

Pious Pilgrims, Discerning Travellers, Curious Tourists

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PIOUS PILGRIMS, DISCERNING  
TRAVELLERS, CURIOUS TOURISTS

Changing patterns of travel to the  
Middle East from medieval to modern times

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*Edited by*

Paul and Janet Starkey

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Cover image: Part of the Grand Gallery of the Temple of Diana. [The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus.] Plate 42 in *Views in the Ottoman Dominions, in Europe, in Asia, and some of the Mediterranean islands, from the original drawings taken for Sir Robert Ainslie by Luigi Mayer, FAS, with descriptions historical and illustrative*. London: printed by T. Bensley,...for R. Bowyer, 1810. Illustrated by the Italian-German artist Luigi Mayer (1755–1803) from a watercolour of 1788; engraved in 1805 by William Watts (1752–1851); sponsored by Sir Robert Ainslie, 1st Baronet (c.1730–1812), British ambassador to the Ottoman Porte between 1776 and 1792 and reputed to be a great favourite of the Sultan Abdul Hamid I (Rawpixel / CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.).

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# Introduction

*Paul and Janet Starkey*

He who does not travel does not know the value of men. (Moorish proverb)

This book brings together chapters based on revised papers originally presented at the thirteenth ASTENE Biennial Conference held at the University of York and at the Railway Museum, York, from 12 to 15 July 2019, or at earlier ASTENE conferences. Delegates to the Conference researched, prepared and presented an astonishingly wide variety of papers, some of which focused on newly discovered and lesser-known travellers, while others provided new insights into the lives and journeys of more familiar figures.

From classical times onwards, travellers have explored and brought back historical, geographical and ethnographic information about the Middle East through their written accounts. The Greek playwright Euripides (c.480–c.406 BC) is reputed to have said that ‘Experience, travel — these are as education in themselves’. A popular genre in ancient Greece was the *periegesis*, a geographical survey or travelogue that described places through an imaginary guided tour. There were also encyclopaedic works such as that by Herodotus (c.450 BC), who travelled widely but must also have depended on intensive reading. Later significant authoritative texts included works by the Greek geographer Strabo (64 or 63 BC–c. AD 24), Pliny the Elder (AD 77) and Diodorus Siculus (fl. first century BC), all of whom continued to influence later travel literature.

Classical travel literature included both actual and fictional travel experiences, describing a world that was sometimes fantastical but also empirically observable. For the most part, medieval travel literature continued to follow the same traditions. A scientific and encyclopaedic tradition, complete with geographical and ethnographic observations in the classic tradition of Herodotus, would include descriptions of routes and tips to make the journey easier for a specific audience, though they were rarely day-to-day narratives of journeys. A second, fictional tradition focused on storytelling and diversionary entertainment, with descriptions of fabulous creatures and adventures in exotic places. Eye-witness accounts were not necessarily considered more reliable than authoritative older texts, however, and the boundaries between truth and fiction were blurred and

porous. Another tradition, often written in an impersonal traditional style, included 'lives' (hagiographies and auto-hagiographies, biography and autobiography), and 'pilgrimage' or 'missionary narratives', which reflected quests for both geographical knowledge and spiritual wisdom. Christian pilgrims embarked on journeys to local sacred sites, and a few ventured as far as the Holy Land. There were also official and semi-official chroniclers of the Crusades, several of them from religious orders who had travelled to the Levant, and whose audiences would have interpreted these works in many different ways.

The present volume begins with chapters devoted to sacred places and medieval travellers: many of them pilgrims, missionaries or merchants. It also reflects on the possible locations of religious routes and sites as can be discovered from the writings of a range of travellers. As early as the fourth century AD, there were pilgrimage narratives written by devoted Jewish and Christian pilgrims from Europe to the Holy Land, to Mount Sinai and to local saints' tombs. At a later date, there was sometimes interaction between Christian and Muslim travellers, as Jacke Phillips describes in her chapter entitled 'Pilgrimage as Travel'. From medieval times pilgrims of different faiths journeyed to the Holy Cities of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem from other parts of the Middle East, North Africa, India or Moorish Spain, mostly along regular trade and communication routes over long distances with a common personal goal, and such interaction led to the transmission of ideas and practicalities. Travels with a religious motive by pilgrims of whatever faith were particularly respected and often ensured the traveller a special status on his or her return.

Some Muslim pilgrims wrote accounts of their journeys, the best known in the West today being Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304–1368 or 1369). For his *Riḥla* [= journey/account of a journey], transcribed by Ibn Juzayy in 1354, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was instructed by the Sultan of Morocco, Abū 'Inān Fāris (1329–1358), to

dictate an account of the cities which he had seen in his travels, and of the interesting events which had clung to his memory, and that he should speak of those whom he had met of the rulers of countries, of their distinguished men of learning, and of their pious saints. Accordingly, he dictated upon these subjects a narrative which gave entertainment to the mind and delight to the ears and eyes, with a variety of curious particulars by the exposition of which he gave edification and of marvellous things by adverting to which he aroused interest. (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa/Gibb 1958: 6)

By comparison with the narrative of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, the writings of the earlier Muslim traveller Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217) have attracted somewhat less attention in the West recently. As Paul Starkey outlines in his chapter entitled 'Ibn Jubayr Reconsidered', however, Ibn Jubayr's account of the pilgrimage he undertook in 1183–1185 has prompted occasionally heated debate, not least as to how to interpret his views on relations between Muslims and Christians during the twelfth century AD. Curiously, Ibn Jubayr undertook his pilgrimage not long after the Jewish Rabbi Benjamin of



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Tudela completed his own journey through the Middle East, providing a somewhat different perspective on the inter-religious relationships of the time, a comparison that is briefly explored in this chapter.

Medieval travellers included not only pilgrims travelling to and from the Middle East but also merchants such as Marco Polo (1254–1324), many of them searching for suitable commercial opportunities and routes eastwards to India or China. As Janet Starkey outlines in her chapter entitled ‘Gardens of Paradise’, Marco Polo’s *Travels* reflect exceptional understanding of the cultures and religions of the Middle East. Christian missionaries such as Odoric of Pordenone (1286–1331) followed another tradition, grounded in religion. There were even fictional ‘authors’ who incorporated accounts by earlier or supposedly *bone fide* travellers, including the so-called ‘Sir John Mandeville’, who set off on Michaelmas Day 1332 on a more or less conventional pilgrimage to the Holy Land then, in an account packed with curious adventures, wandered eastwards to the court of the Great Khan. His accounts were based on a range of unacknowledged sources from other travellers, including those of Marco Polo and Odoric, who had usually (though probably not always) visited the places they described. Such recycling of information, including legends and traditions, from earlier texts, remained more important in medieval travel writing than the faithful transmission of personal experience of travel and places.

This first section of the book concludes on a somewhat different note, with a chapter by Jan Ciglenečki and Blaž Zabel, in which they describe their attempts to locate an unknown Christian site called ‘Wady Ghrásheca’ in the Eastern Desert of Egypt near Saint Paul’s Monastery. The site is mentioned in the unpublished manuscripts of Sir John Gardner Wilkinson (1797–1875) and James (Hali)Burton (1786–1862), and the chapter well illustrates the difficulty of tracking down early Christian hermitage and other sites located in remote sites and valleys where there is little archaeological evidence remaining.

The next chapters focus on aspects of travel in the Ottoman Empire: from a Levant Company merchant to a Moldavian diplomat interested in Ottoman music, an artist in Greece before the Greek War of Independence, and a Bavarian physician with an interest in the plague. From the fifteenth century onwards Europeans had been keen to build commercial ties and diplomatic representation with the Ottoman Empire. Both Britain and France developed strong cultural and political links with the Ottomans and by the 1610s there was a flourishing trade in a wide variety of goods between England and the Ottoman Empire and beyond. Embassies in Constantinople or in consulates elsewhere in the Empire issued travel permits in the form of *firmans*, so that travellers could travel in relative safety. It was in this dynamic commercial environment that, as Jennifer Scarce describes, the merchant Peter Mundy (1597–c.1667) worked for the Levant Company between 1617 and 1620, where he compiled a wonderfully illustrated travel guide and albums, a personal guidebook to Constantinople and his journeys around the region, complete with delightful illustrations and descriptions.

Not only merchants and diplomats travelled in the Ottoman Empire, however: others travelled in search of learning and scientific discovery. In the mid-sixteenth century, Pierre Belon, a French physician, explorer, and naturalist, undertook a journey through Italy, Asia Minor, Crete, Arabia, Palestine and Greece, and a century or so later the Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi (1611–1682) travelled for over forty years and described the many cultures and languages he encountered around the Ottoman Empire. Ronald E. Zitterkopf recounts how John Greaves (1602–1652), Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Merton College, Oxford, travelled around the Empire between 1636 and 1640 to acquire manuscripts, make astronomical observations, and study weights and measures. In 1638–1639 Greaves visited Cairo and undertook a scientific survey of the Great Pyramid in Giza that was more accurate than any made by a previous traveller. On his return to England in 1640, he published *Pyramidographia, or a Description of the Pyramids in Ægypt*, with detailed drawings of the pyramids and mummies in 1646; it is thought that more precise measurements of the Great Pyramid were not made until 1880–1882 by Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie.

By the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire was at the height of its power with a strong and flexible economy and military force, a flourishing cosmopolitan culture and a multinational and multilingual society. Ottoman classical music was an important part of cultural life. Several Sultans, governors and other dignitaries were accomplished musicians, among them Prince Dimitrie Cantemir (1673–1723), who, as Cristina Erck recounts, served for several years as Moldavian ambassador to Constantinople where he enjoyed the rich diversity of its intellectual life. A polyglot, he became an expert on Ottoman music, playing several different instruments himself and composing and recording popular and traditional Turkish pieces, some still played today.

By the end of the eighteenth century, parts of the Ottoman Empire were beginning to press for more autonomy. Greece, which had been under Ottoman rule from the end of the fifteenth century, was in open revolt by 1821 and the resulting Greek War of Independence, closely associated in the West with Lord Byron and others, was at first harshly suppressed by the Ottomans. Brian Taylor's chapter discusses the life and works of William Page (1794–1872) Englishman, a relatively unknown English artist and watercolourist who travelled in Europe, Greece and western Turkey during this period, and who has been often confused with the American artist William Page (1811–1885), who also travelled widely in Europe. Despite the absence of any direct evidence such as journals or correspondence, Taylor has been able to conclude that most of the drawings of Greece and Turkey by William Page (1794–1872) were produced on one or more visits he must have made before 1821, and that several paintings, previously thought to be created by the American 'William Page', might well have been produced by his English namesake.

After years of negotiation and with interventions from European powers, a Greek state was finally recognised in 1830, and in 1831 Britain, France and Russia

installed Otto von Wittelsbach (1815–1867, r.1832–1862), a Bavarian Prince, as King of Greece. Otto brought several officials with him from Bavaria, including Bernhard Röser (1806–1868), who was the king's personal physician. As Joachim Gierlich describes, Bernhard's brother Jacob Röser (1799–1862), who was a physician to a Bavarian Fürst (Count) zu Hohenlohe-Bartenstein, visited Greece and travelled to other parts of the Ottoman Empire, including Smyrna, Alexandria and Cairo, Palestine and Greater Syria in 1834 and 1835, visiting many Greek sites and families on his travels. Particularly interested in medical matters and epidemic diseases, he recorded his travels and observations in a book he published in 1836.

During much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Egypt, like much of the rest of the Ottoman Empire, was a daring destination for adventurous wealthy aristocrats engaged on an extended Grand Tour. Several of them published their accounts as simple first-hand travel logs embellished with sexual encounters and other adventures, whilst other more scholarly travellers provided perceptive observations of the history, peoples and landscapes they encountered. Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798 heralded major changes in the political landscape of the region, and as Muḥammad 'Ali Pasha, who seized power in Egypt in 1805, consolidated his authority European engineers, administrators and other travellers were welcomed to the country in increasing numbers.

It was during this era that the Scottish painter David Roberts visited the Middle East in 1839 and published his sketches of picturesque landscapes and ruins in six lavish volumes entitled *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt, and Nubia between 1842 and 1849*. As Paulina Banas explains, Roberts's illustrated travel book did much to encourage Western travellers to visit Egypt and the Levant and nineteenth-century Britain witnessed the rapid development of publishing businesses dedicated to the production of illustrated books on the Middle East. In 1848, the British publisher James Madden released a luxurious folio book, *Oriental Album*, written by the British writer James Augustus St John with lithographs by the French artist Émile Prisse d'Avennes. Banas examines the complicated genealogies of the illustrations included in the *Oriental Album* and reflects on publishing processes, choices, and influences on the reading public, some of whom were inspired to embark on adventurous journeys in the Middle East themselves.

Between 1847 and 1929, many guidebooks were published about Egypt alone, though the publishing house of John Murray and Sons at first dominated the guidebook industry. In 1847, Murray published *A Handbook for Travellers in Egypt* by Sir John Gardner Wilkinson (1797–1875), and this was quickly followed by other guides. A good flavour of the contemporary travelling experience is conveyed by the extract following:

To travel in the East with comfort or advantage, it is necessary to do so according to the rule and custom of the country. This it is easy to lay down as a rule, but very difficult to put in practice, because it supposes long

experience and perfect acquaintance with a subject when you enter only on its threshold. But, supposing that this can be effected, you will proceed on your rambles, accompanied by attendants who perform the various functions of your establishment as they would do in a fixed abode; you carry also along with you every requisite and comfort, and feel yourself almost entirely independent of circumstance or assistance; and, thus in the desert, as in the peopled city, the associations of home pursue you, and practically inform you of those feelings of locomotive independence, and of that combination of family ties and nomade existence which is the basis of Eastern character. (John Murray 1854: 9)

By comparison with Egypt, the lands east of the River Jordan, lacking any firm central authority for much of this period, were slow to attract travellers and some of those who did visit were reported to have been treated aggressively. The Swiss traveller Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (*d.*1817) was the first European to report a visit to Petra in 1812 but it was not until the middle of the century that the area had become sufficiently calm to welcome more frequent visitors. In 1865, however, as David Kennedy describes, several tourists were visiting Petra, including London socialites ‘Eustace’ Smith and his feisty wife ‘Eustacia’, who published articles about their experiences. It is a measure of how quickly Western travel to the region was developing that by 1869 Thomas Cook was offering tours of Palestine as well as the Nile and by 1875/1876 had included Petra in its *Programmes of Personally Conducted and Independent Palestine Tours with Extensions to Egypt and the Nile, Sinai, Petra, Moab, the Houran, Turkey, Greece and Italy*.

After the first railway in the Ottoman Empire had opened in Egypt in 1854, the Egyptian railway network expanded rapidly, doing much to attract tourists to the country. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 provided a further boost to tourism in the region and the Middle East quickly became a popular destination for the extended Grand Tour: a typical route might lead through Greece, Turkey, and the Levant to Egypt, venturing up the Nile to Luxor and Aswan and even to the Cataracts. It was in 1874 that Anton Prokesch-Osten Jr (1837–1919) published one of the first German travel guides for Egypt after visiting the country several times with his father – a publication that predates the first Baedeker’s guide to Lower Egypt of 1877. As Angela Blaschek recounts, the pair were even on the same ship with Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria at the ceremonial opening of the Suez Canal on 17 November 1869. This grand occasion, complete with its spectacular celebrations and *fanṭāsiyyas*, was attended by many dignitaries and inaugurated in an elaborate ceremony attended by French Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoleon III.

Many adventurous visitors to Egypt in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were inspired by the popularity of Egyptology, especially after Jean-François Champollion had deciphered hieroglyphs from the Rosetta Stone in 1822. Travellers delighted in visiting not only Ancient Egyptian sites but also Islamic

monuments. Lady Lucie Duff Gordon (1821–1869), author of *Letters from Egypt* (1865), lived in Luxor between 1860–1869 for her health and befriended local dignitaries, but she was exceptional: most travellers who came to Egypt during the winter for their health relaxed in luxury hotels with little contact with local people. At least until the 1870s, most tourists travelled on the Nile in small groups, principally in *dahabiyyas* – shallow-bottomed, barge-like luxury pleasure boats, each with two or more sails, which sailed from Luxor, Esna or Aswan. As Mladen Tomorad recounts, visitors who enjoyed such Nile journeys included several American Civil War (1861–1865) generals who served in the Egyptian Army in the 1870s, among them William Wing Loring and George Brinton McClellan, or came as tourists, such as ex-US President Ulysses S. Grant, who visited in 1878 and 1879 as part of a world tour.

Although tourists met members of the crew or hotel staff, most met few other Egyptians on their journeys, apart perhaps for local consular agents, who were responsible for the welfare of Western tourists as well as Muslim pilgrims *en route* for Mecca. As Terence Walz describes in his chapter, the consular agents in Asyūṭ, Qinā and Luxor in Upper Egypt were usually Christians – relatively wealthy merchants who were in a position to provide hospitality to passing travellers. On occasions, the agents also provided *fanāsiyyas*, or performances by local dancers and musicians.

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the advent of rail and steamship travel and the growth of mass leisure tourism, promoted in particular by Thomas Cook Ltd. Thomas Cook improved Egyptian steamships, running the fleet from Cairo to Aswan from 1870, then built their own fleet of luxurious steamers. In 1874, Thomas Cook was granted the concession to run steamers to the Second Cataract on the Egypt-Sudan border. In 1875, as Sylvie Weens describes, Albert Ferdinand Pagnon was appointed Thomas Cook's manager in Egypt and supervised the Nile steamers. He also convinced his superiors of the need to build hotels in Upper Egypt: Thomas Cook & Son inaugurated the first hotel in Luxor, the Luxor Hotel, in 1877 and tourism continued to flourish in Upper Egypt, despite the political convulsions leading to the British occupation in 1882.

Following the British occupation, Egypt was occupied by British forces until 1956 and was visited by a succession of tourists, by travellers *en route* for the Indian Empire, and by military personnel. In 1933, author Agatha Christie visited Egypt: her famous novel, *Death on the Nile*, has inspired several generations of Western tourists to visit and romanticise about their adventures. Less well known is the Austrian writer Richard A. Bermann (pen name Arnold Höllriegel), who travelled to Egypt, Palestine and the Sudan several times between 1914 and 1933. As Ernst Czerny describes, Bermann, fascinated with Sudan, wrote a historical novel about the Sudanese Mahdī and his struggle against General Gordon. In 1933 he also joined Hungarian cartographer Count László de Almásy's expedition to the Libyan Desert, which led to the discovery of cave-paintings in the al-Jilf al-Kabīr plateau and Jabal al-ʿUwaynāt – events subsequently fictionalised in *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje in 1992.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed the rise of Egyptomania, a cultural passion for all things Egyptian. Authors wrote popular exotic and romantic tales, while others wrote fiction that touched on Ancient Egyptian mysticism, supernatural curses and other horrors. Among them was Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), discussed by Rebecca Bruce, who suggests that Stoker's story bears a striking resemblance to the events of two decades later, when Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in November 1922 fuelled the popular obsession with Ancient Egypt. By intertextualising fiction with earlier travel sources involving mindless episodes of tomb excavation and grave robbing, Bruce reflects on the moral and social place of tourists in Egypt at the time. In this way, her chapter brings the book back full circle to the medieval travel writing described in an earlier part of the book, where fantasy and fact, reality and fiction are intertwined — and all to ensure that audiences are provided with a good read.

Note. This book has been compiled and edited during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. The chapters are to the best of the editors' knowledge original contributions and their content has not been published elsewhere, whether by the same author or another. All best efforts have been made to find suitable images and to obtain permissions to publish under the extremely difficult circumstances of the lockdown, even though most universities, museums and libraries remain closed. We extend our thanks to our many colleagues in museums, libraries and universities who have been most helpful, despite the practical obstacles, in this respect; any shortcomings in obtaining permissions will be rectified in any subsequent edition. Hopefully, these chapters will inspire more readers to appreciate the peoples and places of Egypt and the Middle East in years to come. As Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304–c.1365) wrote: 'Travelling—it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller.'

June 2020