

Journeys Erased by Time: The Rediscovered Footprints of Travellers in Egypt and the Near East, edited by N. Cooke, 2019, 350 pp., £38.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-78969-240-2

The book is a collection of essays by different authors spanning over eight centuries of travel in the region. They cover the experiences of men and women, rich and poor, whose reasons to travel included tourism, business, research, military service and even to learn how to run a harem. Reference to their actual travel diaries is often limited. The publication's strength is its condensed format. There is an interesting mix of characters to entice the imagination of most readers and many bibliographical references - opportunities for new discoveries. There is also a selected number of photographs and illustrations, examples of the West's fascination with the "Orient". My own extensive travels in the region (as a tourist and as a conservator) and my curiosity to learn about places through the experiences of others prompted me to read the book. I therefore concentrate this review on my favourite chapters.

The first chapter is an essay by Paul Starkey, an introduction to 12th century traveller Rabi Benjamin of Tudela, one of the first travellers to record his experiences. Written in academic style, the essay discusses the veracity of Benjamin's accounts and that of other early travellers. There are several extracts from his travel accounts including one where Benjamin praises the treatment of Jews by the Islamic caliphate in Bagdad.

The next chapter by Mladen Tomorad summarises George Husz's travel accounts, a Croat captured by the Ottoman army in the early 16th century and forced to travel as an enslaved person. His description of Egyptian traditions and customs are somewhat enigmatic: he considered "immoral" the festivities celebrating the Nile flood. The essay feels much shorter than the others. I tried to find Husz manuscript but there appears to be no English translation.

Sarah Shepherd's essay on the accounts left by First World War soldiers camping by the Giza Pyramids was fascinating, as it taps on an underused source of historical travel accounts. Anyone who has visited these monuments can relate to James William Suffolk's account of the Great Pyramid, written before the landings at Gallipoli:

" (...) it is an immense monument, I suppose, to one man's inordinate vanity, and yet was not a bad investment for posterity. It has brought millions of visitors here, and they have left their millions of pounds behind them...after a while longer spent in this very hot interior we again saw daylight. Our guide protected us from the crowd of 'baksheesh' bounders, and we were soon bowling along towards Cairo." (p.64-66)

Reading this essay took me back to the times I stayed at the Windsor Hotel, a former colonial British officers club in Downtown Cairo and made me look for a copy of *Rambles* - a guidebook produced specially for the soldiers.

I have an interest in old buildings, in particular how their use and importance change over time. The book contains three essays about the built heritage, two of which about structures that no longer exist. Helene Virenque and Sylvie Weens use photos, sketches and guests' accounts to reconstruct the French House - the white building on the cover of the book located on the roof of the southern end of Luxor temple. I find it extraordinary that no trace can be seen of it on the ground and current guidebooks make no reference to it despite its importance to the history of travel and Egyptology - Flaubert and Amelia Edwards were amongst some of its guests.

Complementing the narrative on the French House is the essay on Victor Maunier by Sylvie Weens. Maunier was a 19th century photographer commissioned by the Khedive to photograph the

monuments. He discovered important objects whilst clearing the monuments from sand and mudbrick constructions to make better photos, some of which sold to the Louvre. I wonder how much archaeological evidence was destroyed in the process. Maunier's quest for fortune led him to venture into mine administration and even slave trade.

How many other significant buildings may have been erased completely from travel books over time? Caroline Simpson's essay on her search for the 'Amr Mosque in Qurna (Luxor West Bank) is a reminder of how easily a building can vanish. Her use of photographs and interviews with local residents made me reflect on the changes I have witnessed in Qurna over the past 20 years. These changes include the forced demolition of most residential dwellings that existed above the Tombs of the Nobles (opposite the Ramesseum Temple) and the increasing deterioration of what is left of New Qurna – a sustainable model village projected by Hassan Fathy in 1945.

The pace at which I was reading the book was increasing until I reached Heike Schmidt's biographical essay of Emil Brugsch - made famous for the discovery of the Royal Mummy cache in 1881. Brugsch's cavalier attitude towards antiquities, even for the standards of the time, is thoroughly shocking and so was his involvement with the illegal trade of museum pieces under his auspices. This well researched essay reads like a thriller and should be included on the reading list of anyone interested in the topic of antiquities repatriation.

It was only upon reaching Isolde Lehnert's essay on August Gorff and his famous beer house in the heart of Cairo that I started to recover from the shock of Emil Brugsch. Richly illustrated, the essay takes us back to a time when beerhouses were a common feature in the city, expertly juxtaposing a once famous destination, its customers and its larger-than-life patron.

Andrew Oliver's essay on Americans travelling on the Nile river in the 1874-75 season mixes travel accounts with photos and illustrations thus capturing the essence of cruising the Nile on a *dahabyia* (a two-mast sailboat). The text includes itinerary details, some diary entries and bibliographical references. *Dahabyia* cruises are an increasingly popular alternative to the large motorboats cruising between Luxor and Aswan today. Despite the restricted itinerary, they enable a connection between present-day tourists and those of the 19th century via the magnificent sunsets and wildlife.

Janet Starkey's essay draws attention to the role of artist-travellers in Ottoman Lands focusing on French-Flemish painter Jean Baptiste Vanmour whose compositions influenced 19th century European Orientalist art. My favourite image is the whirling dervishes, something I experienced first-hand by chance whilst on a trip to Syria in 2009. The West's fascination with "the Orient" is further expanded on by Brian Taylor's absorbing biographical piece on 6th Baron Baltimore and artist Francis Smith, hired to illustrate his travels. The chapter is well structured, revealing one anecdote after another – Baltimore counted on Casanova as one of his acquaintances. My only objection is to the extended discussion on Smith's paintings, hindered by the lack of corresponding illustrations.

The book ends with Heba Sheta's essay comparing a selection of 19th century illustrations and drawings of Islamic buildings in Cairo with contemporary photographs revealing inconsistencies in historical architectural drawings and restorations. The comparisons between the interior of Ottoman Houses and Orientalism images were particularly intriguing as often there is no documentation of past interventions. This topic reminded me of the HEIR Project at the University of Oxford, a growing digital archive of architectural, landscapes and society images from the late 19th century onwards rephotographed in modern setting as a way to document change.

Of all the characters mentioned in the book the most endearing to me was Leo Tregenza, who travelled on foot through Egypt's Eastern Desert in the mid-20th century. Ronald Zitterkopf not only includes extensive extracts of Tregenza's travel diaries but also recounts a meeting with him back in 1991. The most poignant part of the essay was a quote from Tregenza, as a son of one of his desert colleagues contacted him 35 years after he left Egypt:

"They had heard stories from their fathers of the journeys they had had with me, ...one of them sent me a dictated letter begging me to come back into the desert to visit them again, adding...that the mountains and valleys that were so well known to me still mourned my absence." (p. 265)

The choice of words is classic Egyptian idiom and thus recognisable to anyone who has established personal connections with Egyptians.

Journeys Erased by Time: The Rediscovered Footprints of Travellers in Egypt and the Near East is the latest volume in the ASTENE Conference series. The Association for the Study of Travel in Egypt and the Near East (ASTENE) was founded in 1997 to encourage and promote education and research on historical travels and travellers in that region. Reading the book made me consider my own motivations to travel, prompting a reflection on my recurring trips to Egypt. My husband also enjoyed reading the book. It gave him a sense of perspective: how things have changed, how other things have remained the same, that all those people in the photographs are long gone. Books like this bring historical travellers back to life and I look forward to reading the previous volumes in the series.