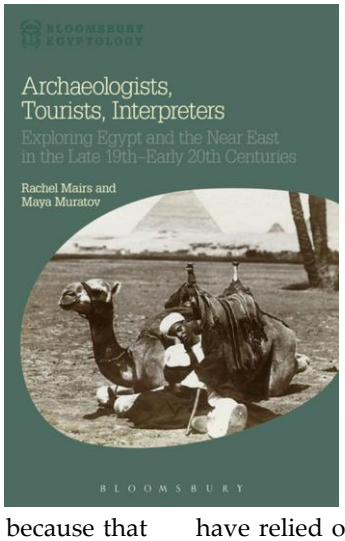
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Review

ARCHAEOLOGISTS, TOURISTS, INTERPRETERS: EXPLORING EGYPT AND THE NEAR EAST IN THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

By R. Mairs and M. Muratov
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Many readers of this review will have been members of escorted group tours in Egypt and the surrounding countries of the modern Middle East or will have participated in archaeological excavations there. As such they are familiar with present-day guides, local tour managers, and excavation managers and *reises*. The authors of this study have focused on the predecessors of these roles in the newly organized tour industry to Egypt and the Holy Land and the interpreters who filled multifaceted roles on the digs where they were employed.

In their introduction, the authors deliberately choose to use the term "Orient" because that epitomized the way that contemporary Western travelers viewed Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean, as the opposite pole from their own culture. They accepted the political situation and colonial domination of the region as normal and right, and their experiences traveling there as romantic and exotic. For many travelers this viewpoint was further influenced by the fact that they were visiting, to use the authors' words, "the Land of the Pharaohs, the Lands of the Bible, and the Arabian Nights."

Mairs and Muratov define the role of the dragoman/interpreter as a guide and translator who interpreted for travelers lacking Arabic or Turkish, and who also insulated them from the rigors of travel while still giving them the feeling that they were experiencing the real Orient.

In their second chapter, "Mediating Language and Culture," the authors expand their discussion of the dragoman. Many travelers chose to write accounts of their travels, a great many of which were published, which made the dragoman/interpreter a stock character and an often-maligned stereotype. The authors include several illustrations of this phenomenon. In nearly all cases, he is referred to only as "dragoman" or by his first name. Dragomans, their hiring, and relations from the clients' point of view were also covered in the guidebooks of the day, such as Baedeker's, with numerous warnings. In order to recover the experiences of the dragomans/interpreters from their own point of view, the authors have relied on the published accounts of several of them, most of which predate the advent of organized tourism in the 1860s, as well as reviewing the testimonial letters that the dragomans solicited from their clients and that they used to advertise themselves. They also discuss in more detail the travelers and tourists themselves. They quote extensively from the accounts published by these individuals to illustrate the relationship between dragoman and client, which, given the modes of travel and countries visited, was often a lengthy one that could last weeks or months. In addition to being multilingual, knowledgeable of local culture and conditions, well informed on the landscape and monuments, and suitably theatrical in dress, a successful dragoman had to be perceptive and clever in "managing" his clients—that is, seeming to conform to their attitudes toward him as well as delivering a successful trip.

The final pages of this chapter are devoted to a review of self-teaching Arabic manuals from the late 19th century, which went beyond the lists of words and short phrases provided in guidebooks. These were utilized by people who planned to spend extended periods in Egypt and the Near East, such as archaeologists. Of note, many of these manuals use the term dragoman as part of their title, in that they allowed their users to interpret for themselves.

Chapter 3, entitled "Archaeologists in the Field," relies on the writings of W. M. Flinders Petrie, T. E. Lawrence, and Sir Leonard Woolley. Their published accounts of their work methods and daily life while digging in Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia from the 1890s to 1920s show that all of them felt it necessary to be reasonably fluent in colloquial Arabic so as to be able to function independently on a day-to-day level. Some, like Woolley, also employed a local interpreter who took on other roles such as negotiator with local authorities and mediator in labor disputes.

The final pages of this chapter focus on the writings of the archaeologist Max Mallowan and his wife, Agatha Christie. As an experienced excavator in Syria and Mesopotamia, Mallowan was fluent enough in Arabic to dispense with an interpreter; but despite spending numerous seasons in the field with him, Christie only learned enough to function in the house and camp. She did, however, absorb the culture, characters, and landscape, which she then used in her mystery novels *Murder in Mesopotamia*, *They Came to Baghdad*, and *Appointment with Death*. In this last novel she shows herself to be fully aware of the dragoman's duties and gives a detailed, if not flattering, portrait of this character.

The remaining three chapters of the book deal with two dragomans, Daniel Z. Noorian and Solomon Negima, whose careers the authors were able to trace and document. Noorian was hired in Constantinople in 1885 as an interpreter for the America-based Wolfe Expedition. He subsequently became interpreter and director of workmen for the University of Pennsylvania Babylonian Expedition at Nippur from 1888 to 1890. We learn much about his skills and ever-growing responsibilities from the diary of Dr. William Ward, leader of the Wolfe expedition, who would later be instrumental in Noorian's immigration to the U.S., and from the account of the excavations at Nippur published by John P. Peters.

Already as a young man in Constantinople, Noorian had begun to collect and deal in antiquities and, during his stints in Mesopotamia, built up a network of sources and dealt with major American museums and universities. In 1894 he set up a showroom in Newark, N.J., and in 1900 transferred it to Manhattan.

The second dragoman, Solomon Negima, is known to us through the fortuitous preservation of his book of testimonial letters, which Mairs purchased on eBay in 2014. Negima began his career as an interpreter for the British Expeditionary Force to Egypt and the Sudan to relieve General Gordon at Khartoum, as attested by the earliest letters in his book. Upon his return to Palestine, he took up the profession of dragoman proper, managing and guiding groups through the Holy Land, working with the major tour agencies: Cook's, Gaze, and Rolla Floyd. Through the numerous letters in his book and two published accounts by travelers he guided, we can get bits of information about his background, skills, and activities and some insight into how he managed his charges, but the choice of letters and photos he includes in his book as well as the annotations he made also tell us what he felt was important.

Mairs was able to trace Negima's life outside his career as a dragoman through his association with Rolla Floyd, who had originally come to the Holy Land as part of a quasi-Mormon colony at Jaffa. In 1911, Negima and his family were baptized into the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and took up residence in Floyd House in Jerusalem as caretakers, where they worked with a series of RLDS missionaries. Negima's daughter Olinda stayed in touch with some of these after World War I, and the last papers associated with the testimonial book are dated 1933. Olinda had expressed a desire to immigrate to America, but it is unknown if she did or how the book ended up in an estate sale in Oregon in the 1990s.

In their conclusion, the authors state that this book is about "attitudes towards communication." They have chosen a period of marked political and social change as well as a part of the world heavily freighted with history, religion, and illusions, and used excerpts from contemporary documents, both published and unpublished, to show how two cultures communicated with each other through the medium of the dragoman/interpreter.

As a reviewer I found the text quite readable and still scholarly, the examples well chosen to illustrate the authors' points. A study from the point of view of dragoman is both necessary and timely. Unfortunately, the quality of the black and white images in the book is poor: most are too dark and grainy. As someone with a longstanding interest in travel and travelers in Egypt and the Near East, I was pleased to have the opportunity to review this book. In fact, my own interest in the subject began in the 1990s when I happened across a bound set of 1930s guidebooks of Egypt, annotated by the traveler and containing a letter to him from his dragoman.