exposes its on-the-ground “day-to-day actions within the built environment of the city” (p. 84). Addressing burial logics, however, tests Minkin’s overall argument. In fact, in graves “religion trumped nationality” (p. 83). She therefore concedes that claiming burial ground was not “directly an act of empire” and frames it instead as “a process of spatial inclusion into the social fabric of the city” (p. 86; p. 91) that was significant for the dead but also for the imperial living who could claim the city as theirs. Still, being “of Alexandria” and being “of Egypt” (p. 78) may not have necessarily coincided in the perceptions of foreign contemporaries.

The fourth chapter moves on to the recording of death. This was a final act, that embalmed the imperial dead as permanent subjects of one rather than another nation. The chapter thus moves from the flexibility of life to the fixity of death. Nonetheless, Minkin still makes a valid case for the messiness of consular classifications and mechanisms. Even if she acknowledges the legal differences between citizens, “protégés,” and subjects (of France, specifically), she illustrates cases in which some of those who interacted with the imperial power would be classified interchangeably as one or the other. Finally, Minkin

shows how the records of death (and birth) both served the immediate needs of the Egyptian state and gave imperial consulates a chance to pose as necessary mediators—or eager undertakers.

Dying and death, in her treatment, then become at once moments of imperial taxonomy and sites of imperial competition. At times, it was only in death that somebody's existence was revealed to the consulate that would go on to claim that particular corpse. Jessie Brown, for example, eluding the attention of the British consulate in life, was “rendered legible within a matrix of colonial governance and communal boundaries that mandated categorizations” upon her passing in 1906 (p. 126). European consulates used the bodies of Brown and other “imperial subjects” like her both materially and performatively. For reasons that can be intuitively grasped but that Minkin could have dug deeper, corpses could neither be shipped nor cremated but had to be interred right away. Thus, consulates rushed to bury the dead as both acts of necessity and statements about belonging. In hospitals, funerals, graveyards, and paperwork, consulates commandeered death to push back against each other's influence and space within Alexandria.

By embracing the intervention and performance in matters funereal of both the British and the French consulates in Alexandria, Minkin approaches imperialism flexibly. First, she shows that Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882 was not a watershed concerning the bureaucracy and maintenance of the dead. Then, she convincingly addresses France's “non-territorial imperialism” in Egypt and the “various strands of French community” in Alexandria (p. 99; p. 120). Thereby, she demonstrates that the British—even after 1882—were never the sole power in Egypt and that the French never relinquished their claim to imperial space even in the absence of territorial control. Third, Minkin goes beyond the revisitation of Franco-British interimperial rivalry in Egypt to explore the relationship between the British and the French on the one hand and the Egyptian state on the other. She finds that both imperial powers were ultimately beholden to the Egyptian governmental authority, with whom the final word on the necessary resources and lands rested. The exact mechanisms of death governance within the Egyptian administration remain elusive; nonetheless Minkin's claim rings clear: death was a “building block of empire” (p. 128) as well as a not-to-be-buried hatchet wrenched by imperial competitors and local authorities alike. Finally, her notion of empire operates on multiple scales. Not only does she wrap up a myriad of individual ends of life, but she also unveils the “tentacles of empire”: the bureaucratic logic necessitating the collection of data and the construction of an imperial community (p. 120). Her treatment confirms preexisting theories of empire as something stratified on the military and diplomatic levels as well as on the ground, where imperial subjects perished and consulates acted as key in-between facilitators.

From six feet under the surface, then, Minkin persuasively revisits the history of Alexandria, Egypt, and empire. She also incorporates a welcome reflection on her archival sources, their riches, as well as their omissions. She succeeds in animating numbers and providing a lively rendition of potentially deadly silent data. Her writing displays some truly hilarious passages (“his friends were surprised that he fell over and insisted he was sober” since he “had drunk only six or seven beers that evening,” p. 124) and presents theoretical debates in an accessible way, making this book suitable for upper undergraduate readers. Even if Minkin follows individuals through sickness, memorialization, and burial, hers is not a morbid or gloomy account. The author compellingly reframes death as an interimperial and local affair, while also disinterring the underground connection of both imperial and Egyptian governance to matters of dying and death.

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Empire and Tribe in the Afghan Frontier Region: Custom, Conflict and British Strategy in Waziristan until 1947. Hugh Beattie, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019). Pp. 308. \$115.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781848858961

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In *Empire and Tribe in the Afghan Frontier Region*, Hugh Beattie offers a new exploration of British colonial policy towards Waziristan, a border region at the intersection between Afghanistan and Pakistan that